

**TIBETAN BUDDHISM CENTER FOR WORLD PEACE**  
**San Antonio, Texas**

**Shantideva's *Bodhicharyavata*, The Way of the Bodhisattva  
Chapters 2 and 3: "Confession" and "Taking Hold of Bodhicitta"**

*The following consists of edited and modified excerpts transcribed from a series of talks about the Bodhicharyavatara given by Wulstan Fletcher of the Padmakara Translation Group, presented by the Tsadra Foundation & Shambhala Publications*

**TBCWP Session 3: Sunday, March 5, 2023**

*Geshe Nima requested we study Shantideva's text following his two month teaching residency at the TBCWP between November 2022 and January 2023.*

**A structure for generating *sonam* and removing obscurations**

1. We now move on to chapters two and three, which can be taken together. The structure of these two chapters is based on what is called the *Uttara Puja* which means "the supreme *puja*" or supreme worship ritual. It was a kind of monastic liturgy that was celebrated at Nalanda while Shantideva was there. It has come down to us in its Tibetan form as the *Zangchö Mönlam*, or the Prayer of Good Actions, by the great bodhisattva Samantabhadra. At the beginning of the Prayer of Good Actions, there is quite a long ritual known as the Seven-Limb Practice or Seven-Limb Prayer, which we often recite in shortened form at the beginning of our daily spiritual practice. The purpose of it is to generate merit, or *sonam*.

2. As we said before, *sonam* is a positive energy or potential that is generated in one's heart and consciousness through virtuous behaviors of body, speech, and mind. As we generate and accumulate *sonam* over time, our disturbing emotions and actions gradually subside and the obstacles and obscurations to our understanding and realizations are gradually removed. Eventually, this enables our own buddha nature to fully reveal itself to us.

3. In chapters two and three, these seven limbs for generating *sonam* are presented by Shantideva. He begins by making offerings, confession, and prostration. In the third chapter, he continues with rejoicing, requesting the teachers to remain, requesting the teachings, and dedicating the merit, or *sonam*, that he and others have generated through this practice.

**Chapter 2: "Confession"**

**Offering**

1. Shantideva begins chapter two by making offering. The reason for this, is that in order for bodhicitta to take hold in one's mind it is necessary for the heart and consciousness to be enriched and strengthened by *sonam*. It's a very beautiful series of stanzas, in which he imagines: [2] *"I offer every fruit and flower, Every kind of healing draft, And all the precious gems the world contains, With all pure waters of refreshment; [3] Every mountain wrought of precious jewels, All sweet and lonely forest groves, The trees of paradise adorned with blossom, Trees with branches bowed with perfect fruit; [4] The perfumed fragrance of divine and other realms, All incense, wishing trees, and trees of gems, All crops that grow without the tiller's care, And every sumptuous object worthy to be offered; [5] Lakes and meres adorned*

*with lotuses, Delightful with the sweet-voiced cries of waterbirds, And everything unclaimed and free, Extending to the margins of the boundless sky.*

2. Basically he's offering everything he conceives to be beautiful and excellent. Of course, you can make physical offerings as well, but this can be rather tricky. Because the attitude that has to be present when you're making an offering in this way, is that the thing you offer should be completely relinquished—something that is excellent and something that is freely given. What is important is your own feeling of the preciousness of the thing that you offer.

### **How offering generates and strengthens one's *sonam* (merit) and bodhicitta**

3. If a poor person offers a piece of fruit, and a wealthy person offers a huge sum of money, those offerings could be very different, or they could be equally beneficial in terms of generating *sonam* within the individual's heart. For the poor person, to offer just a piece of fruit might represent a real sacrifice, and that person could be really moved by the beauty of that offering. The wealthy person could also be moved by the amount of money that he or she gives. But if the offering is something that really doesn't matter to you, that's not the kind of offering that will generate *sonam* in your heart and consciousness. This is something we should always bear in mind because we have to be very sincere and honest with ourselves. Offering is about freely giving what is precious and meaningful to us. It's very personal. Offering the light of a candle can be extremely moving and meaningful depending on the intention of your heart and mind. The main thing is to offer everything that you find wholesome and good and beautiful.

4. It is possible to have an attitude toward *sonam*, or merit, which is quite materialistic. You hear that you have to generate merit, and so you concretize it and think of your merit as a kind of capital in the bank. And you do all the sorts of things that are supposed to produce merit, thinking that you've gained it. With a materialistic attitude toward *sonam*, one can make huge offerings thinking they are generating huge merit. Of course, there are those who are altruistic in their intention and completely unattached to huge offerings—it depends entirely on the individual. But it sometimes can come off as being too lavish somehow, and the effect of it is not necessarily very beneficial. Especially on gurus and lamas, who can become materialistic themselves and easily spoiled by this kind of thing. It can happen. So offering is something that one has to really think about carefully.

5. The point about offering is that it is crucial for the generation of *sonam* and bodhicitta. There's a story that when Atisha went to some place or other in Tibet and they said, "please give us the bodhisattva vow," he said, "I can't give it—there aren't any offerings." And so they made offerings, they laid them out, and he said, "It's not enough." So eventually they really pulled out all the stops and produced this huge offering. And Atisha said, "Okay, now I can give you the bodhisattva vow." It wasn't because Atisha wanted any of the offerings—he probably got up and left like Patrul Rinpoche used to do—people would give him gold and he would just leave it in the grass and go off without it. The point is not for the object of offering to possess the offering. The point of the exercise is for you to let it go—to give it. And that's what Atisha was talking about. Of course, he could have gone through the bodhisattva ritual without the offerings, but it would have been meaningless because the aspirants couldn't have generated bodhicitta if they couldn't let go of their attachment to things.

6. The first part of this chapter is devoted to this, and it's very Indian. Shantideva offers a bath to the Buddhas, and so he visualizes this wonderful bathing chamber, with perfumed water, and music. And the Buddha's are standing in a bathing pool being bathed, and dried with wonderful, soft cloths, and they are offered wonderful robes to wear. They get out of the bath, and Shantideva pulls the plug and imagines all of the bath water pouring down over himself, purifying his negativities. For us, it's not the kind of thing we would normally think about and it may seem odd. Who knows what it meant to the Tibetans who didn't have this kind of ritual—perhaps it was very impressive to them.

### **Changing the direction of our life through confession**

7. Having made this offering in order to prepare his mind for the birth of bodhicitta, Shantideva then goes on to confess. And as we said before, the point of confession in Buddhism is to make a change of direction (*shakpa* in Tibetan) in one's life. What Shantideva does is to invoke the presence of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, and then he confesses. He says, "This is what I've done—this is what I'm like. I won't do it again." He doesn't ask the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas for forgiveness. They're not there to forgive. There's nothing for them to forgive—they don't even conceive of his negativities as negativities in the way that Shantideva does. Shantideva confesses all sorts of things from beginningless past lives that he can't possibly remember.

8. And that's the same for us when we make this confession. We're talking about not just this life, but all the lives before. All the negativities that have been accumulated in our mind streams from time immemorial. The point about confession here is that we accept this is the case. It's not a question of feeling guilty. We can't possibly feel guilty for the murders we committed when we were a warriors a long, long time ago in a galaxy far, far away. We can't possibly remember that. Nevertheless, one accepts that it's all there—it's all being carried on one's mind stream. And the effect of those destructive actions will eventually come to fruition. There's no doubt about it.

### **Purifying negative karma through the four opponent powers**

9. One of the basic qualities of karma is that it is completely indestructible unless something stops it. Otherwise it will eventually produce an effect. It won't just wear out through the passage of time. Once all the obstacles to its coming to fruition are removed, it will manifest. The point of confession is that the seeds of negative karma can be purified. One has to understand how these negative seeds can be removed. The image that is used in the teachings is that when you have a seed of grain it will remain dormant for a very long time, especially if conditions for it to do so are conducive. The idea is that when you have warmth, and fertile soil, and water, if you put the seed in the fertile soil it will grow, and a plant will be produced. The same applies to a karmic seed. When the circumstances are right it will appear. What you can do to a seed to stop it from ever sprouting and bearing fruit is to roast it. If you cook it, it won't sprout. Using this metaphor they say that when you use the four opponent powers, that's what you're doing. You're actually destroying the seeds of negative karma.

10. We should bear in mind that this whole story about karma, this whole story of a beginningless and endless series of lives—action and fruition, cause and effect, and so on—is all on the level of relative truth, as we will see later. Ultimately, there is no karma. Ultimately there is no cause and no effect. But for those of us who are living on the level of relative truth, all of

those things are absolutely unavoidable. If you commit an action it is absolutely certain that you will experience the results of that action unless you do something about it.

11. You can produce karmic seeds for happiness in samsara, as we talked about at the level of beings who are in the first scope. You can produce karmic seeds that are geared towards freedom and liberation from samsara at the level of beings who are in the second scope. And you can generate karmic seeds that result in complete enlightenment at the level of beings on the third scope.

12. When Shantideva is confessing, it's not a question of feeling guilty. Certainly it is a feeling of regret. Regret is the first of the four opponent powers. The four opponent powers are the power of regret; the power of reliance—the beings to whom you make the confession, in Shantideva's case the visualized Buddhas and Bodhisattvas who are the witnesses to his change in direction; the power of the remedy—the virtuous practices that destroy the seeds of negative karma on your mind stream; and the power of resolve—the decision to not engage in those habitual negative karmic actions that are causing all the trouble. A popular way of remembering these four opponent powers is to think of them as the four R's: regret, reliance, remedy, and resolve.

13. The way to know if your confession is working is to watch how your own behavior changes. If you have a bad habit and you confess it, you might have to confess it a great many times. But eventually, you'll see that habit start to fade away as a sign that the purification is taking place. Of course, you need a lot of patience for this to happen. Nevertheless, it is important to do it—to apply the four opponent powers.

### **The power of regret**

14. The strongest of the four opponent powers is the power of regret. And this is very different than feeling guilty. We feel guilty because we think we have failed to live up to some sort of standard—like the law of God, or what would my mother think, or what would my father think, or what would other people say if they knew what I was really like. That is not what we're talking about here. What we're talking about with regret, is the understanding that what one has done will cause suffering to oneself and others.

15. One image that provides a strong example of what regret is in Buddhism, is a story that was written up some years ago in a British newspaper about some young people in the Royal Air Force who were learning how to parachute. They'd done all their training on the ground and they were in the plane to make their first jump. There they all were, waiting to jump out while their trainer was with them giving last instructions. They jump out and their trainer jumps with them. Suddenly the trainer realizes that because he was so intent and focused on explaining the final instructions to the trainees, he hadn't put his parachute on. He'd jumped out of the plane without a parachute. So the feeling he had then...was *regret*. That is what Buddhism mean by regret. You realize that you've done something really bad and you're going to pay the price. With regret you say to yourself, *okay, I'm going to have to do something about this*. Happily, the story worked out well because the trainer managed to take hold of one of the trainees and they got down to the ground with just one parachute.

16. Shantideva says, [24] *To Buddhas of the past, the present, and all future time, And to the Dharma and Sublime Assembly, With bodies many as the grains of dust upon the earth, I will prostrate and bow.* [26] *Until the essence of enlightenment is reached, I go for refuge to the Buddhas. Also I take refuge in the dharma and in all the host of Bodhisattvas.* [27] *To perfect Buddhas and to Bodhisattvas, In all directions where they may reside, To them who are the sovereigns of great mercy, I press my palms together, praying thus:* [28] *“In this and all my other lives, While turning in the round without beginning, Blindly I have brought forth evil (great negative action - Ed.\*), And incited others to commit the same.* [29] *“Deceived and overmastered by my ignorance, I have taken pleasure in such sin (negative actions), And seeing now the blame of it, O great protectors, I confess it earnestly!* [30] *“Whatever I have done against the Triple gem, Against my parents, teachers, and the rest, through force of my defilements, In my body, speech, and mind, [31] “All the evil (extreme negative actions) I, a sinner (deluded being), have committed, All the wicked deeds that cling to me, the frightful things that I contrived I openly declare to you, the teachers of the world. [32] “It may be that my death will come to me Before my evil (negativity) has been cleansed. How then can I be free from it? I pray you, quickly grant me your protection!”*

17. Notice where he says, “Deceived and overmastered by my ignorance...” People commit negative actions because their minds are overwhelmed by negativity. It’s not as if Shantideva is bad in himself. What he’s talking about are the mistakes he’s made due to his misconceptions, his misunderstandings, his ignorance. He’s not saying, “I’m a bad person.” That’s important to realize. The Buddha never says to beings they are bad people. He merely says that they suffer. The reason why they suffer is that they are ignorant and mistaken. Again, it’s not a question of guilt, which seems to be a problem for westerners who feel they are somehow inherently bad. In fact, guilt is a result of the ego clinging to itself—taking itself a little too seriously.

18. Shantideva makes his confession and he then reflects upon the fact that life is impermanent and life is passing away. There isn’t really a great deal of time. He says, [33] *We cannot trust the wanton Lord of Death. The task complete or still to do, he will not wait. In health or sickness, therefore, none of us can trust Our fleeting, momentary lives.* [34] *And we must pass away, forsaking all. But I, devoid of understanding, Have, for sake of friend and foe alike, Provoked and brought about so many wrongs.* [35] *But all my foes will cease to be, And all my friends will cease to be, And I will also cease to be, And likewise everything will cease to be.* [36] *All that I possess and use Is like the fleeting vision of a dream. It fades into the realms of memory, And fading, will be seen no more.*

\* Western practitioners sometimes object to the use of the words *evil*, *sin*, and *sinner* in translations of Buddhist texts, on the grounds that they carry too many Judeo-Christian associations with the doctrine of original sin—a state of sin present in each human at birth, that is a direct result of a human lineage of disobedience to God; and evil being associated with the Devil/Lucifer/Satan, a fallen angel turned rival-to-God who seeks to seduce humans into becoming sinners and then delights in carrying out God’s punishment on them. I’ve provided alternate translations in parentheses in an attempt to convey my understanding of Buddhist philosophy as taught to me by Tibetan Lamas in way that doesn’t lead to misunderstanding. Given all that, there is nothing inherently wrong with using the words *sin*, *sinner*, and *evil* in translation if those terms don’t trigger misunderstanding in the practitioner. - Ed.

\*\* Yama, the King or Lord of Death—not a sentient being, but a symbol and personification of death

19. [37] *And even in the brief course of this present life, So many friends and foes have passed away, Because of whom, the evils (great negativities) I have done Still lie, unbearable, before me. [38] The thought came never to my mind That I too am a brief and passing thing. And so, through hatred, lust, and ignorance, I have committed many sins (negative actions). [39] Never halting night or day, My life drains constantly away, And from no other source does increase come. How can there not be death for such as me? [40] There I'll be, prostrate upon my bed, And all around, my family and friends. But I alone shall be the one to feel The cutting of the thread of life. [41] And when the heralds of the Deadly King\*\* have gripped me, What help to me will be my friends and kin? For then life's virtue is my one defense, And this, alas, is what I shrugged away.*

20. Those last two lines are quite important. If we want to die happily, the only way to die happily is to live well, virtuously, not to have regret for the hurt we have done to others. Or if we've done them, we must be conscious that they have been confessed, and have been mended. He continues, [42] *O protectors! I, so little heeding, Hardly guessed at horror such as this— And all for this brief, transient existence, I have done so many evil (extremely negative) things. [44] No need to say how stricken I shall be When overcome and sick with dreadful fear, I'm seized by forms so horrible to see, The frightful servants of the Lord of Death.\*\* [45] Who can give me safe protection From this horror, from this frightful dread? And then I'll search the four directions, Seeking help, with panic-stricken eyes. [46] But in those four directions no protection shall I find. And I shall sink into despairing woe. No refuge will there be for me; At such a time, what shall I do?*

21. [47] *Thus, from this day forward I take refuge In the Buddhas, guardians of beings, Who labor to protect all wanderers, Those mighty ones who scatter every fear. [48] And in the Dharma they have realized in their hearts, Which drives away the terrors of samsara, And in all the host of Bodhisattvas Likewise I will perfectly take refuge. [49] Gripped by dread, beside myself with anguish, To Samantabhadra I will give myself; My body I myself will give To Manjughosha, gentle and melodious. [50] To him whose deeds of mercy never fail, My lord Avalokita, I cry out from depths of misery, "Protect me now an evildoer (a deluded being)!"*

22. [53] *Formerly your words I have transgressed, But having seen these terrors all around, I come to you for refuge praying: Swiftly drive away my fear! [54] For if, alarmed by common ailments, I must implement the doctor's words, What need to speak of when I'm constantly brought low By ills like lust and faults a hundredfold? [55] And if, by one of these alone, The dwellers in the world are all thrown down, And if no other remedy exists, No other healing elsewhere to be found [56] Than words of the all-knowing doctor, Which uproot our every ill, The thought to turn on him deaf ears Is abject and contemptible stupidity. [57] Along a small and ordinary cliff If I must pick my way with special care, What need to speak of that long-lasting chasm Plunging to the depths a thousand leagues?*

\*\* Yama, the King or Lord of Death—not a sentient being, but a symbol and personification of death

23. [58] *“Today, at least, I shall not die.” So rash to lull myself with words like these! My dissolution and my hour of death Will come to me, of this there is no doubt. [59] Who can give me fearlessness, What sure escape is there from this? It’s certain that I’m going to die, So how can I relax, my mind at ease? [60] Of life’s experience, all seasons past, What’s left to me, what now remains? By clinging to what now is here no more, My teacher’s precepts I have disobeyed. [61] And when this life is left behind, And with it all my kith and kin, I must set out on strange paths all alone: Why make so much of all my friends and foes? [62] How instead can I make sure To rid myself of evil (negativity born of delusion), only cause of sorrow? This should be my one concern, My only thought both night and day.*

24. The interesting thing about confession is that it can be done at the last minute. Some of us are already adults or even quite old when we come to the teachings. But that really doesn’t matter. Provided we can get the point that one can put an end to the meaningless sufferings of samsara, we can actually change direction. We can make the decision to cut off, or split, from the harmful trajectory we’ve been on and start in on a new and beneficial direction. That’s what *shakpa* is, that’s what confession means in Buddhism. This will affect both the way we die and the manner in which we move on.

### **Chapter 3: “Taking Hold of Bodhicitta”**

1. Shantideva then goes on to the third chapter. He moves past this dramatic moment of confession. It’s done. He’s made his decision to change. He’s declared it to the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, and he’s taken refuge in them as his protectors. They will protect him through the power of their blessings, but also the Dharma of their teachings, which he will put into practice and thereby transform himself. Then he moves on to the actual taking of the bodhisattva vow.

2. An important thing to be aware of regarding the protection of refuge, is that it’s quite easy to make the mistake of thinking that refuge is some kind of theistic thing—that you go for refuge to the Buddha and he will protect you. Of course the Buddha does, but not by waving a magic wand and putting you in a state of liberation. The Buddha protects you by showing the path and inspiring you, by showing you how the mind transforms itself. Actual refuge is a commitment. One can think of the Buddha as a protector in a sort of theistic way if that helps, but real refuge is putting the Buddha’s teaching into practice. It’s the Dharma realizations in your own mind that protect you. His Holiness the Dalai Lama often says if you’re sick, you go to the doctor and the doctor will examine you and prescribe medicine for you. But it’s not the doctor that cures you, it’s the medicine that you take. In the same way you can understand refuge as being a commitment to practicing the stages of the path.

3. So having prepared the ground through prostration, confession, and offering, Shantideva then goes on to think about his bodhicitta commitment—how wonderful bodhicitta is and what a great development it is for him in his life. He starts with a rhapsodic continuation of the seven-limb practice. He rejoices in the virtue of other beings that results in their happiness, the virtue that carries them into the higher realms of experience, the virtue that will bring them to liberation from samsaric suffering. He takes delight in the enlightened attitude of the Buddhas, which he calls “an ocean of great good.” Regarding all these things, he says, “such is my delight and joy.” So that’s the limb of rejoicing in the seven-limb practice.

4. He then goes on to the next two limbs, requesting the teachings, and beseeching the teachers to remain: [5] *And so I join my hands and pray The Buddhas who reside in every quarter: Kindle now the Dharma's light For those who grope, bewildered, in the dark of pain!* [6] *I join my hands beseeching the enlightened ones Who wish to pass into nirvana: Do not leave us wandering in blindness, Stay among us for unnumbered ages!*

5. Then he dedicates his merit—the *sonam* positive energy and positive potential he has accumulated with this practice, which is the final limb of the seven-limb practice: [7] *Through these actions now performed And all the virtues I have gained, May all the pain of every living being Be wholly scattered and destroyed!*

6. Very often when we do this practice, we dedicate the merit—for instance when we attend a teaching or when we do something good or positive. We dedicate our all of our *sonam* energy to our own enlightenment and the enlightenment of all sentient beings. It's a way of protecting our *sonam* so that it doesn't degenerate. Here, in a beautiful way, Shantideva dedicates his *sonam* to the way he himself will be transformed for the benefit of others. He says, [7] *Through these actions now performed And all the virtues I have gained, May all the pain of every living being Be wholly scattered and destroyed!* [8] *For all those ailing in the world, Until their every sickness has been healed, May I myself become for them The doctor, nurse, the medicine itself.* [9] *Raining down a flood of food and drink, May I dispel the ills of thirst and famine. And in the aeons marked by scarcity and want, May I myself appear as drink and sustenance.* [10] *For sentient beings, poor and destitute, May I become a treasure ever-plentiful, And lie before them closely in their reach, A varied source of all that they might need.*

7. Shantideva is actually thinking about himself as he progresses on the Bodhisattva path in the future, over many lifetimes. He then offers his body, he offers his possessions, and he offers his *sonam*/merit. He says, [11] *My body, thus, and all my goods besides, And all my merits gained and to be gained, I give them all and do not count the cost, To bring about the benefit of beings.* So he's even giving that which within him will produce enlightenment. The paradox is that he's giving precisely what he needs to attain enlightenment. He's actually aspiring to give everything, and it's the gift of everything which is the bodhicitta itself, the aspirational bodhicitta.

8. He then turns his attention to the fact that our own body, our most precious possession in a way, the vehicle through which we communicate with and exist in the world, is the thing that we most protect. If someone insults our body and says you're old, or you're fat, or you're ugly, we immediately rush to its defense. Because Shantideva acknowledges this, he gives it away. He says, [12] *Nirvana is attained by giving all, Nirvana is the object of my striving; And all must be surrendered in a single instant, Therefore it is best to give it all to others.* [13] *This body I have now resigned To serve the pleasure of all living beings. Let them ever kill, despise, and beat it, Using it according to their wish.* [14] *And though they treat it like a toy, Or make of it the butt of every mockery, My body has been given up to them. Why should I make so much of it?*

9. [15] *And so let beings do to me Whatever does not bring them injury. Whenever they may think of me, Let this not fail to bring them benefit.* [16] *And if in my regard they have A thought*



*of anger or respect, May these states always be the cause Whereby their good and wishes are fulfilled. [17] All those who slight me to my face Or do to me some other evil, Even if they blame or slander me, May they attain the fortune of enlightenment!*

10. There is a dedication we often make at the end of a teaching that says: “May anyone who merely sees or hears, remembers, touches or talks to me, be instantly freed from all suffering and abide in happiness forever.” Of course, touching me might be stroking my cheek or it might be punching me in the face. And those who are pleasant to me or make fun of me, are all making contact with me. The basic idea is that since my body is now given over to them, may that be a cause for their progress on their path. There’s a two-line verse in Tibetan about the relationship with an authentic teacher which says: “If there is a good connection with the lama, Buddhahood in one life. If there is a bad connection, samsara has an end.” So even for the people who torture and kill the great lamas, like they did in Tibet during the Chinese invasion, the Bodhisattva attitude is *may those beings who torture and kill me, be drawn to the path because of their connection to me.*

11. That concept is something we really have to get our heads around. It’s a completely new frame of mind for most of us and quite a big training. Of course, in any given human situation or relationship the first thing that most impresses us is the body of that person there, in front of this body here, and the physical and psychological relationship that’s based on that. This could be with your spouse, or your child, or your teacher, or anyone who you are relating to. We have to remember that these meetings which seem so solid, and permanent, and real are temporary comings and goings in our journey through samsara. That other person has had a completely different beginningless experience than I’ve had. That person has come from another place. That person will go to another place, perhaps. But in this moment, here we are together. If we can get used to that thought, it frees up the relationship and brings a spaciousness into it that is quite useful.

12. Say, for instance, you’re in a marriage and that marriage breaks down. As we all know, that can be a very unpleasant event—the children that may be involved, the divorce settlement, the hatred that comes to replace the love that was there. It’s a very terrible, but very common, thing to happen. But if one person in that relationship is a Bodhisattva, the whole situation is changed. Because even if the other person comes to hate you, whether it’s a marriage or any other kind of relationship that has turned bad, perhaps through one’s own fault, that relationship can become part of the path of Dharma. If you regret it, but the other person doesn’t forgive and the enmity remains, the person that is trying to practice bodhicitta in that relationship can make sincere prayers, *may that person who has been in relationship to me be drawn to the path.* It doesn’t matter that in the present situation that person may never like me again. They’re going to follow their own trajectory, whatever that may be. But the aspiring bodhisattva’s prayer is that because of that relationship that maybe has turned bad, that person will find happiness eventually. It’s a very powerful training.

13. [Ed. note: This reminds me of a story I read or heard on the news years ago that both shocked and moved me. An older woman in San Antonio was walking in the woods, either in the Alamo Heights area or near Brackenridge park. She was attacked by a young man, perhaps for her money or some other reason—I don’t remember. What I do remember is that the young man

killed her. The woman was Christian, and as she was dying she said to the young man, “I forgive you.” Then she blessed him by saying something like, “May you find happiness and peace.” The woman clearly grasped the powerful karmic moment of connection between herself and this young man, and she didn’t want that connection to be the cause of unbearable torment for him in the future. So at that moment, the older woman possessed the frame of mind of a Bodhisattva: *May anyone who merely sees or hears, remembers, touches, or talks to me, be freed from all sufferings and abide in happiness forever.* Following that, the young man turned himself in, or he was apprehended, and he told the police what the woman had said. ]

14. Shantideva is constantly strengthening his bodhicitta. He says, [17] *All those who slight me to my face Or do to me some other evil, Even if they blame or slander me, May they attain the fortune of enlightenment!* [18] *May I be a guard for those who are protectorless, A guide for those who journey on the road. For those who wish to cross the water, May I be a boat, a raft, a bridge.* [19] *May I be an isle for those who yearn for land, A lamp for those who long for light; For all who need a resting place, a bed; For those who need a servant, may I be their slave.* [20] *May I be the wishing jewel, the vase of wealth, A word of power and the supreme healing, May I be the tree of miracles, For every being the abundant cow.* [21] *Just like the earth and space itself And all the other mighty elements, For boundless multitudes of beings May I always be the ground of life, the source of varied sustenance.* [22] *Thus for everything that lives, As far as are the limits of the sky, May I be constantly their source of livelihood Until they pass beyond all sorrow.*

15. On the basis of these kinds of aspirations we move into the two stanzas that have become the formula for taking the Bodhisattva vow. [23] *Just as all the Buddhas of the past Have brought forth the awakened mind, And in the precepts of the Bodhisattvas Step-by-step abode and trained* [24] *Likewise, for the benefit of beings, I will bring to birth the awakened mind, And in those precepts, step-by-step, I will abide and train myself.*

16. So there, he’s taken his vow. He’s brought to perfection the bodhicitta of aspiration. When you strengthen your bodhicitta, then you are in a position to make that promise. It’s not yet bodhicitta in engagement or action, but it’s the perfection of bodhicitta in aspiration. He’s already said in the beginning of Chapter 1 that people who have this thought of bodhicitta, when it arises and grows in them, they become immensely special. They become the children of the Buddha. And so he finishes off this chapter with a very beautiful celebration. It’s good to read it fairly frequently to remind yourself of your own dignity, however difficult your experience on the path might be, especially in moments of depression and despair. You’ve had this thought and you’re trying to maintain it. You are no longer in a position to feel dejection—it’s actually a fault on the part of a Bodhisattva. So you have to remind yourself of this great and extraordinary attitude of bodhicitta.

17. [25] *Those who thus with clear intelligence Take hold of the awakened mind with bright and lucid joy, That they may now increase what they have gained, Should lift their hearts with praises such as these:* [26] *“Today my life has given fruit. This human state has now been well assumed. Today I take my birth in Buddha’s line, And have become the Buddha’s child and heir.* [27] *“In every way, then, I will undertake Activities befitting such a rank. And I will do no act to mar Or compromise this high and faultless lineage.* [28] *“For I am like a blind man who*

*has found A precious gem inside a heap of dust. For so it is, by some strange chance, That bodhicitta has been born in me.*

18. [29] *“This is the supreme draft of immortality That slays the Lord of Death, the slaughterer of beings, The rich unfailing treasure-mine To heal the poverty of wanderers. [30] “It is the sovereign remedy That perfectly allays all maladies. It is the tree that gives relief To those who wander wearily the pathways of existence. [32] “It is the mighty sun that utterly dispels The misty ignorance of wandering beings, The creamy butter, rich and full, That’s churned from milk of holy teaching. [33] “Living beings! Wayfarers upon life’s paths, Who wish to taste the riches of contentment, Here before you is the supreme bliss. Here, O ceaseless travelers, is your fulfillment! [34] “And so, today, within the sight of all protectors, I summon beings, calling them to Buddhahood. And, till that state is reached, to every earthly joy! May gods and demigods and all the rest rejoice!”*

*—Transcribed and Edited by Tenzin Sherab/Christopher Moroney*