

TIBETAN BUDDHISM CENTER FOR WORLD PEACE
San Antonio, Texas

Shāntideva's *Bodhicharyāvatāra*, The Way of the Bodhisattva
Chapter 10: "Dedication"

The following is based on *The Nectar of Manjushri's Speech: A Detailed Commentary on Shantideva's Way of the Bodhisattva* by Khenpo Kunzang Pelden (Khenpo Kunpel); *Transcendent Wisdom, A Teaching on the Wisdom Section of Shāntideva's Guide to the Bodhisattva Way of Life* by His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama, translated, edited and annotated by B. Alan Wallace; *The Way of the Bodhisattva*, translated by Wulstan Fletcher and the Padmakara Translation Group; *Science and Philosophy in the Indian Buddhist Classics, Volume 2: The Mind; Debate in Tibetan Buddhism* by Daniel E. Perdue; and teachings by Lama Tsongkhapa, His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama, Geshe Drakpa Gelek, Lama Zopa Rinpoche, Ven. Robina Courtin, Ven. Passang Gelek, Geshe Lhundup Sopa, Jeffrey Hopkins, Guy Newland, Alexander Berzin, and the guidance of Geshe Lobsang Nima.

TBCWP Session 33: Sunday, January 7, 2024

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

Explanation of dedication

1. [1] *By all the virtue I have now amassed by composition of this book, which speaks of entry to the Bodhisattva way, may every being tread the path to Buddhahood.*

2. In this concluding tenth chapter of *The Way of the Bodhisattva*, Shantideva dedicates all the roots of virtue he has accumulated through composing this text for the benefit of himself and all other beings. Taken in its entirety, the *Bodhicharyavatara* text contains the meaning of the Buddha's teachings that perfectly lead sentient beings to enlightenment through the graded stages of the Bodhisattva path. Here Shantideva is dedicating the existing merit that has been accumulated through the composition and transmission of his text so that all sentient beings may develop bodhicitta and engage in the practice of the six perfections and all the other Bodhisattva practices that lead to full enlightenment.

3. According to the Mahayana Buddhist tradition it is very important to dedicate the merits and fruits of any Dharma practice we engage in. Our teachers have said that for a Dharma practice or action to be complete it must begin and end in a specific way. When we start each action it is important to generate a proper motivation and at the completion of that action we should dedicate all the accumulated merit. Our initial motivation determines whether our practice is pure or not. For our practice to be pure, it should not involve ego-based self interests.

4. For instance, if we practice Dharma only for the purpose of making this life pleasurable—to gain a good reputation or material comforts and so on—then our practice is not pure. In other words, it is not a Dharma practice. If our motivation is to gain a future rebirth as a human or god, this qualifies as a dharma practice but its aspiration is of the smallest scope. A higher aspiration is to practice with the motivation to be free from suffering and to liberate ourselves from cyclic existence, which is the aspiration of the medium scope. Finally, if we practice Dharma with the highest motivation to attain enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient

Sunday, January 7, 2024

beings, this is an aspiration of the greatest scope. The scope of our practice depends on our motivation for performing that Dharma practice. This is why it is so important to generate a proper motivation before we begin any Dharma-related practice.

Generating the motivation for practice and dedicating the merit of it

1. Generating the proper motivation for practice is the correct way of starting an action and dedicating the merit of one's practice is the proper way of ending it. When a drop of water falls into the ocean it will remain for as long as the ocean remains. In a similar way, when virtue is dedicated to the attainment of Buddhahood, it will not be spent until enlightenment is achieved. In fact, it is said our dedicated virtue will increase and actually take us to Buddhahood! As Shantideva explains in the "Patience" chapter, virtue that has been dedicated in this way can never be destroyed at some later time by our anger; instead, it will keep increasing.

2. Dedication is defined as the mental factor of intention which directs our accumulated virtue and acts as a cause for the results we desire. In this respect dedication is like the reins on a horse. Wherever a horse is led is determined by its reins; whatever results are wished for are determined by dedicating the merit of our virtue. For these reasons, it is extremely important to dedicate our merit after every dharma practice, no matter how insignificant it may seem to us.

3. When we have the aspiration and motivation to become enlightened for the benefit of all sentient beings, the process of dedicating our merit can become an amazingly effective Dharma practice. Each morning when we wake up we can set the intention that every action of our body, speech, and mind, including every interaction we have with others, will be motivated by the wish to become enlightened for the benefit of all beings. The more we can habituate ourselves to doing this in whatever ways we can, the more natural it will become for us.

4. Even when it appears that we have failed and we succumb to our ego-based afflictive emotions, if we make the intention to continually shine the light of the Dharma teachings onto those afflictions and failures, we can learn from the experience of our mistakes. It is helpful to remember that the motivating force that triggers every ego-based afflictive emotion is the wish to be happy and to not suffer. Our job on the Bodhisattva path is to clearly distinguish between the true cause of happiness, a cause that is rooted in the realization of the interdependent nature of all things, and the ego's view of what will cause happiness, which is rooted in self-centered delusion. In so doing, we will gradually overcome our own afflictive emotions and the mistakes we make because of them, and learn how to help others do the same for themselves. In this way, at the end of each day we can dedicate the merit of our actions—no matter how small we may think that merit is—to the attainment of Buddhahood.

Dedication for the sake of others

1. [2] *May beings everywhere who suffer torment in their minds and bodies have, by virtue of my merit, joy and happiness in boundless measure.* There are three kinds of suffering: the suffering of suffering (suffering in the ordinary sense of the word), the suffering of change, and all-pervasive suffering. Here we wish that, by the virtue of merit from our practice of the Bodhisattva way, beings who reside in all directions and in all realms of existence be instantly freed from the suffering of suffering that torments them in their minds and bodies. We hold compassion in our hearts and minds, wishing that beings be free from sorrow and its causes. We

also think of all beings everywhere with loving kindness, wishing that they have physical and mental well-being and perfect happiness.

2. [3] *As long as they may linger in samsara, may their joy be undiminished; may they taste of unsurpassed beatitude in constant and unbroken continuity.* Here we make the dedication to free beings from the suffering of change by wishing that, though the power of our virtue, all beings who are prosperous, and who have healthy bodies and happy minds, will never lose their good fortune for as long as they remain in cyclic existence.

3. As for all-pervasive suffering, this will be with us for as long as our physical and mental aggregates are defiled within the entrapment of cyclic existence. Dedication to free beings from this kind of suffering consists in the wish that the infinite multitude of beings existing in every dimension of space be free from all-pervasive suffering and attain the unceasing bliss of the nirvana of the Bodhisattvas.

4. When we reflect that all suffering arises from its associated cause, namely negative action, we will gain confidence in the karmic principle of cause and effect. We will come to understand that wherever we are born in cyclic existence, whether high or low, there is nowhere in cyclic existence that is beyond the reach of sorrow. Eventually we will feel revulsion for cyclic existence and become determined to free ourselves from it. And we will come to understand that of all those who are tormented by suffering there is not one of them that we have not been connected to and interconnected with since beginningless time. There is not one of them who wants to suffer and who does not want to be happy. And so a strong desire and willingness to help others will arise in us.

Dedication to pacify the sufferings of the three lower realms

1. Stanzas 4 through 17 consist of dedications to pacify the sufferings experienced in the three lower realms of hell beings, hungry ghosts, and animals. With descriptions of the intense pain and suffering of the various hell realms, the insatiable hunger and grasping in the realm of hungry ghosts, and the fears and sufferings of the animal realm, Shantideva envisions a transcendent transformation of these horrible and pitiful states of existence through the powerful merits of all the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.

2. Although normal human beings cannot see the terrible plight of hell beings and hungry ghosts, we can readily observe the fear, suffering and desperation that exists among terrestrial and aquatic animals in the wild—animals who attack and devour one another, who experience pain, hunger, entrapment, and poisoning, who suffer at the hands of humans who kill them for sport or treat them inhumanely to raise and slaughter for food.

3. Regarding hellish existence, we need look no further than the planet we live on to see the fear, agony, and tremendous suffering of sentient beings—children, women, and men who are homeless and hungry, ravaged by war, famine, and disease; who suffer physically, mentally, and emotionally; who are trafficked for the purposes of forced labor, sexual slavery, commercial sexual exploitation, and worse. These children, women, and men are currently experiencing a living hell on earth. And because of the laws of karma, those who torture them and perpetrate their suffering are destined and bound for the same hellish experiences.

4. We dedicate any merit we have gained from our studies and practice of the Bodhisattva path for the benefit of all these beings suffering in lower states of existence. May they quickly be free of their negative karma and experience physical and emotional relief and healing. May they have fortunate rebirths where they meet with qualified spiritual masters who can teach them the Buddhadharma so they may achieve complete liberation from suffering and its causes and attain incomparable happiness. May we, as Bodhisattva practitioners, be blessed and inspired by our spiritual masters and all the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas to have the power to accomplish the goal of becoming enlightened for the benefit of all beings who suffer in these lower realms.

Dedication to relieve the sufferings of humans and gods and to fulfill their wishes

1. In stanzas 18 through 41 Shantideva makes dedications of merit to relieve the sufferings of humans and beings in the god realm and to fulfill their wishes. We can dedicate the merit we have gained from studying and practicing Shantideva's text to benefit these beings as well.

2. To this purpose, Shantideva enumerates many dedications such as: May all humans and gods be relieved of any suffering they may experience. May the blind see and the deaf hear. May everyone have enough food, water, and clothing. May everyone be free from physical pain and the suffering of disease. May all sickness be absent from the world. May those who are poor and destitute find wealth, those who are exhausted and burdened with worry find joy. May those who are terrified have no more fear, may captives be set free, and may living beings help each other in kindness. May children and the elderly, and all those who are without protection have pure celestial beings as their guardians.

3. Through the merit gained by studying and practicing the Bodhisattva path may every being never be separated from bodhicitta and always engage in the actions of a Bodhisattva. May multitudes of Bodhisattvas live in every land with many disciples. May the sound of Dharma be perceived by each and every living being, and may they always come into the presence of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.

Specific dedication for ordained monks and nuns

1. In stanzas 42 through 47 Shantideva makes specific dedications for the ordained. Here we can bring to mind our own spiritual teachers who are ordained monks and nuns, including those who have passed on, and dedicate our merit for their benefit.

2. [42] *In monasteries, temples, and the like, may reading and reciting widely flourish. May harmony prevail among the Sangha; may its purposes be all fulfilled.* [43] *May ordained monks, intent upon the practice, find perfect places for retreat in solitude, abandon every vagrant thought, and meditate with trained and serviceable minds.* [44] *May nuns have all their wants supplied; may quarreling and spite be strange to them. Let all who have embraced monastic life uphold a pure and unimpaired observance.*

3. [45] *May those who break their discipline repent, and always may they strive to cleanse away their faults. And thus may they acquire a fortunate rebirth, wherein to practice stainless discipline.* [46] *May wise and learned beings be revered, and always be sustained by alms. May they be pure in mind, and may their fame spread far and wide.* [47] *May [these] beings never*

languish in the lower realms, may pain and hardship be unknown to them. With bodies greater than the gods, may they attain enlightenment without delay.

Dedication of virtue for the sake of perfecting the supreme goal

1. Through the virtue of composing this text, Shantideva dedicates stanzas 48 through 50 to all beings throughout the universe, Bodhisattvas, and other superior beings such as Pratyekabuddhas and Shravakas, that they may perfect their supreme goals of liberation from cyclic existence, achieve nirvana, and attain enlightenment. A Pratyekabuddha or “solitary realizer” is a practitioner of the Hinayana level who attains the cessation of suffering without relying on a teacher. A Shravaka or “hearer” is someone who first hears the instructions from the Buddha and then through meditating on these instructions gains insight into the true nature of existence and achieves Nirvana and liberation from cyclic existence.

2. [48] *May beings time and time again make offerings to all the Buddhas. And with the Buddha's unimagined bliss may they enjoy undimmed and constant happiness. [49] May all the Bodhisattvas now fulfill their high intention for the sake of wanderers. May sentient beings now obtain all that their Guardians wish for them. [50] And may the Hearers and Pratyekabuddhas gain their perfect happiness.*

Dedication of virtue for the sake of oneself

1. In the following six stanzas Shantideva dedicates the merit he has accumulated through the virtue of composing this text and through the kindness of Manjushri, the bodhisattva of wisdom and insight. In Vajrayana (Tantra) Buddhism, Manjushri is a meditational deity and considered a fully enlightened Buddha. Another name of Manjushri is Manjughosha (“Sweet Voice”).

2. We can also dedicate the merit we have gained from studying and practicing Shantideva's text in a similar way to the following verses.

3. [51] *And till, through Manjugosha's perfect kindness, I attain the ground of Perfect Joy* [Perfect Joy is the name of the first of the ten Bodhisattva bhumis or grounds of realization leading to enlightenment], *May I remember all my lives and enter into the monastic state. [52] Thus may I abide, sustained by simple, ordinary fare. And in every life obtain a dwelling place in perfect solitude. [53] Whenever I desire to gaze on him or put to him the slightest question, may I behold with unobstructed sight my own protector Manjughosha.*

4. [54] *To satisfy the needs of beings dwelling in the ten directions, to the margins of the sky, may I reflect in all my deeds the perfect exploits of Manjushri. [55] And now as long as space endures, as long as there are beings to be found, may I continue likewise to remain to drive away the sorrows of the world. [56] The pains and sorrow of all wandering beings—may they ripen wholly on myself. And may the virtuous company of Bodhisattvas always bring about the happiness of beings.*

Dedication for the flourishing of the Buddha's doctrine

1. [57] *May the Doctrine, only cure for sorrow, source of every bliss and happiness, be blessed with wealth, upheld with veneration, and throughout a vast continuance of time, endure!*

Recognizing kindness and prostrating

1. [58] *And now to Manjughosha I prostrate, whose kindness is the wellspring of my good intent. And to my virtuous friends I also bow whose inspiration gave me strength to grow.*

2. Shantideva prostrates to Manjughosha (Manjushri) through whose kindness he developed the precious awakened heart and mind of bodhicitta and received the the opportunity to practice the Six Perfections. Through his practice he developed the wisdom that enabled him to compose this treasured text on the perfect path that leads to the attainment of Buddhahood. He also prostrates to his other spiritual guides through whose kindness he received ordination and was inspired to develop the wisdom of listening to the Dharma, contemplating the Dharma, and meditating on the Dharma—a process which strengthened and increased all of his good qualities.

3. With the tenth chapter, Shantideva thoroughly explains the dedication of his body, resources, and roots of virtue for the benefit of others. In this way his dedication serves as a detailed example of the perfection of generosity.

This completes the Bodhicharyavatara, which was composed by the master Shantideva.

Compiled and edited by Tenzin Dhondup Sherab/Christopher Moroney