



Bodhicharya

AWAKEN THE HEART BY OPENING THE MIND

3: TAKING HOLD OF BODHICITTA

Teachings on the *Bodhicharyavatara*, by Ringu Tulku Rinpoche
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3: TAKING HOLD OF BODHICITTA.....	1
EXPLANATION OF THE CHAPTER TITLE.....	2
CHAPTER STRUCTURE.....	2
I. THE PREPARATION.....	2
I.A. ACCUMULATION.....	2
<i>I.A.1. The branch of rejoicing.....</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>I.A.2. The branch of turning the wheel of the dharma.....</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>I.A.3. The branch of requesting the enlightened beings to stay with us.....</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>I.A.4. The branch of dedication.....</i>	<i>8</i>
I.B. TRAINING THE MIND IN GIVING AWAY THE THREE BASES OF EGO-CLINGING.....	11
<i>I.B.1. The actual training.....</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>I.B.2. Establishing its reasoning.....</i>	<i>13</i>
<i>I.B.3. The special method of giving away your body.....</i>	<i>14</i>
<i>I.B.4. Dedicating the result of the mind training to others.....</i>	<i>14</i>
II. THE MAIN PART: TAKING THE VOW.....	16
III. REJOICING IN TAKING THE VOWS.....	23
<i>III.A. Rejoicing for oneself.....</i>	<i>23</i>
<i>III.B. Causing others to rejoice.....</i>	<i>28</i>

Explanation of the chapter title

Here we have translated the title of this chapter as “Taking Hold of Bodhicitta.” A more accurate translation would be “taking complete and perfect hold of bodhicitta.” It means that once we have generated a little bit of bodhicitta, we should really hold onto, and never let it go.

In other translations, this title is called “Embracing Bodhicitta,” or “Commitment.”

Chapter structure

This chapter has three parts: the preparation; taking the bodhicitta vows; and rejoicing that we have actually taken the vows and made this commitment.

I. The preparation

The section on preparation has two parts: accumulating merit; and training our mind to cut through ego-clinging.

I.A. Accumulation

Generally, there are eight accumulation practices that are used to help the bodhicitta attitude grow in us. In the previous chapter, we discussed the first four practices: making offerings, prostrations, refuge, and confession and purification. In this chapter, Shantideva presents four more practices: rejoicing, requesting the teachings, requesting the long life of the teacher, and dedication.

These eight accumulations, or *branches*, are very important in the Mahayana and Vajrayana traditions. The accumulation practices described in this text are the source of seven branch practice that you find in your ngöndro and other Vajrayana practices. However, in the ngöndro, the refuge is not included within the seven branch practice; it is done separately because of its special importance. In this text, Shantideva includes practice of refuge with the other seven branches, for a total of eight branches or accumulations.

I.A.1. The branch of rejoicing

Generally, these eight accumulations are a way of working on our mind poisons. For instance, making prostrations works on our pride; making offerings works directly against attachment (such as miserliness or our tendency to hold on to things); and purification is the antidote to aversion (such as anger or hatred).

Rejoicing is the antidote to jealousy. Jealousy is regarded as something very negative from the Buddhist point of view, because it doesn't help anybody. It only causes harm and suffering. Jealousy is a combination of both aversion and attachment. It is when if somebody has something better than you, and then you feel a burning inside you, you don't want that. Or if somebody has done something good, then you don't like that—you wish that the person didn't do that well or did not have that good experience.

Here we are trying to work on this jealousy by generating appreciation and joy for the virtue and good fortune of others. Rejoicing means that if somebody does something good, then we are happy for that. If something good happens to somebody, we are happy for that. If somebody has something much better than we do, we are happy for it.

This is usually not a very easy thing. I had to find this out the hard way myself. In the past, sometimes I had some nice things happen to me, and then I would think, “Oh, if I share this with my friends, they will be very happy, because I have done something good.” But I found out later on, that was not the case! Sometimes, if I had some good things happening, and if I talked about it too much, then the people around me didn't like that! That was a difficult lesson.

Another example of jealousy is: suppose I am an employee, and she's an employee. And she is about to get a one hundred dollar raise, and I am about to get a fifty-dollar raise. Now I should be happy, because she's getting one hundred dollars and I'm getting fifty. But actually, many times in this type of situation I'm not happy at all. I would say that she should not get one hundred, even if I don't get fifty. You know, that is done, practically. That's really strange.

The point is that we can learn not to think that way, but to do the opposite. If I get only fifty, or even if I don't get anything at all, if she gets a hundred dollars, I'm happy for it. "Very good, she has done very well." This type of appreciation is extremely important from the Buddhist point of view. The Buddha said that if a positive deed is done by somebody, and you really, truly, rejoice at that, if you really appreciate it, then you get the full benefit of actually doing that yourself.

Example of King Prasenajit and the old beggar-woman: demonstrating the great merit of rejoicing

During the time of the Buddha, there was a king called King Prasenajit who organized a very big retreat during the rainy season for the Buddha and all his monks, nuns, and followers. He also gave food and drink and shelter to all the people who needed it, including all the beggars and needy people in the city. This went on for many months in a very nice, pleasant park. Everything went very well, and everybody was very happy.

It was a tradition at that time that if you did something good, then you asked the Buddha to dedicate the merit of your actions. So at the end of the season, the king asked the Buddha to dedicate the merit. The king said, "Please dedicate this action in the name of the person who has gained the most merit from it." The Buddha agreed, and then he made the dedication in the name of an old lady who was sitting at the gate of this garden, a beggar. She had been sitting at the garden gate just begging, and she hadn't done anything to help this great event happen. She hadn't contributed anything at all—she had done exactly nothing, just sat there. This seemed very strange to everyone, since the Buddha usually didn't make that kind mistake!

Now there was another tradition that if anybody had any questions for the Buddha, then they would pass them to the Buddha's attendant, Ananda, and Ananda would ask the question.ⁱ So Ananda asked the Buddha, "Why are you doing this? It was not this lady who did the everything. It was the king who did the whole thing. This lady was just sitting at the gate and doing nothing, just begging for herself!"

"No," the Buddha answered, "that is not the case. This lady sitting at the gate really rejoiced for what was happening. She really appreciated it. And she was so happy and grateful that the whole thing was happening and that the king was doing such a great good thing. Therefore, because of her gratitude, her real appreciation and joy, she received the same amount of merit from the positive deeds as the king did. But the king, who was doing all these things, had a little bit of pride, and thoughts like 'I have done something really great, and nobody else could have done it like this!' Because of that, his merit was actually a little bit less than hers. That's why she gathered even more merit than he did."

Rejoicing for the three levels of beings

In the first four stanzas of this chapter, Shantideva refers to three different levels of beings, based upon their motivation for doing positive deeds. People are very different, of course. Each person is an individual, so you can't really categorize them. But if you look at people's intentions—the strength of their motivation, the vastness of their mind, their courage, and so

ⁱ This was because before Ananda agreed to become Buddha's attendant, he made him promise four things, one of which was "You should answer any questions that I ask."

on—you can describe three different levels of beings: what might be called the *lesser* person, the *middle* person, and the *great* person.

[Shantideva rejoices in the positive merit or virtue of each of these three types of beings. He also rejoices in the fruition (the resulting positive state) of this merit at each level.]

1. Lesser beings

Lesser beings don't have a very far-reaching understanding or wish. They want to simply get rid of sufferings, and attain a nice positive life in this human existence or godlike state. A life in samsara, but still enjoyable, and without too many problems.

With joy I celebrate
The virtue that relieves all beings
From the sorrows of the states of loss,
And places those who languish in the realms of bliss. (1)

States of loss means the three lower realms of samsara¹. If you do negative deeds, you go to the lower realms. And if the beings in these realms do positive deeds, such as saving lives, leading people in the right way, and so on—any of the ten positive actions—then they will get to the higher realms.

So here I rejoice at the positive deeds that are done by the beings in these realms, because these actions will cause them to be reborn in the higher realms of humans and gods. So if anybody does anything positive, or has achieved anything positive in this life or the next, I am not jealous of them, but feel very good that they have done it. I rejoice when the causes of their being born into negative realms are purified, and when they are be born into the higher realms and have peace, happiness, pleasure, and joy in these realms.

2. Middle beings

Then there is the category of the *middle* beings, who understand that whatever realm you are born into, you are still in samsara as long as you have a samsaric state of mind. *Samsaric state of mind* means that your mind is overpowered by the three mind poisons of: ignorance, attachment, and aversion. The middle beings see that even if you are born in a higher realm, but have not removed the samsaric state of mind, you have not completely got rid of the problem. Therefore one must renounce this state of mind.

But the renunciation of samsara is not just leaving the world and going into a cave. Even if you go into a cave, that doesn't mean that you have renounced samsara, because you carry samsara with you. You carry your own mind poisons with you wherever you go. Renouncing samsara means renouncing these mind poisons, and really knowing that as long as you have these poisons inside you, as long as you don't fundamentally change your way of being, then you can't completely solve the problem. Really thinking and understanding that it is possible to change in this way, and then wanting to do it—that is renunciation.

And I rejoice in virtue that creates the cause
Of gaining the enlightened state,
And celebrate the freedom won
By living beings from the round of pain. (2)

Here, *virtue that creates the cause* is the renunciation of samsara. Renunciation is the cause that results in liberation from samsara and attaining the *enlightened state* of the shravakas and pretyakabuddhas (arhathood in the Hinayana tradition). This state (arhathood) is not the

¹ The six realms of samsara are the realms of the: gods, demi-gods, humans, animals, hungry ghosts, and hell beings. Of these, the three lower realms are the animal realm, the hungry-ghost realm, and the hell realm.

complete enlightenment of buddhahood, since it is not based on bodhicitta.ⁱ So here I rejoice at the renunciation of the of these beings, and at their liberation from samsara, which leads to peace and happiness.

3. Great beings

Now we come to the level of *great* beings.

And in the buddhahood of the protectors I delight
And in the stages of the buddhas' offspring. (3)

Here we rejoice [in the fruition of the buddhas and bodhisattvas. So we rejoice in the buddhahood of the buddhas, and in the realization of the bodhisattvas. *Stages of the buddha's offspring* refers to the stages of the Mahayana or bodhisattva path.¹ The bodhisattvas are those who have reached a level of realization called the "seeing stage" in the Mahayana path; this is when you have actually seen the truth, and then you can not go back, because you have completely seen through experience.]

The intention, ocean of great good,
That seeks to place all sentient beings in the state of bliss,
And every action for the benefit of all:
Such is my delight and all my joy. (4)

Here we rejoice in the motivation of the bodhisattvas, which is to place all the beings, without leaving anyone behind, in the *state of bliss*. *Bliss* means the greatest kind of happiness, the greatest joy, where even the cause of suffering is completely eradicated. This is what we call delight, natural bliss, complete, full satisfaction, full happiness.

Every action for the benefit of all, means every action that a bodhisattva or anyone with that intention takes in order to accomplish that goal. I rejoice, I have the greatest delight and joy, in anybody taking any action towards that goal. I rejoice for anybody having even the little bit of intention or a little bit of motivation in that way.

The benefits of rejoicing

In the *Sancaya-sutra*ⁱⁱ, it says:

You might be able to measure the weight of all the matter
In the three-thousand realms of the universe.
But the merit that comes from rejoicing at another's virtue
Is beyond measure.

Rejoicing does not generate pride or arrogance. It is not something you can do to show off, because there's nothing to show off. And it is very easy to do, and very inexpensive, because you don't need to spend anything! But it accumulates lots of positive merit.

So this is a very important key instruction. Whatever good things you can see and hear and feel that everybody is doing, you should rejoice in their merit. It is also the greatest source of joy for everybody. Because if you can rejoice at the good things happening to everybody, then there is no time to be unhappy, because something good is happening to somebody all the time. So you can always be happy all the time.

ⁱ See Chapter 2, section "III.A.3.2.1. Transcendental motivation of the Hinayana"

ⁱⁱ Tib. *Doudupa* [check]

I.A.2. The branch of turning the wheel of the dharma

When the Buddha Shakyamuni attained enlightenment under the Bodhi tree in Bodhgaya, he said:

I have understood this nectar-like dharma,
Which is deep, peaceful, beyond all extremes, luminous, and uncompounded.
But to whomever I try to show, none will understand.
Therefore I will sit here without saying a word.

I have found a nectar-like dharma
Which is profound, peaceful, free from complexity, luminous and uncompounded.
To whomever I teach it, it will not be understood.
Therefore, I will remain in the forest without teaching. (Kretschmar)

Deep and peaceful, though-free, luminous, unmade:
The nectar-truth, this now I have discovered.
Were I to teach it, none would understand;
And so I will remain, not speaking, in the forest. (Padmakara)

And he sat there without teaching for seven weeks. This shows the great value and scarcity of the teachings. Then Indraⁱ offered a white conch shell curling to the right, and the Brahma offered a golden wheel with one thousand spokesⁱⁱ, and they requested the Buddha to give his teachings. They said: “You have endured so many hardships for so long in order to gain this insight, this realization, this dharma. For the sake of just one stanza, you sacrificed your life; for another stanza you had your body pierced with a thousand pins, and another time you had a thousand lamps burning on your body, and much more. You did all of this in order to benefit all sentient beings. So now that you have gained this realization, please give these teachings.”

The Buddha said:

Brahma! For the people of the Magadha
Who can listen with faith and intelligence,
Who are without malice and receptive to the dharma
For them, I will open the door to these nectar-like teachings.

Brahma! For those beings of Magadha
Who are endowed with ears, faith and knowledge,
Who do not harm (others) and whose intention is to always listen to the
dharma,
For them I will open the nectar-like gateway. (Kretschmar)

Having said this, the Buddha began his first teaching on the dharma. From then onwards, it was the tradition that the teachings should not be given unless asked.

If you give teachings unasked for, then it can become something that is not valued. It can be like telling someone, “I want you to learn!” And maybe they don’t want to know about it. The teaching is not something that can be imposed on people; you shouldn’t try to convert people.

If you ask the teacher to teach, that means that you want it. Requesting the teaching comes out of the appreciation of it. When people are ready, when they have the appreciation, then they should request and then the teacher should give.

ⁱ The king of the Gods in the traditional Indian belief systems.

ⁱⁱ The white conch shell curling to the right and the golden wheel are considered very rare and precious gifts.

By requesting the teaching, you create an opportunity for the teacher to teach the dharma, for others to hear and understand, and for yourself to learn. It is also regarded as a preparation for generating bodhicitta, because one has to know how to do things. If one doesn't learn, then one can't do anything. Unless you learn what bodhicitta is, you won't know how to practice it. In order to learn, then you have to ask somebody to teach you.

So the request has to be from your own interest, from your own initiation. If you don't have the interest or the motivation to learn, then you will not ask the teacher to teach. But if you have the interest and the motivation to learn more, then you will ask for the teaching.

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 suffering! (5)

Here you make a general prayer to all the buddhas and bodhisattvas, "Please, give us the teachings." This is developing your interest, your curiosity, and your desire to learn.

Make your request with words like this: "Just as Indra and Brahma requested the teachings, in the same way, to all the buddhas of the ten directions, who have the compassion and wisdom, and who see everything clearly, I offer a golden wheel with one thousand spokes, and other offerings. With reverence and humility, I request the teachings for the sake of all the sentient beings who want happiness and who want to get the best thing for themselves, but who don't know what is the best thing for them and what is the worst thing for them. Please give us the teachings in order to help them understand. Please light the lamp of the Dharma to show them the way out of the darkness. I request this from the bottom of my heart."

I.A.3. The branch of requesting the enlightened beings to stay with us

I join my hands, besieging the enlightened ones
Who wish to pass beyond the bonds of sorrow:
Do not leave us in our ignorance;
Remain among us for unnumbered ages! (6)

This is also part of the appreciation of the enlightened beings, who have the power and the knowledge and the wisdom; we request that they be among us. The main understanding from this is that we don't want these great beings who have lots of good qualities to pass away. We want more of them. I want people who are better than myself around me. It's not that I don't want anybody who is better and more qualified around me, but I want more and more great people around me. I have great appreciation of those who are more qualified and more enlightened than me, and I want them to stay around.

It is also said that if you request the great beings to stay longer, they can stay longer. During the time of the Buddha, a householder called Cunda requested Buddha to live longer, and the Buddha said, "I will live three months longer." And his life was extended by three months. There was also the story that when Buddha was around that age of eighty or eighty-one, the demonic forces came and told him, "You have taught enough, you have done enough for the world. Now you should please pass away." Then the Buddha asked Ananda, "Well now, I would like to pass away shortly." And then Ananda didn't say anything. This caused many problems for Ananda later on.² [2:35]

The main thing here is that, if you ask enlightened beings to live long, then it is possible that they will live longer. This also gives us a lot of positive karma; it can even lengthen our own lives. We pray that all the enlightened beings live longer and remain with us all the time. We request not only that they don't pass away, but they work for the benefit of all the sentient

beings, and then live with us in this world and completely eradicate all obscurations for all the time. We request that they live with us for countless eons—for eons and eons and eons.

I.A.4. The branch of dedication

Now we come to the last of these eight practices to accumulate positive merit: that is the dedication. The dedication is regarded as very important—almost the most important practice after aspiration or motivation. In the Buddhist tradition, whatever positive deed you do, if you dedicate it, then the effect of that deed multiplies and becomes inexhaustible. It remains effective until the objective of your dedication is accomplished. Even if you do a small positive deed, if you dedicate it in a very grand and far reaching way, then that small thing you have done becomes that big. For example, if you do a very small thing, but dedicate it for all sentient beings to become completely enlightened, then that small thing, that not very significant thing, has this effect of not getting lost until that happens.

Therefore, this is regarded as very skillful, because you are not clinging to your actions, but you are dedicating it for something greater than yourself; in this way it multiplies and in many, many, many different forms [check]—therefore that positive deed becomes a very strong and powerful force.

Dedicating our positive deeds for the benefit of all the sentient beings is also a very strong way to generate compassion in ourselves, which is the root of bodhicitta. Especially in the following four stanzas, the dedication is presented in almost the same way as training the mind in compassion; it is used to reinforce this mind training.

Dedicating all our positive actions in all three times

And through these actions now performed,
By all the virtues I have just amassed,
May all the pain of every living being
Be wholly scattered and destroyed! (7)

[Here we are dedicating the merit of all our accumulations from the previous sections] and any other positive things that I have done in all the three times.

When we dedicate something, we don't dedicate just the thing that we did just then. If you make a prayer, practice meditation, or help someone in need, and so on, you dedicate that. But at the same time, you also dedicate all the positive activity that you have done in all the three times. We dedicate all our past actions that we remember, and those that we don't remember; and not only those actions we have done in the past, and those we do now, but also that we might do in future. In this way, we dedicate all our positive actions in all the three times.

Make the dedication with words like this, "Throughout space, wherever there are sentient beings, may they all be rid of all the sufferings of the negative worlds of samsara. May they be rid of not only just one or two problems, but may they be completely rid of any suffering, any misery, any kind of discomfort, anything that is negative to them. May they completely eradicate all of these problems. For that end, I dedicate."

May I be the doctor, the nurse, and the medicine

For all those ailing in the world,
Until their every sickness has been healed,
May I myself become for them
The doctor, the nurse, the medicine itself. (8)

Here, Khenpo Kunpal says that because of the negative actions of ourselves or other beings, the positive energy in the environment is weakened and the negative energy is strengthened. Speaking metaphorically, he says that the virtuous gods are defeated, and the demonic demi-gods are victorious. Then because of that negative vaporⁱ or pollution from the demi-gods, all the negative effects come into the world in form of diseases, negative spiritsⁱⁱ, all different kinds of problems, and so on. So in this stanza, we dedicate so that all these things may be completely eradicated and completely healed. And may I become the source and the agent through whom all these diseases, all these problems of the beings, can be eradicated.

For example, there is the story from the Jakata tales of the *Nya rohita* (Big Fish). At one time there was an epidemic and everybody was dying here and there. There was a bodhisattva there, and he could not do anything with his medicine to cure these persons, so he did lots of praying and positive deeds. But nothing worked. Then he said “May I die and be born in whatever form that will cure this disease.” Then he died and he was born as a big fish, called *Rohita*. This fish came to the shore and he spoke to the people and said: “I will die, and then you must eat my flesh and then everyone will be cured of this disease.” So the fish died, and everyone ate a little bit of this fish and became well.ⁱⁱⁱ

So this stanza is saying that, in any different form, may I become the agent through which all the problems and all the diseases of all beings may be purified. May I become the doctor who would give the medicine, who knows the right kind of cure for all the different kinds of problems. And also the person who would nurse them, who would work on them, who would serve them. And may I also be their medicine.

There is another Jataka story about somebody who completely dedicated his life to cure people’s diseases, and to serve them and nurse them. Even the Buddha has said in his teachings that whoever is sick, you should try to serve them, try to clean them. He did this himself many times.

May I dispel thirst and famine

Raining down a flood of food and drink,
May I dispel the ills of thirst and famine.
And in the ages marked by scarcity and want,
May I myself appear as drink and sustenance. (9)

In this world, wherever people are suffering from lack of food and water, may I be able to provide food and drink, and completely eradicate all thirst and famine. May I not only be able to provide people with the drinks and the food and all the things they need, but, if need be, I may myself become an unlimited source of food and drink.

It is said here, that in order to avoid being born into periods where there are lots of diseases, warfare, or starvation, we should try to make offerings of different kinds of medicines and weapons to the three jewels, and offer food and drink to the sangha. At the same time, we pray that nobody will be born in these kinds of negative periods—that these periods will never appear.

May I dispel poverty and destitution

For sentient beings poor and destitute,
May I become a treasure ever plentiful
And lie before them closely in their reach,

ⁱ Tib. *khalung*

ⁱⁱ There are eighteen classes of negative spirits.

ⁱⁱⁱ See also *Words of My Perfect Teacher*, pages 230-231.

A varied source of all that they might need. (10)

For all sentient beings in this world who are poor and destitute of food and drink for their mouths, clothing for their backs, and wealth and riches for their hands, may I become a great and inexhaustible treasure, whatever they want—food for those who want food, drink for those who want drink, and so forth. And may all the various things they might need, whatever they might wish for, food, clothing, riches and so forth, be readily available to each of them.

Making the dedication as big as possible

We can dedicate our merit in many different ways, but this is a short dedication, so that whatever positive things we do, we try to dedicate it in the most grand way. Not small way.

For example, if you make a small offering so that you have good health or a safe journey—when you actually say the dedication prayer, first you dedicate in a very big way. For example, you can start by wishing for all the sentient beings to become enlightened. Then continue by letting the dedication become a little bit smaller, and add the wish that all the people in the world may have no problems, no poverty, no disease, no war, and so on. Then let it become a little smaller again, and make a similar wish for all the people in your country, then for all the people in your sangha, and so on. Then include the most important one, which is yourself, but adding the wish, “May my life be free of all obstacles, and I be free of all suffering and attain enlightenment.” That is the traditional way of making a dedication.

In the Buddhist way of thinking, if you make the most important dedication last, it doesn't make that dedication any smaller or less significant. In fact it will have more effect, because when you do a positive deed, and then you dedicate it for big things, it makes this positive deed stronger and more powerful. Therefore when you dedicate it for the small thing also, it has more effect than if you didn't dedicate it for the other things.

A way of generating compassion

Dedication also has a very strong effect on the mind. As we have said, it is one of the most important ways of generating real compassion and loving kindness and concern for all others. By practicing in this way, every time you do something good, if you are dedicating, then you are remembering to share. When you want to share, you want to give, and you want to have good things for all other beings—that is compassion. In this way, dedication is a skillful way to generate compassion.

I.B. Training the mind in giving away the three bases of ego-clinging

This section has four parts: (1) the actual training, (2) establishing its reasoning, (3) the special method of giving away your body, and (4) dedicating the result of this mind training to others.

I.B.1. The actual training

The three bases of ego-clinging are: my body, my possessions, and my merit or positive energy. Training to let go of, or give away, of these three things is a very important practice in the Mahayana tradition that ultimately leads to the perfection of transcendental generosity.

The purpose of this mind training

In the Mahayana tradition, it is believed that there are basically two main categories of obscurations that prevent us from reaching enlightenment. These categories are referred to as the *two obscurations*, and they are:

- *Emotional obscurations*: these are the mind poisons that we have already discussed, such as ignorance, attachment, aversion, jealousy, pride, and so on. The eight accumulation practices discussed previously are generally a way of working on these mind poisons; they are the antidote to this type of obscuration. Overcoming the emotional obscurations leads to the “seeing stage” in the Mahayana pathⁱ; this is level of arhathood in the Hinayana tradition.
- *Wisdom obscurations*: these are the habitual tendencies that we have also discussed. In the Mahayana view, even after we have purified all of our emotional obscurations, we still have these subtle habits and tendencies of clinging to self, which prevent us from clearly seeing the truth. In order to attain complete enlightenment, these subtle obscurations must also be purified. This mind training in giving away the three bases of ego-clinging is an antidote to this type of obscuration; it works directly against these subtle habits of clinging to self or ego.

Khenpo Kunpal says that the cause for having bodhicitta arise in your mind is exactly this mind training. Our *habitual pattern* of complete self-centeredness has to be changed into a way of thinking where we have more room and more concern for the benefit of others. The purpose of mind training is: instead of just thinking about ourselves alone, and our benefit alone, to train, to make it a habit, to make it an understanding that we have to think about the benefit of others as well. When this attitude becomes stronger through understanding, through repetition, through making it a way of being—then we have trained our mind.

But we must train gradually. This type of giving (of my body, possessions, and merit) is not something that we actually venture into right away, when we are still beginners. At first, we practice this only in our mind. If you attempt this type of giving before you have developed the ability or maturity to do it, it will be a mere imitation.

From the Buddhist point of view, gradual training is the important thing. It is said that when you are ready to give a cup of curry, then you give a cup of curry. And when you feel that you can give your body or your life for the sake of all sentient beings, with no more regret than giving a cup of curry, then you may do that too. But you should not give your body before you are ready. If you train in doing something, the more and more you train, the more accustomed you become, then the stronger and stronger your ability becomes. Then you have the ability to do anything.

Example of Anathapindika: demonstrating training in generosity

During the time of Buddha there was a very rich but miserly merchant who began attending the teachings of the Buddha. One day after the Buddha gave a teaching on generosity, the

ⁱ For a description of the Five Stages of the path, see page 29.

merchant approached the Buddha and said, “Well, this generosity sounds very interesting, but I can never give away anything. I could never become generous.”

“Well,” the Buddha said, “if you want, you can learn to be generous.”

“No, no,” the merchant said. “It’s not possible. I can’t give. It pains me to give even a few crumbs of bread.”

“There is a way,” the Buddha said. “I can teach you.”

“But I can’t do it. I could never learn.”

“But do you mind giving to yourself?” Buddha said.

“Well, no. I can do that. Of course, I can give something to myself.”

“Then I have a way. Just go home and take something in your right hand and give it to your left hand, and say, ‘Take it!’ And then give it back to your right hand in the same way.”

So the merchant went home and he took a gold coin—he had lots of them—and he gave it from his right hand to his left hand, and said, “Take it!” Afterwards, he didn’t feel so good! But then, I think he was curious, so tried passing the coin back to his right hand, and said, “Take it!” And then he just kept on doing it, passing the coin from one hand to the other, saying, “Take it!” and then, “Take it!” And then slowly, slowly, without his knowing, he became more and more open and giving.

Eventually, over time, he became the most generous person of his time, and he called *Anathapindika*. *Anatha* means those who have no protector, who have nobody to look after them. *Pindika* means giving food. So *Anathapindika* means one who gives food to those who have no protection. He became the main sponsor of the Buddha and his Sangha, and not only that, he also built guest houses all along the roads to Dharamsala, where people could just come and eat and stay overnight. Then he also built hospitals for animals and all different kind of things.

This is just to illustrate that if you work on it, if you train yourself, if you do more and more, then it is possible to become something different; even if that is not your nature now. This is the most important teaching from the Buddhist point of view. If you want to become generous, for example, but you are not generous now, then you can train to become like that. Whatever you want to be, you can change your way of being.

Description of the mind training practice

My body, thus, and all my goods besides,
And all my merits gained and to be gained,
I give them all away, withholding nothing,
To bring about the benefit of beings. (11)

Essentially, these means that anything that I hold onto with great liking, great attachment, great value—including all my possessions, my wealth, my property, my food and drink, my body, and also all my merit from the past, present, and future—all of this I give away for the benefit of all sentient beings. In practice, you should try to develop this way of thinking, to become more and more familiar with it.

Therefore, you should recite with your voice and clearly bring to mind again and again the meaning (of the following): “This body, this material object which I hold dear, and likewise all my enjoyments such as riches, food, clothing and so forth, and even all the roots of virtue that I have gathered throughout the three times, I surrender from the depth of my heart, in this (unique) way of giving, without any sense of loss due to stinginess, and without any hope for reward or karmic results, in order to accomplish the welfare, the benefit and happiness, of all beings—the object of intent—without exception.”

This is a very important training. It is the basis for the practice of *tonglen* and other mind training practices.³

I.B.2. Establishing its reasoning

The point of this section is to logically establish why this training in giving, or generosity, is necessary.

Nirvana is attained by giving all,
Nirvana the objective of my striving.
Everything therefore must be abandoned,
And it is best to give it all to others. (12)

Giving all, refers to giving away the three bases of ego-clinging, which we have said are my body, my possessions, my merit. *Nirvana* refers to complete enlightenment.ⁱ So here Shantideva is saying that I have renounced samsara and become a follower of the Buddha in order to attain a specific objective, which is to reach enlightenment. Only by letting go and giving away everything—my body, my possessions, and my merit—will I attain my objective and become completely enlightened.

But what does it mean to give away all my merit? Must I also let go of my renunciation, my wish to attain enlightenment, my vows, and so on?

As we have said, in order to attain complete enlightenment, one must purify the two obscurations:

- On the level of the *emotional obscurations*, the merit that we gain from positive deeds brings us to the three higher realms (of humans, demi-gods, and gods), which is the physical basis for practicing dharma and entering the path to enlightenment. This positive merit is a condition for realizing the truth of the path, which means gaining a complete understanding of the emptiness of self and phenomena. [check] This realization of the truth of the path, or emptiness, causes us to purify our emotional obscurations. However, in the final stage of this path, our positive deeds that are affected by our ego-clinging are no longer necessary—they can be left behind. It is said that when you cross a river, you don't carry your boat with you after you have reached the other side; you just cross the river and leave the boat there. In the same way, you leave the path behind once you have used it. [check]
- On the level of the *wisdom obscurations*, we must completely transcend these deeds that are affected by ego-clinging in order to attain complete enlightenment. Even at the very end, when you are about to attain complete enlightenment, there is no need to hold onto your vows, thinking, "This is my vow!" and so on. You must let go of everything, including your vows. [check]

An additional reason why this mind training is necessary is that if I don't give away my positive merit, then if I have a strong negative emotion, like getting very angry, that merit will quickly become exhausted. Therefore whatever I have, including the merit that I have accumulated, will not help me that much unless I use it for the benefit of others. Therefore, without delay, I should give away all my merit for the sake of all sentient beings. Once you give away all your positive deeds or merit, then it's not wasted, it's never lost. In this way, you will eventually attain the supreme result of complete enlightenment.

ⁱ "Nirvana" is sometimes used to refer to the limited nirvana of the shravakas and pretyakabuddhas (arhathood in the Hinayana tradition), or to the complete enlightenment of a bodhisattva (buddhahood in the Mahayana tradition); in this case it is referring to the complete enlightenment.

I.B.3. The special method of giving away your body

This body I have given up
To serve the pleasure of all living beings.
Let them kill and beat and slander it,
And do to it whatever they desire. (13)

I have now given my body to all sentient beings throughout space for their benefit. May it be an agent through which all sentient beings may benefit. It is theirs. Let them use it in whatever way that will bring them benefit. If they want to kill my body, let it be killed. If they want to slander it or beat it, let that happen.

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—
There's no use, now, to make so much of it. (14)

And so let beings do to me
Whatever does not bring them injury.
Whenever they catch sight of me,
Let this not fail to bring them benefit. (15)

I wish only that I may be of benefit to all sentient beings. In the process, whatever may happen, whatever difficulties [I face, may I not be deterred]. When I am insulted by others, out of their ignorance or prejudice or untrained mind, when I am mocked by others, out of their uncontrolled passion and negative emotions, or if I am otherwise mistreated, I will not consider it as something that I have to reply to. Instead I will take it as if this, my body, is being used for the benefit of others. Whatever happens, let me become a source of benefit for others. If they do something bad to me, may that become the source of benefit; if they do something good for me, may that also become the source of benefit.

If those who see me entertain
A thought of anger or devotion,
May these states supply the cause
Whereby their good and wishes are fulfilled. (16)

If somebody has a very negative feeling towards me, like anger, or a positive feeling, like devotion, may all of this result in the benefit for all the beings.

All those who slight me to my face
Or do me any other evil,
Even if they blame or slander me,
May they attain the fortune of enlightenment! (17)

In essence, whether someone is in a good relationship with me or a bad relationship, whether they give me something or whether I give them something, may it result in their benefit. Whatever kind of connection or relationship anyone has with me, whether seeing, hearing, thinking, or touching, whether positive or negative, may that relationship become a source of great benefit for all of them. That is the way of training the mind in the form of a prayer or a wish.

I.B.4. Dedicating the result of the mind training to others

May I be a guard for those who are protectorless,
A guide for those who journey on the road.
For those who wish to go across the river,

May I be a boat, a raft, a bridge. (18)

May I be an isle for those who yearn for landfall,
And a lamp for those who long for light;
For those who need a resting place, a bed;
For all who need a servant, may I be their slave. (19)

May I be the wishing jewel, the vase of plenty,
A word of power and the supreme healing;
May I be the tree of miracles,
And for every being the abundant cow. (20)

Like the earth and the pervading elements,
Enduring as the sky itself endures,
For boundless multitudes of living beings,
May I be their ground and sustenance. (21)

Thus for everything that lives,
As far as the limitless sky,
May I provide their livelihood and nourishment
Until they pass beyond the bonds of suffering. (22)

Here we are saying that for people who have very little power or support, or no protection, may I become their protection, and so on. I don't think it is necessary to comment on these stanzas, there's not much to explain.

This way of training our mind is a preliminary practice for developing bodhicitta that we do before we take the bodhisattva vow. It is also a practice that we can do after we have taken the vow and generated the bodhicitta, as a reminder to keep our precepts and to keep working on developing bodhicitta further and further. Having worked on training the mind in this way, it is important to make these [dedication] prayers or aspirations as widely and as strongly as possible.

In the future, when you have a more enlightened state and you are ready to work for the benefit of other people, the scope of the benefit you can offer to others at that time will depend on how strong and vast your aspiration and dedication prayers are now. If your motivation and dedication are very big and vast, then in the future your capacity to benefit others will be equally great. If your aspiration prayers are small, then even if you gain the understanding and the realization, your capacity to benefit other people will not be that great.

Therefore, how much you will benefit other beings, how many people you can reach and how much you can do, depends on how great and how strong your motivation is. Therefore it is very important to have a great motivation and make lots of these [very strong] prayers.

II. The main part: taking the vow

Now we come to the actual commitments, taking the vows of the bodhisattva. The actual words used in the bodhisattva's vows are taken from these two stanzas:

Just as all the buddhas of the past
Embraced the awakened attitude of mind,
And in the precepts of the bodhisattvas
Step by step abode and trained, (23)

Just so, and for the benefit of beings,
I will also have this attitude of mind.
And in those precepts, step by step,
I will abide and train myself. (24)

Why should I take the vow?

Now, why should we take a bodhisattva vow? Some people say that you don't need a ceremony to become a bodhisattva. That the motivation and the commitment to help beings is something that comes naturally; therefore becoming a bodhisattva is a natural process. That is true. If somebody genuinely has the compassionate attitude of, "I really want to help all sentient beings, and I want to get them to the best happiness, and towards that I will work," then whether or not he or she has even heard the name "bodhisattva" or has any idea of what all these things are, he or she is a bodhisattva. There's no doubt about that. But for those people who because of their own training have heard of the bodhisattvas of the past and are inspired by the bodhisattva's way of life, and then want to take the vows and the commitments, then that is also done.

First one must think and try to see whether this is the right way for me or not. One must decide, "This is generally what I want. I want to benefit myself and I want to benefit all the sentient beings. And not only that, but I want the greatest happiness to myself and to all the sentient beings. I will work towards that." If that is the decision, then you are advised to take the bodhisattva's vows. In the Buddhist way, one takes the vows first to enter the bodhisattva's path, and then again as a reminder.

A way to accumulate merit

From the Buddhist point of view, if you do something good, then you will generate positive energy or merit for yourself and others. But if you first take a vow to do something good, and then you do it, then the effect is much stronger. This applies even if you take a vow to refrain from doing something that you usually don't do anyway. For example, you probably usually don't steal. But when we just don't steal, there is no negative effect, but there is no positive effect either. But if you make the commitment, "From today onwards, I'm not going to steal," then as long as you don't steal, there is a positive effect of keeping the vow of not stealing. So you have a positive energy happening all the time, because you have kept the vow of not stealing. In this way, it is considered very good to make a commitment or a vow, especially for things that you are not going to do anyway.

This is the same in the case of a bodhisattva's attitude. If you have the intention to help other beings, this is very good and you will gain merit from this intention alone. But then if you take the vow to really act on this intention and train in this bodhisattva's line, then you have made a real commitment, and your merit becomes much, much stronger. Then whether you are training yourself or not, whether you are doing something really positive or not, whether you are really going and helping other beings or not, there's a constant positive flow of merit. Because you are in a way mindful that you are a bodhisattva. You have taken the vows and you are generally working towards that goal.

A way of training

In the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, the bodhisattva's vow is taken as often as possible and without too much fuss, because you are taking the vow as training. As the text says, *step by step* I will train. You shouldn't think that the moment you take the bodhisattva's vows, then you must become a great bodhisattva who is able to give everything away and who is always completely dedicated for the benefit of all the sentient beings. It's not like that. You are making this commitment to gradually train yourself on the path, step by step. This means that I will act according to my own ability, according to my own level of attainment at this time. The bodhisattva's vow is not an obligation that once you've taken it then you have to give this away, give that away, and cannot do this and cannot do that.

Types of motivation

As we discussed before, there are three different levels of motivation for generating bodhicitta: the motivation of the king, of the captain, and of the shepherdⁱ. Whichever motivation one adopts for generating bodhicitta, the way of receiving the vows is the same.

Methods for taking the vows

There are two main traditions for taking the bodhisattva vows, according to two great masters from India: Asanga and Nagarjuna. According to Asanga, one takes the two parts of the vow separately: first you take the aspiration bodhisattva's vow and then you take the action bodhisattva's vow. According to Nagarjuna, there is no separation of taking the aspiration and action bodhisattva's vow. You take the bodhisattva's vow, and then as long as you are not yet strong enough or mature enough to actually act in the bodhisattva way, then you take it as an aspiration. When you become a little bit stronger and you go into action, then it becomes the action bodhicitta.

You can take the vow by yourself or in the presence of a teacher. If you take the vow on your own, you can visualize the enlightened beings of the past, present, and future in the space in front of you, and say something like, "Oh, listen to me, all the buddhas and bodhisattvas and great ones, from today onwards I take the bodhisattva's vows..." In this way you can take the vow in front of your altar or anywhere you like. But in order to make the vow more concrete and more real, it is best to take it from a teacher for whom you have respect and trust. In this way, you are more aware of the vow—you will feel, "My teacher knows that I have taken this vow, so if I don't keep it, I will feel ashamed."

First, take refuge

Whatever way you want to take these vows, first you take refuge by repeating the refuge prayer three times. Refuge is in a way regarded as a necessity before taking the bodhisattva vow because here you want to bring all the sentient beings to enlightenment, but if you don't have the refuge, then you don't have the belief or the faith that anybody can get enlightened, so it would be just words. After taking refuge in the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha three times, you take the bodhisattva vows.

Taking the aspiration and action vows separately

To take the aspiration and actions vows separately, rearrange stanzas 23 and 24 into aspiration and action vows. The first two lines of stanzas 23 and 24 are combined for the aspiration vow as follows:

Just as all the buddhas of the past
Embraced the awakened attitude of mind,
Just so, and for the benefit of beings,
I will also have this attitude of mind.

ⁱ See Chapter 2, section IV.B.2. *The power of support*.

Repeat these lines three times to take the aspiration bodhicitta vow.ⁱ Then the second two lines of stanzas 23 and 24 can be combined for the action part of the vow:

And in the precepts of the bodhisattvas
Step by step abode and trained.
And in those precepts, step by step,
I will abide and train myself.

Repeat these lines three times to take the action bodhisattva vow.

Taking the aspiration and action vows simultaneously

You can also take the aspiration and action vows simultaneously, by reciting the two stanzas as they appear in the text:

Just as all the buddhas of the past
Embraced the awakened attitude of mind,
And in the precepts of the bodhisattvas
Step by step abode and trained, (23)

Just so, and for the benefit of beings,
I will also have this attitude of mind.
And in those precepts, step by step,
I will abide and train myself. (24)

The essential meaning of these two stanzas is that just as the buddhas of the past generated bodhicitta and trained on that step by step, so I also would like to generate this bodhicitta and to train on it step by step.

In this case, you repeat these two stanzas three times to take the bodhisattva vow. When you finish the last repetition, it's very important at that moment that you feel that you have actually received the bodhisattva's vow—you should feel confident that you have received the precepts of aspiration and application bodhicitta in your mind.

According to the Indian master Sagarameghaⁱⁱ, when you repeat this three times, you should practice as follows: the first time you say the vow, feel that you have received the aspiration bodhicitta; the second time you repeat the vow, feel that you have received the action bodhisattva's vow; and the third time, think that you have stabilized both the aspiration and action bodhicitta. Then after you have taken the vows, you have to work on it and train yourself. It is good to retake the vows again and again as much as possible. You can take it every morning if you wish, as a reminder, in the same way that you practice refuge and guru yoga every day. The training processes is working on this.

That is the short way of taking the bodhisattva's vow. The long way is you can do it the whole day! Actually, there are very long ceremonies for taking this vow, but this is the way of Nagarjuna and Shantideva, which is a very common practice in Tibetan Buddhism.

Detailed explanation of the vow

Khenpo Kunpal explains what we are saying in these two stanzas (in the following sections):

ⁱ For an example of formally taking just the aspiration vow, see *Flash of Lightening in the Dark of Night*, by The Dalai Lama, Shambhala Publications, page 32.

ⁱⁱ Tib. Gyatso Trin

Buddhas of the past trained step by step

Just as all the buddhas of the past
Embraced the awakened attitude of mind,
And in the precepts of the bodhisattvas
Step by step abode and trained, (23)

It is generally believed that the buddhas are always there, that for every age in every world system, a buddha will come. According to Buddha Shakyamuni's predictions, in this very world there will be one thousand buddhas. It is said that when this particular world came into being, the first thing that the divine beings saw on this space was one thousand lotus flowers. When they looked at this and asked, "Why is this so?" they concluded that, "Well, it is so because during the existence of this world there will be one thousand buddhas."

When we say there will be one thousand buddhas in this world, sometimes people think that means that there will be only one thousand people who can get enlightened in the whole world through all the centuries. That is not the case. Here a buddha is more than just somebody who gets enlightenment. In this case, a buddha is somebody who comes and starts a whole new cycle of teachings and leaves behind a complete dharma. And lots of people benefit from that and many of them get enlightened. Then finally that special tradition or doctrine becomes extinct. Then another buddha comes and teaches and leaves another complete dharma, which will also eventually become extinct.

Now is the era of Buddha Shakyamuni, because we still remember the Buddha Shakyamuni, and his teaching still exists. Until we forget all his dharma and there are no more Buddhists left, it will remain the time of Buddha Shakyamuni. When we forget everything and the Buddha Shakyamuni's doctrine is completely finished, then another buddha will come. The next buddha will be Buddha Maitreya, and when he comes another era will begin. According to this tradition, there have been three buddhas before Buddha Shakyamuni in this world, and he is the fourth one.

Now, "'Just like the buddhas of the past" [refers to the countless buddhas of the past on countless worlds]. In the first volume of the Kangyur, in the sutra called *Dor de kalpo zangpo* (Tib.) [check], there are stories of how each of the thousand buddhas of this world [check-past or future] first generated bodhicitta, and then how they entered into the actions of bodhicitta.

It says that the starting point for the Buddha Shakyamuni was when he was born as child of a potter and was given the name of Prabhasaⁱ; he met a buddha called the Great Shakyamuniⁱⁱ, and he was so impressed by him that he said, "I would like to become a buddha like you. From now onwards I will work so that I can be like you and I will be able to benefit all sentient beings." He also made the aspiration to help the beings when they are in a most violent state of mind, with words similar to, "When people are very violent and difficult to deal with and teach, when it is difficult for them to arouse positive states of mind, that will be the time I chose to become a buddha. For that I will practice." That was his starting point for becoming a bodhisattva. From then onwards he worked on this continuously, in life after life. He worked and improved slowly, gradually, step by step, until he reached enlightenment.

It is the same with all the other Buddhas. For example, Buddha Akshobhyaⁱⁱⁱ got his first inspiration from the Buddha Mahacana^{iv}, and so on. The Medicine Buddha had the aspiration that "I would like to heal all the illnesses and diseases of all beings. Therefore I will dedicate

ⁱ Tib. Nangje

ⁱⁱ Skt. Tathagata Maha-Shakyamuni, Tib. Shakya thubpa chino

ⁱⁱⁱ Tib. Markup

^{iv} Tib. Chechen

myself to become a buddha with the power to completely heal all the illnesses of all beings". Then he worked on this slowly and gradually.

Therefore, the *buddhas of the past* did not just generate the bodhisattva's attitude and then immediately become great bodhisattvas. Rather they all generated this bodhisattva's attitude and then slowly trained themselves on the path, slowly improved themselves, and slowly became stronger and stronger, until eventually they became perfect buddhas.

I too will train step by step

Just so, and for the benefit of beings,
I will also have this attitude of mind.
And in those precepts, step by step,
I will abide and train myself. (24)

This means: in the same way, I would like to generate this bodhicitta, and I will train myself, slowly, step by step, on the path of the aspiration and action bodhicitta.

When you take the bodhisattva vow, it's very important to understand that you are not just taking it for one life-time; you are committing to follow the bodhisattva path until you become enlightened. So it's not a short term thing. It's a very, very long-term proposition!

When you say, "I take this vow," it is a very great thing, a very big project. Actually, it's the biggest project ever made! It's done in order to help all the sentient beings and make them all into enlightened beings or buddhas. This is not something that can be done in a short time. I have to be patient, I have to work on myself, I have to be prepared to go through lifetime after lifetime working on this. This is my ultimate goal. But this doesn't mean that I don't do anything else. In the process, I can do other things: I will work to better myself, I will enjoy myself a little bit. Why not? But I will keep working towards the main goal.

Sometimes people get the wrong idea about this. If you read stories about the great bodhisattvas in the Jataka Tales and so on, you'll find lots of very great sacrifices by these great bodhisattvas who work only for the benefit of others and who are ready to give away everything, including their lives. And sometimes people think, "Oh, if I become a bodhisattva, I have to do it like that." That is not the case. You don't immediately become a great bodhisattva. You have to take it step by step. Eventually, after many lifetimes, when you have reduced your attachment and developed your compassion to such extent that for the sake of others you can make a great sacrifice—you can even sacrifice yourself—and you have no problem with that, then you can do that. But until you are ready, you are not allowed to make that type of sacrifice. That is the bodhisattva's vow.

One has to think at every step, "By doing this, how much will I benefit others? How much can I sacrifice myself at this time?" You must find the right balance. If your sacrifice will cause you more harm than the help it is giving, then even if you are prepared to do it, you are not supposed to do it. If the benefit is more than the sacrifice, then you have to look and see whether you are prepared to do it, whether you would have no regret after doing that. Then if you feel that you would have no regret doing it and it will bring great benefit, then you can do it for the sake of others.

In Buddhist way of training in compassion and so on, we give so much emphasis first on the training—on study, contemplation, and meditation practices. We prepare ourselves; we prepare our attitude and our mind and our aspiration. We do not just go and do something. When we are ready to do something, then we can do it. But in the beginning, more time is spent on the preparation, on the training, and then slowly, gradually, our actions should become more like an outcome of this process—a natural outcome of our way of seeing, not

something too much forced. If our actions are too forced, it means that the preparation of the aspiration has not been too strong.

I think that is why sometimes people say, “You Buddhists always talk about doing good for all the sentient beings and working for the benefit of the beings, and then you go and lock yourself up in your room or some other solitary place, and don’t see anybody. What kind of great hypocrisy is this?” In a way, it looks quite true. But then, that is supposed to be the way. Maybe sometimes it is hypocrisy? Or maybe not sometimes, but many times! But this is the general way it should be. Because if you want to perform good actions, you must first train yourself and you try to work on yourself.

Different explanations of the stages of gradual training

Now the commentary gives different views on the meaning of the phrase *And in those precepts, step by step, I will abide and train myself*. According to the Sakyapa scholars, training step by step means gradually progressing in three different levels of bodhisattva’s precepts. At the highest level, you have to abide by eighteen main precepts from the *Akashagarbha Sutra*ⁱ. At the middle level, you have to avoid the four root downfalls from the *Wrathful Householder Requested Sutra*ⁱⁱ, such as not giving material gifts because of your stinginess, and so on. But if you are a beginner and not that good at keeping things, then according to the *Great Secret Skillful Sutra*ⁱⁱⁱ, it is enough that you don’t lose your bodhisattva’s aspiration or motivation. So if you are not very good at this, if you don’t know about other things, it’s all right if you just don’t give up the aspiration. Therefore, according to this view, the more trained you are, the more precepts you can try to keep. If you are less trained, then there are fewer precepts.

Another school of thought refers to the five stages of the path (see page 29): this school says that when you are beginning, you start at the first stage, the accumulation stage, where you should work on refraining from the negative deeds. Then when you enter into the next stage, the joining stage, you work on accumulating positive deeds, such as helping others and so on. The next stage is the seeing stage, where you first get liberated from samsara—from the seeing stage onwards, you practice the discipline of working for the benefit of others.

Another way of defining this gradual training is just to work on your compassion, and your own mind. At first, as we said before, when you are prepared to give a cup of curry, then you give that. Then when your compassion and your understanding of egolessness becomes so strong that you have no problem of giving your own body—if you can give away your own body just like giving a cup of curry—then you might also give that. If you have that training, you become stronger and more compassionate. Actually, it comes to more or less same thing. But there are different ways of defining the gradual training.

According to the tradition of Patrul Rinpoche and Khenpo Kunpal, one should train “from time to time, little by little,” as stated in the *Sutra Requested by Subahu*^{iv}. Each time a little more, each time a little more. The activities of a bodhisattva are vast and limitless. Therefore, you can’t become a great bodhisattva right away. You do not have this limitless compassion and limitless wisdom as soon as you take the vows. You can not practice like that. It’s important to understand and accept that. When you begin, you have a little compassion, so practice accordingly. You have a little wisdom, so use it accordingly. Work with what you have and train yourself step by step, little by little.

ⁱ Tib. *Nam kye ningpo* [check]

ⁱⁱ Skt. *Grhapati-ugra-pariprccha-sutra*, Tib. [Check]

ⁱⁱⁱ Skt. *Maha-rahasyopaya-kausalya-sutra*, Tib. *Sang chen tab la khepa*

^{iv} Skt. *Subahu-pariprccha-sutra*

Also in the *Compendium of Trainings*, Shantideva says that you should train according to your own ability. When you train gradually in this way, your capacity to keep the precepts and benefit others will grow more and more.

III. Rejoicing in taking the vows

This section has two parts: rejoicing for oneself and causing others to rejoice.

III.A. Rejoicing for oneself

That this most pure and spotless state of mind
Might be embraced and constantly increase,
The prudent who have cultivated it
Should praise it highly in such words as these: (25)

Now, after taking the bodhisattva's vows, is this section on rejoicing in what we have done. This is in a way congratulating yourself.

When someone with wisdom, devotion, and great aspiration has taken the bodhisattva's vows, afterwards they should not let this aspiration decrease, but try to make it increase more and more. Because the whole practice of the bodhisattva's way of life, the whole practice of Buddhism actually, is to generate this bodhicitta, this aspiration, in those who do not have it. Then once we have generated it, to preserve it and not let it deteriorate, and then to try to improve it and make it increase.

So now we have managed to get the inspiration once, but as we talked about before, because our mind is unstable or even fickle, we can change. Therefore in order to keep [our aspiration] stable and steady, we have to encourage ourselves, we have to praise ourselves, we have to keep our motivation and our state of mind up. So here we are encouraging or appreciating ourselves.

How do we do that? How do we encourage ourselves? Generally speaking, there are two ways of working on ourselves: one is to gently reprimand, and one is to encourage. That is the same with everything. So if you are doing something negative, you say to yourself, "This is no good. It's bad for myself, and bad for others. I should not do this." Then if you are doing something good, you should encourage yourself and say something like, "This is good. I should increase that." So here Shantideva is saying that you should encourage yourself using words similar to those in the following stanzas.

My life has become purposeful

Today my life has given fruit.
This human state has been well assumed. (26, first half)

Because I have generated this aspiration and I have actually taken the bodhisattva vows, I now have a purpose in my life, which is to train in this path and work towards the benefit of all the sentient beings. My ultimate goal is so vast and so far reaching that I am not wasting my life. I have a very great and beneficial purpose. Therefore this life has become meaningful. As it is said,

If used well, this body becomes like a boat
That will take you across the ocean of samsara.
If used poorly, then this body becomes an anchor
That will pull you down to the bottom of the ocean.

This means that this life as a human being has tremendous potential. You can make it very good, very purposeful, very beneficial to lots of people, including yourself. And you can also make it very negative, very destructive, very harmful, to yourself and others.

Today I take my birth in Buddha's line,

And have become the buddhas' child and heir. (26, second half)

Here we are saying: "Due to my good karma from my previous lives, I have been born a human being and I have this precious human body. Now from today onwards, I have become a holder of the line of the buddhas, and I will make a great use of this body."

When you become a bodhisattva, you are in the direct line of the buddhas, you are a direct follower of the buddhas, you are a future buddha. So you have joined this line and become the Buddha's heir. The Buddha's only wish and only aspiration is to help all the sentient beings. Therefore if one has this state of mind, or this aspiration to help the sentient beings, then he or she becomes the heart son or heart daughter of the buddhas—the real heir or holder of the lineage.

Undertaking bodhisattva activity

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. (27)

Now that I have become a lineage holder of the buddhas, whatever happens, I will keep this lineage without marring or staining it; I will not become a disgrace to this lineage. I will make myself a good bodhisattva. And to do that I will try to work on myself and improve myself, and I will also work for the benefit of others.

A precious gem

For I am like a blind man who has found
A precious gem within a mound of filth.
Exactly so, as if by some strange chance,
The enlightened mind has come to birth in me. (28)

This state of mind or way of thinking, this bodhisattva's aspiration, is not easy to get; it is something very rare and precious. It is like a blind person finding a precious jewel in a heap of rubbish. If a blind person finds a very precious jewel in a dust bin, then he would feel very lucky. For me to get this aspiration is even more rare than that. I have found something so valuable, something almost impossible to find. Therefore I really have to appreciate it even more.

So I have to be as happy as this blind person who has found this most precious jewel. Because I am a just an ordinary being who has all these problems and negative emotions, and yet somehow, due to some great chance, some great blessing, this motivation has arisen in me which is leading me to enlightenment for the benefit of all the sentient beings.

If I can train and develop this bodhicitta, then this will lead me to become a better person in the short term, and eventually it will lead me out of samsara and to complete enlightenment. If there is something that can give me a breakthrough to a way where I can completely end all the suffering, not only of myself, but of all the others, then what can be more valuable than that? So therefore I should be extremely happy for that. [I should take delight in this jewel of bodhicitta and rejoice.]

The draft of immortality

This is the draft of immortality,
That slays the Lord of Death, the slaughterer of beings, (29 first half)

The *draft of immortality* means nectar, called *amrita* in Sanskrit. In Indian legend, the amrita is a substance created by the gods which very sweet and wonderful to taste, and can prolong your life. So this bodhicitta is the very best amrita, that can even make you immortal.

With bodhicitta, with the bodhisattva's training and activity, you can attain enlightenment, which is said to be like attaining immortality—because when you get enlightened, then all the negative things are completely eradicated, [including your fear of death. So by conquering your fear of death, you've defeated the *Lord of Death*, and in a sense you have become deathless or immortal.]

The rich, unfailing treasure-mind

The rich and unfailing treasure-mind
To heal the poverty of wanderers. (29 second half)

The bodhisattva's attitude, the bodhicitta, is like an inexhaustible, never-finishing, treasure house from which you can get anything you want. It is the source of everything good and positive and beneficial. In this way, the bodhicitta heals all the poverty of beings. Poverty is mainly a state of mind, where you feel miserly, where you are not satisfied, where you are not contented, where there is always want and craving. Once the bodhisattva's attitude is developed, then there is no more craving, there is no more need or want. You are completely satisfied, completely at peace.

In addition, Khenpo Kunpal says, once you reach the eighth bhumiⁱⁱ, then you will be able to access the inexhaustible treasure of space, and you will have the power to eradicate the poverty of all the beings.

The sovereign remedy

It is the sovereign remedy,
That perfectly allays all maladies. (30, first half)

The main cause of all the sufferings, all the illnesses, of beings are the three mind poisons of attachment, aversion, and ignorance. These three poisons cause the three humors of wind, bile and the phlegm to arise in people. Whenever there is an imbalance of that, then the people have disease. Therefore the ultimate cause of any disease is also these poisons. Therefore since you are getting rid of the poisons through the training and the cultivation of bodhicitta, then this is also a real way of completely eradicating all the illnesses and maladies in this world right from the root.

The wish-fulfilling tree

It is the wishing tree bestowing rest
On those who wander wearily the pathways of existence. (30, second half)

When you go into this path of Buddhahood, you need resting places on the way. Everybody can not go directly to enlightenment. When it becomes very hot and you are very tired, you need a place to rest. The many different steps and stages on the path become like resting places, or like great trees that provides a cool resting places under their shade.

Those who wander wearily the pathways of existence have the great desire to rid themselves of the miseries of the world. They can do it more quickly by working on this kind of path, getting into a better existence, or getting out of samsara very quickly. Then once they have

ⁱ See also *The Wheel of Analytic Meditation, Teachings by Ringu Tulku Rinpoche*, ZAM Publications

ⁱⁱ A high level of realization.

attained self-liberation and reached the level of arhat, they can rest at that level before going on to become a bodhisattva.

From the Mahayana point of view, the stages of the Hinayana path are also regarded as stepping stones on the bodhisattva path. They are resting places where you can get rid of the worldly or samsaric problems for a while, and then enter into the bodhisattva's path. For example, those who just want liberation for themselves, if they work on that, then they can get a little liberated from the samsaric sufferings. And then they rest. Then when they are rested, they can continue further and get their own liberation. Then, because they have attained their own liberation, they are less self-centered, so then they can generate bodhicitta and work for all sentient beings, and become a bodhisattva.

In certain books, some people have said that in Tibet there are two different kinds of Buddhists: very formal Buddhists, like monks and nuns, whose aim is to get enlightened; then others who are like shaman Buddhists, who are just interested in a better life, a better environment, power, and so on. That's actually not correct. From the Buddhist point of view, the ultimate goal is to attain enlightenment, but that does not mean that everybody gets there very quickly, and it doesn't mean that we don't want anything else. We want a better life, we want to reach the higher realm, we want any kind of temporary solutions to our problems that we can find. Everybody wants that.

So there is not this complete separation of two different types of Buddhists. Everybody wants benefits for the long term as well as for the short term. This bodhisattva attitude is something through which we try to get ourselves and others to enlightenment; but we not only care about the long term, we care about the short term as well. Here it says the same thing. If you are going a long way, then you need a place to rest on the way. You can't just keep going on; you are not on a marathon.

The universal vehicle

It is the universal vehicle that saves
All wandering beings from the states of loss— (31, first half)

States of loss means the lower realms. Bodhicitta is like a vehicle that carries beings from the lower realms to the higher realms of gods and men. It is also said to be like a stepping stone, since first it liberates beings from the lower realms to the higher realms, and then from the higher realms to the state of enlightenment.

The rising moon

The rising moon of the enlightened mind
That soothes the sorrows born of the afflictions. (31, second half)

For all the sentient beings, the main obstacle to their liberation from samsara are the mind poisons, called *afflictions* in this verse. Just as the torturing heat of the scorching sun is cooled with the rising of the moon, the suffering of these mind poisons is cooled by the generation of bodhicitta. Therefore bodhicitta is like the moon.

The mighty sun

It is a mighty sun that utterly dispels
The gloom and ignorance of wandering beings, (32, first half)

Bodhicitta is also like sun, because when the sun arises, then no matter how dark it was before, all the darkness is immediately dispelled. In the same way, the main obstacle for a

human being to gain complete enlightenment is their ignorance and confusion. With the bodhisattva's practice, one can completely dispel all the ignorance and confusion. Therefore, it is said to be like the sun that dispels all the darkness of the three-thousand realms.

These two examples of the moon and the sun refer to the ability of bodhicitta to dispel the two obscurations, referred to as the *emotional obscurations* and *wisdom obscurations*. The *emotional obscurations* are the mind poisons, such as ignorance, attachment, aversion, jealousy, pride, and so on. The *wisdom obscurations* are the habitual tendencies.ⁱ

The emotional obscurations, such as anger and attachment, are called the course obscurations, because they are easier to get rid of. Then once we have gotten rid of the emotional obscurations, we still have these subtle habits and tendencies, which prevent us from clearly seeing the truth. Therefore these tendencies are called the wisdom obscurations. When both types of obscurations are eradicated, then one becomes an enlightened being. It's very simple!

According to Maitreya:

- *Emotional obscurations (mind poisons)* are all thoughts such as stinginess, anger, pride, and so on. Thus they are all course obscurations that are the opposite of the six paramitas.
- *Wisdom obscurations (habitual tendencies)* are thoughts of grasping on three concepts: object, subject, and action. This means clinging to the thoughts of "this is me" and "this is other", which is the dualistic way of seeing or feeling. To get rid of this type of obscuration, one must be completely free of all grasping to self and other.

The creamy butter

The creamy butter, rich and full,
All churned from milk of holy Teaching. (32, second half)

This means that bodhicitta is the quintessence of all the teachings; it is the essence of the essence of the teachings.

The supreme bliss for all beings

Living beings! Wayfarers upon life's paths,
Who wish to taste the riches of contentment, (33, first half)

Living beings means all the beings of the six realms, wherever they are. All these beings are like *wayfarers* or travelers on life's path; they are always journeying, they never stop, so everything is always changing. One wishes to stay at one place, or to remain the same, but one can not. The cycle of life goes on—one gets born, one gets old, one gets sick, one dies. Then one gets born again.

So these beings are always on the move, always in transition, and therefore are always in a state of suffering. But they *wish to taste the riches of contentment*. There is nobody who doesn't want peace and happiness and contentment. But, because of our wrong way of seeing, and not knowing how to work on ourselves, we are completely under the power of our own habitual tendencies, which is the result of the karma that we ourselves have created. And the more we give into these tendencies, the more of the same karma we create, so therefore we go on getting into this trouble that we are in a way creating for ourselves.

Here before you is the supreme bliss—

ⁱ See also page 11.

Here, O ceaseless wanderers, is your fulfillment! (33, second half)

Now with this commitment to bodhicitta, I am finding a way out of this ceaseless journey. This journey is completely useless and fruitless, all the time moving, all the time changing, and all the time suffering. We don't want to go through this, but because of our own ignorance and habitual tendencies, we can't stop.

So now through the bodhicitta, through wisdom and compassion, through the right view, meditation and action, I am finding my way out. And I want all sentient beings to have this. It's such a great potential. The aim and objective of bodhicitta are so great, it is the source of *supreme bliss*, the complete fulfillment to all the *ceaseless wanderers*. This is the way out of this ceaseless journey.

The most worthy thing that I have done

All of these things are talking about the benefits of the bodhicitta and the bodhisattvas way of being and the training. It is such a wonderful thing, it is such a useful and far-sighted thing, and such a noble and such a beneficial thing, therefore I must really rejoice that I have at least made an effort to generate this kind of motivation or aspiration in myself. I have made a commitment at least to start to work on myself and to train and deepen my understanding. This is the most worthy thing that I have done. Therefore I must rejoice.

To rejoice at the actions of others or yourself helps to increase the effect of that action and to encourage yourself.

III.B. Causing others to rejoice

And so, within the sight of all protectors,
I summon every being, calling them to buddhahood,
And till that state is reached, to every earthly joy!
May gods and demi-gods and all the rest rejoice! (34)

Here, I am inviting every earthly being to buddhahood, because the goal of the bodhisattvas' training is to bring perfect enlightenment to all the sentient beings ultimately. But it's not just that and then nothing else. In the meantime, until all beings have attained buddhahood, I invite them to have all the joys and good things of life, whether they are in the low realms or the higher realms. I've not only invited all the sentient beings to enlightenment ultimately, but I've also invited all the sentient beings to temporary joy and happiness and a better life throughout, till everybody becomes enlightened.

If I make such a great effort, such a great project, and such a great journey, that is something everybody needs to rejoice for. So please everybody rejoice.

¹ In the Mahayana tradition, we can speak of five stages, or ten bhumis, on the path to enlightenment. The five stages are:

- *Accumulation stage*: this stage is starting from now. You are maybe a little bit on the accumulation stage already when you want to do positive things, to accumulate wisdom and merit.
- *Joining stage*: When the accumulation stage becomes very strong and accomplished, you come to what is sometimes translated as the 'joining stage' or the 'warming stage'. That is where you have a real understanding and real feeling about the truth, but are not completely experiencing it. The example given is like a fire on the other side of a wall. If there is fire on the other side of the wall, you will feel the heat. You are definitely sure that there is fire at the other side of the wall—you are very confident about it—but you have not really experienced it or seen it.
- *Seeing stage*: When you actually see the fire, that is called the 'seeing stage'. This stage is the same as 'stream entering', as described from the Hinayana or Theravada tradition. In the Mahayana, we talk about the ten bhumis; in this case, the first bhumi is when you enter into this seeing stage, or when you can actually see the truth, and then you cannot go back, because you have completely seen through experience.
- *Meditation stage*: Now you have seen the truth, but you still have negative habits and patterns. Therefore you have to work to get rid of these, and this takes a long time. According to the Mahayana view, this process stretches from the first bhumi all the way to the tenth bhumi; and the whole process occurs in the meditation stage. It has different levels because seeing the truth can be of many degrees. The example given is seeing the moon through the clouds. Let's say there is a moon, but there are lots of clouds. Because the clouds are lit up by the moon, you know there is a moon, but it's not clear. You can't really see the moon, but you can't say you haven't seen the moon—it's completely clouded. And then again it can also be that you see the moon, but it's still clouded and there is still lots of disturbance between you and the moon, but you can definitely see the moon. Then there is no cloud, and the moon is there, but not much moon to see because it's the new moon or two or three days after the new moon. You can't say 'I haven't seen the moon', but you really haven't seen the full moon. And finally you can see the full moon without clouds. These are like different levels of seeing. This is how the different levels or different bhumis are regarded.
- *No-more-learning stage*: This is Buddhahood in Mahayana or the level of arhat in the Theravada view. There is no more to learn, no more to do, no more to purify.

² It is said that after Buddha passed away, the *Kashyapa*, the regent appointed by the Buddha to lead his sangha, accused Ananda of many things, including that when the Buddha said, "I am passing away," that Ananda could have asked him to live long, long, long time and he might have lived. But Ananda didn't ask, so therefore he passed away. So the regent said to Ananda: "The Buddha passing away is your fault." Afterwards Ananda was expelled from the Sangha because he was accused with so many things. He became so sad and he just went in a corner and meditated. Earlier, Ananda had received all the teachings that Buddha gave, because he was with the Buddha all the time and he asked lots of questions. So there was no teaching which Ananda did not receive. But because he was so busy with being the attendant and secretary to Buddha, that he didn't have time to practice. So he was not an enlightened being. Then after Buddha died and he was expelled from the Sangha, he went and meditated and in a very short time he attained Arhathood. And then he was called back. *Kashyapa* went with all his followers and said, "We are very sorry, please now come back. And now you tell us the teachings of the Buddha." So he came back and then he recited the teachings of Buddha.

³ The following detailed description of this mind training practice is from the Padma Karpo translation:

[70] Therefore, you should recite with your voice and clearly bring to mind again and again the meaning (of the following): "This body, this material object which I hold dear, and likewise all my enjoyments such as riches, food, clothing and so forth, and even all the roots of virtue that I have

gathered throughout the three times, I surrender from the depth of my heart, in this (unique) way of giving, without any sense of loss due to stinginess, and without any hope for reward or karmic results, in order to accomplish the welfare, the benefit and happiness, of all beings—the object of intent—without exception.”

[71] This is a key point of oral instructions, dispelling the insatiable demon of ego-clinging, the root of (samsaric) existence. Whenever thoughts of attachment, of cherishing your body and so forth, arise in your mind, confront them directly, one by one, through the supreme path of never forsaking illusory sentient beings, while remaining inseparable from the core [rtsi] of egoless emptiness and non-conceptual compassion. In frightening places or hermitages, at the time when fear and the like arise, the mere thought, “There is no material substance that I cherish because I have sacrificed the three bases to others,” is like casting a burden from your mind. Your mind becomes relaxed and happy.

[72] While resting in this state, when ego-clinging once again arises, recite with your voice (stanza 11): “My body and likewise my enjoyments ...” and so forth, and with your mind imagine that you surrender everything, your body and so on, to beasts, to physical beings such as predators, and to non-physical beings such as demons and spirits; and (imagine) that they take your flesh, drink your blood and greedily carry off all your possessions. You may or may not exclaim the (syllable) ‘phat’. This is mind training as well as (the practice of) generosity. There is no greater meaning of ‘the cutting’ than this. As (Milarepa) said:

Going to frightening places and hermitages is ‘the outer cutting’.
To sacrifice one’s body (as food) to others is ‘the inner cutting’.
To cut ego-clinging at its root is ‘the ultimate cutting’.

[73] Therefore, nothing is more important than this (practice). From the Siksha-samuccaya:

Understand this key point among key points
Of not falling (into samsara), no matter how.
You should surrender your body, your riches and
The virtues you have created throughout the three times
To all sentient beings.
You should protect, purify and increase this (attitude of generosity).

Thus, (1) surrendering the three bases to others, (2) protecting (this practice) from what is not conducive to it, (3) purifying (this practice) from its inherent stains and (4) increasing it further and further through (various) methods, that is to say applying each of these four—(1) surrendering, (2) protecting, (3) purifying and (4) increasing— (to each of the three bases), (the Siksha-samuccaya) teaches twelve (aspects) through which to practice the essence of the six transcendental perfections as well as their individual qualities.

[75] The same (Siksha-samuccaya) also states: “Having thus surrendered your body and riches to others, your food, clothing and so forth still belong to you, but, since you must still use food and clothing to sustain this body for the benefit of others, act like a servant enjoying his employer’s food and clothing. Otherwise you are taking what has not been given to you.” Using for your own benefit what you have given to others is misappropriating what has been given.

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