

English Dharma talk
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A Guide to the Bodhisattva Way of Life (Bodhicaryavatara) – Class 1

By Shantideva

To start today, we can reflect on a stanza of the previous text. The 37 practices of all bodhisattvas. In the beginning of that text, the author makes this promise to compose the text.

The perfect Buddhas who are the source of all benefit and joy,
Come into being by through accomplishing the sacred Dharma.
And since this in turn depends on knowing how to practice,
I shall now describe the practices of all the Buddha's heirs.

It's stated that the perfectly enlightened beings who help sentient beings achieve all kinds of happiness, benefit and joy come about through practicing the sacred Dharma, the teachings of the Buddha. Here, it's stated if we want every kind of wellbeing and happiness, we need to engage in the Dharma. The Buddhas are the ones who explain this Dharma.

Here it's stated the perfect Buddhas are source of all benefit and joy. The highest form of benefit and joy is the state of full enlightenment. We may have confidence that such a state exists and we aspire to attain such a state. It's not sufficient for us to simply aspire for such a state b/c simply by generating fervent wishes by making fervent prayers, we won't become fully enlightened. This stanza states the perfect Buddhas come into being by accomplishing the sacred Dharma. So if we want to come into this state, we need to also practice Dharma. Dharma is the second jewel. Triple gem: Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha gems. Dharma gem is what we need to accomplish if we want to attain the state of perfect enlightenment.

So in order to attain this state of highest enlightenment, we need to practice the Dharma. This is something indispensable in that no other means will allow us to become perfectly enlightened. Just by praying, prostrating, circumambulating and so on, we won't be able to become fully enlightened. If a hungry person, he will think about getting food. Just generating wish may I be able to find food, he won't be able to rid his hunger. Just by praying fervently, may I be able to find food, there's slim chance food will appear before his eyes and remove his hunger. To so rid his hunger, he needs to actively find food. He needs to get up and go look for food in a place where there is food. In that way, there is more hope he's able to dispel his hunger. Similarly, re spiritual path, if we want to attain spiritual enlightenment, to become spiritually realized, we won't be able to achieve our goals just by praying. It's only by actively practicing the Dharma, working on our mind that we can achieve full enlightenment.

We believe that highest enlightenment is a wonderful state and we do want to achieve such a state. But how do we reach this goal? We may think if I read books that explain the path, listen to explanations on Buddhism, then I'll be able to attain that state. But those activities aren't sufficient in that if you don't go on to actually practice the Dharma, you won't be able to achieve enlightenment. Practice of Dharma involves actualizing True Path and True Cessation in our mind. We need to know how to practice. We may have wish to become enlightened, but if we don't know how, we won't arrive at destination. Like hungry person who doesn't know where to look for food. Although make great effort trying to look for food, if looks in wrong place, he won't be able to dispel his hunger. So it's crucial we identify the right means for achieving our goal and make effort in that direction b/c if we don't understand what the right method is, although we make tremendous effort, we won't become enlightened. So we need to understand what the practices of Bodhisattvas are.

In order to attain highest enlightenment, we need to engage in Bodhisattva's practices. As much as we are able to engage in deeds of Bodhisattva, that much closer we will be able to achieving the state of full enlightenment.

What text do we study to understand practices of Bodhisattva. The best is this one by Shantideva. His Holiness in his recent teachings in Bodgaya when he was teaching this text said his teacher who gave him the transmission of this text said this text is the best text for understanding how to engage in Bodhisattva deeds. There's no better text than this one. It's the clearest text. There's no clearer text that explains deeds of a Bodhisattva. There's unlikely clearer text in the future. It's excellent text for understanding practices of Bodhisattva.

Since this is the first of a series of classes explaining the text, it's important for us to generate very positive motivation for participating in these classes. Whether or not our activity becomes virtuous depends on our motivation. We should think: by listening to these explanations, I'll be able to understand meaning of text. This meaning I shall put into practice. We shouldn't have worldly motivation – by understanding this text, I'll become superior to others or show off to people who haven't come across this text. That's not the correct motivation for attending these classes. So we should generate this motivation whatever I understand from these classes, I put into practice – transform spiritually.

In the beginning of the first class, it's appropriate for me to say something about the author of this treatise. There are extensive biographies explaining the life of Shantideva. However, it may not be meaningful for us to go through word by word. I'll introduce his life and enter the text proper.

Shantideva is what we call a child of the Victors. In Tibetan, this expression can have two meanings, b/c child of the Victors can refer to offspring of Buddhas – Bodhisattva – because he's a child of the Buddhas. The other meaning is child of the Kings – he happened to also be a Prince. He was the son of a King. He's both a Bodhisattva and a

Prince. He was born in the place North of Bodgaya. At the age of 6, he met a great practitioner and master and received initiation from this master. Subsequently he engaged in Dharma practice. It's said that soon after that he was able to receive a vision of Manjushri and receive directly guidance from Manjushri and engage in study, practice, and attain realizations.

As a Prince, he had the complete favourable conditions to engage in areas of study: poetry and other areas of study. Indeed, he became an expert in all the various subjects he studied. In time, his father, the King passed. The people in the country asked him to become King. Even though Shantideva himself didn't have much desire to be the King, b/c the subjects requested very sincerely that he accepted to ascend to the throne. However, the night before he was due to participate in this ceremony, he had a dream in which he saw Manjushri sitting on the King's throne. Manjushri in the dream told him we have a student-teacher relationship and I'm already sitting on the throne, so how can you, student, sit on this throne too? Manjushri told him it's not appropriate for him to ascend to this throne, which Manjushri has already occupied.

When he woke up from this dream, then he made this decision I will not ascend to the throne. I will not become King. Quickly, he decided to leave the palace. He then made his way to Nalanda University where there is this big Buddhist institution with 500 great scholars, pandits, and there, in Nalanda, he started studying with many teachers and became a great scholar.

When he was in the monastery, he became known as the person with 3 recognitions. He gave this appearance that he was not engaging in Dharma practice in the sense that when it was time for food, he showed up for the meals. After that, he would lie down and go to sleep. When it was time to go to the toilet, he would do that. He was known as the person with these 3 recognitions: for meal times, for sleeping, and for going to relieve himself. That was how he was perceived by most of the people in the monastery. Some of the people in the monastery had clairvoyance but most didn't. To these people, Shantideva seemed like a lazy bum, not engaging in recitations, teaching, explaining of the text and so on. They thought, we need to get him out of the monastery. He's not a good example of Dharma practitioner. Let's find a way to expel him.

In order to expel him from the monastery, they need a good excuse. They can't just say he's not a Dharma practitioner so we need to kick him out. Unknown to them, Shantideva was a great practitioner. When he gave this appearance of sleeping, he was engaging in yoga – yoga totally free from elaborations. In tantra, there are 3 levels of practice: yoga with elaborations, yoga without elaborations, and yoga totally free from elaborations. So unknown to these monks in the monastery, Shantideva was engaging in this third level of practice. They tried to expel him. They thought: perhaps we can request him to teach the Dharma and he's not engaging in any kind of study and practice so he won't have anything to explain. If we keep requesting him, he'll become annoyed and embarrassed. This they thought was how to kick him out.

The monks then requested him to teach the Dharma. Please give us a Dharma teaching. Shantideva said I can't do it – I have nothing to say. He didn't accept this request. Then afterwards the monks requested him to teach again. This time he said due to your insistence, I will give a teaching. So he accepted.

When Shantideva received the request, they weren't very happy. So they constructed the throne that was very high and didn't arrange a staircase leading to this throne, thinking when he comes and is about to give the teaching, he won't get up and we'll embarrass him. However, Shantideva showed up and by using his hand to touch the throne, he was able to press the throne down and with ease, ascend the throne. He asked the audience what kind of teaching would you like to hear? Something taught before or something that has not been taught before?

They replied something not taught before. Shantideva then went on to teach and the result is this text: A Guide to the Bodhisattva Way of Life or Engaging in the Deeds of Bodhisattva. Composed by a great Bodhisattva and accomplished tantric practitioner. Text carries great blessings.

When Shantideva was teaching the text, when he arrived in the middle of the ninth chapter, at a certain stanza, he started to levitate into space and he rose higher and higher into space until eventually his voice became inaudible to people on the earth. So some of the members who have magical emanation powers were also able to rise into space with him and receive the teachings. I will tell you which stanza this is when we arrive at chapter 9.

We base it on commentary by Tibetan Scholar Gyaltsab Je, a spiritual son of Lama Tsongkhapa, and is a great scholar-practitioner in Tibet.

The title to the commentary is Entrance for the children of the victors: An explanation of the Guide to the Bodhisattva Way of Life. He begins by making Homage to teachers, Buddha Shakyamuni and Manjushri. He identified their excellence qualities of body, speech and mind and pays homage to these great beings and so on.

After the expression of workship, the author promises to compose the text. He says he's acquainted himself with this material in all his life times and I believe it'll benefit people of equal fortune to me. So I'll write down meaning of words of Shantideva's text, in accordance with the assertions of the great scholars.

After this promise, the author states a stanza of exaltation to listen to the explanation: There are some of you who say it's not necessary to realize profound reality. If you just want to attain Hinayana enlightenment, or that of personal liberation. Those of you who are biased by holding such a view, listen to this explanation clearly.

After these opening stanzas, the author goes into an explanation of the structure of Buddha's teachings. First, he generated bodhicitta: mind aspiring for supreme enlightenment. In the middle, he accumulated merit and wisdom by practicing 6

perfections for countless eons. In the end, he became completely enlightened and turned the 3 wheels of Dharma. First, he turned the wheel of the Dharma of Four Noble Truths. When the Buddha taught the Four Noble Truths, he did so 3 times. First wheel of Dharma was taught in 12 aspects, b/c Four Noble Truths was taught 3 times. Through such a teaching, he ripened continuum of listeners who are Hearers. ... Some of the trainees merely by having been taught the Four Noble Truths came to realize subtle depending arising, which is free from extremes of elaborations. The protector Nagarjuna in his Treatises explains in a Hinayana scriptural basket, the Buddha taught subtle selflessness many times. Not only in Nagarjuna but also in Chandrakirti's "Commentary on 60 stanzas of reasoning", Buddha taught this many times. So in the first turning of the wheel, the most profound substances have been taught by the Buddha.

In the first wheel, Buddha taught Four Noble Truths. Second wheel: he taught what are called the extensive medium and brief mother sutras. Mother sutras refer to perfection ... there are extensive, medium and brief versions. In these sutras, Buddha extensively taught selflessness of persons and selflessness of phenomena. In third wheel: speech of irreversible wheel and vast factors of method. Third wheel of Dharma: Buddha was able to clarify what he meant in his previous teachings. When he said phenomena don't exist inherently, what does that mean? In these three wheels of Dharma, the branches of the limbs of the entire path were explained. If there's someone who wants to attain Buddhahood, has Mahayana lineage, then all the parts of the path have been laid out in the three wheels of Dharma. All the practices that are necessary, intentions of the Mahayana sutra baskets have been completely explicated in these wheels of dharma.

Shantideva's text A Guide to the Bodhisattva Way of Life explains this Mahayana path: what someone needs to practice to attain Buddhahood. In Gyaltsab Je's text, he says Shantideva has rid faults. He has great compassion that cherishes others more than himself. He strove for the benefit and happiness of all living beings without regard for his own beings. This author Shantideva has these wonderful qualities.

He also adds this author, Shantideva, has completed the Mahayana path and he also engages in the highest yoga tantra. Following that, we have the actual explanation of the text. This text has 4 main sections:

Meaning of the title
Translator's homage
Meaning of the text
Meaning of the conclusion

This is similar to the text we studied before.

Let's look at the first section. Meaning of the title. Indian language: Bodhicaryavatara.

This title has various parts.

1. Bodhi: means enlightenment.
2. Caryā: deeds.

3. Avatara: engaging.
Engaging in Deeds of Enlightenment.

Popular rendering: A Guide to the Bodhisattva Way of Life.

India: 4 main languages. Here: Sanskrit.

Translator's homage in Tibetan text. Homage stated by the translator when they translated Sanskrit (Indian) into Tibetan. This isn't evidence in English translation. But Tibetan: Homage to all Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. Why do the translators pay homage to Buddhas and Bodhisattvas? First reason is that homage pacifies obstacles to translation. When translating text, the translators may face obstacles. To remove those obstacles, need to pay homage to all Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. Second reason to paying homage is to make known that this commentary, this treatise that is being translated is actually a commentary on the thought of 3 sutra baskets. It's mainly on the sutra scripture basket from among the tripitaka. Although it's a commentary on all the sutra baskets, it's mainly on the sutra scripture basket. Gyaltsabje then says the first bundle: the explanation of the enumeration of a bundle is easy to understand, so I won't explain it here.

Let me explain what this bundle means. This enumeration of a bundle is a technique employed by translators to ensure that their translation doesn't become corrupt as it's passed down from generation to generation. b/c when it becomes passed down, there may be omissions / additions. In order to keep track of how many words and stanzas have been translated, they state at certain points in the text, the first bundle, second bundle and so on. What's a bundle? A text is composed of stanzas: 4 line verses. Then three hundred stanzas constitute a bundle. However, if a text is free flowing prose (not stanzas), then 32 words will be counted as equal to a stanza. Then each bundle consists of 300 stanzas. If text is prose, then 32 words are considered a stanza.

e.g. subsequent translators can check if the original translation has been lengthened / shortened, they can count stanzas where it says bundle. If 300 stanzas present, then they know the whole bundle is complete. So it's a technique employed by translators to keep track and help to prevent corruption in the text. So Gyaltsabje says enumeration of bundle is easy to understand so I won't state it here.

Meaning of text: 2 sections. First is activities for embarking on the explanation of the stages of the Mahayana path. Second is actual explanation of the stages of the path.

Previous parts we've gone through are basically like the preliminaries in the sense we look at what Tibetan translators have said. Now we come to what Shantideva actually said. Meaning of actual text. For activities for embarking on the explanation of the stages of the Mahayana path, there are 3 subsections:

Shantideva's expression of worship
His promise to explain subject

His abandoning of arrogance and his reason for enthusiasm for composing this treatise

Expression of worship:

1 purpose of expression of worship – why does Shantideva make this? He says – Gyaltsabje explains – Shantideva does this expression of worship is so one will realize he is an excellent being and obstacles to the composing of the treatise will be pacified. By expressing excellent qualities of the holy objects and going for refuge in them, they will realize a person who does this is a special being. So that's a reason. Second is obstacles to composing treatise will be removed. Finally, one will be able to attain this beatitude – state of liberation and enlightenment and cause other trainees to do the same. In this way, all collections of goodness will be accomplished.

The brief meaning of this expression of worship is it pays homage to 3 jewels and other beings worthy of homage.

Now we look at root text.

Chapter 1: The Excellence of Bodhicitta

[Shantideva's expression of worship]

1.1

**To those who go in bliss, the Dharma they have mastered, and to all their heirs,
To all who merit veneration, I bow down.**

Bliss is Sugata in Sanskrit. 2 parts to word Sugata. You can understand it in terms of abandonment and realization.

Here, Sugata can be explained in terms of abandonment and realization. In fact, there are 3 qualities of abandonment and 3 qualities of realization. Let us go through the 3 excellent qualities of abandonment.

First is abandonment has exhaustibly abandoned afflictive obscurations. Buddha's exhaustibly abandoned afflictive obscurations. He has gone well. This is like a person who has good form. Like perfect physical features. This is the first of the 3 excellent qualities of abandonment.

Second is a Buddha has gone from cyclic existence. The Buddha no longer circles in samsara through the power of afflictions. This is likened to someone who's completely eliminated an epidemic disease that's been afflicting them. A Buddha has completely gone beyond cyclic existence and doesn't circle in samsara through the power of afflictions.

Third is the Buddha having exhaustively abandoned non-afflictive ignorance. In that case, the Buddha is said to have gone entirely. B/c he's exhaustively abandoned non-afflictive ignorance. It's like a vase filled well, filled to the brim.

The point of explaining these 3 excellent qualities of perfect abandonment is to indicate that a Buddha is superior to 3 kinds of beings. Through these 3 abandonment types, a Buddha surpasses 3 kinds of beings. Through the first excellent quality, he surpasses non-Buddhists who've separated from attachment. Non-Buddhists who've separated from attachment have cultivated concentration, which don't rely on them realizing selflessness of persons and selflessness of phenomena. They're able to be free from attachment for the time being. As a result of that, they have certain worldly powers: worldly clairvoyance / powerful emanation and so on. Buddha by abandoning obscurations surpasses these people who suppress attachment but not exhaustively abandon attachment.

Second quality shows Buddha surpasses stream-enterers and once-returners. These are realized beings but they still need to take rebirth in samsara. Buddha who has completely become free from samsara who doesn't circle in samsara are superior to these beings who still need to take rebirth in samsara.

Third feature of perfect abandonment is Buddhas exhaustibly abandoned non-afflictive ignorance. He's like a vase filled to the brim. It's already full. This excellent quality of the Buddha is like the Hinayana Foe-Destroyers. They haven't exhaustibly abandoned non-afflictive ignorance. These indicate Buddha surpasses the 3 types of beings: beings who abandoned attachment, stream-enterers and once-returners, and Hinayana Foe-Destroyers.

3 features of realization of Buddha (full enlightenment):

1 Buddha's directly knowing reality: reality refers to the 2 kinds of selflessnesses – that of person and that of phenomena. Thus, Buddha surpasses the non-Buddhists mentioned earlier before.

2 Buddha's stable knowledge: makes him superior to stream-enterers and once-returners. Their knowledge isn't as stable as Buddha's.

3 Buddha knowing all phenomena without exception. Hinayana Foe-Destroyer lack this quality. In terms of perfect realization, Buddha surpasses these.

By knowing suchness of reality (2 selflessnesses), stable knowledge, and all phenomena, he surpasses the 3 types of beings stated above.

Buddha or someone who's a Sugata (one who go in bliss) has these qualities: 3 qualities of abandonment and 3 of realization. That's how we should understand who a Buddha is. b/c sometimes people think of Buddha as a statue. But in terms of what Buddha embodies, it's these qualities that characterize a Buddha.

In the first line of the first stanza, "to those who go in bliss, the Dharma they have mastered, and to all their heirs". "to those who go in bliss, the Dharma they have

mastered “ are the Buddhas. Their heirs are the Bodhisattvas. Here, they represent the Sangha jewel. We can understand from this description here a Buddha isn't a Buddha from the very beginning. A Buddha is once an ordinary being who passes through various stages and becomes a fully enlightened being. There are 5 paths: accumulation, preparation, seeing, meditation, and finally, no more learning that a person goes through. On the first 2, Bodhisattva is an ordinary being. when reaches 3rd path, directly perceives emptiness. From there on, they become an Arya or superior being. they become Bodhisattva Arya. From there, to path of meditation. Then to path of no more learning, attains Buddhahood. When we talk about the Sangha jewel, we refer to these beings. Bodhisattva Aryas are the Sangha jewel.

As Buddhists, it's important for us to know the objects of refuge. All the time we go for refuge to three jewels, but if we don't know who they are, our refuge won't be effective. Here, at first part of stanza 1, we have Buddha jewel. Buddha jewel: someone who has 3 qualities of abandonment & realization. Anyone who has these is a Buddha jewel. What's the Dharma jewel? Those 6 qualities of abandonment and realization are the Dharma jewel. What's the Sangha jewel? Sangha jewel refers to beings who've directly perceived reality. Anyone who's on 3rd path does this. Such Bodhisattva Aryas have excellent qualities of abandonment and realization. Sangha jewel refers to Arya beings, beings who have directly perceived reality. We should understand what 3 jewels are. b/c we recite every day. We have to know clearly what the jewels are.

In the first stanza, Shantideva pays homage to Buddha, Dharma and Sangha.

“To all who merit veneration, I bow down”.

This includes other beings, such as one's own teachers, preceptors, masters and so on. To 3 jewels and as well as all who merit veneration, I bow down. This is expression of worship to this text.

Today's class is quite dense in that we're reading a traditional commentary word by word. From the next class onwards, we'll focus on root text itself as we've done for our past courses. It's easier to focus on the root text b/c the commentary tends to be a bit elaborate and then it can be difficult to focus b/c sometimes it's not so evident what in the root text that the commentary is explaining. From the next class onward, we'll focus on the root text.

Main content of today's class is meaning of 3 jewels.

Question: some have translated “Sangha” as those who follow teachings rather than Bodhisattva Aryas. I wonder if Geshela is familiar with that.

Answer: even in Tibetan, there's different usages of word “Sangha”. There's this Sangha jewel that refers to Arya beings, who've directly perceived reality. But in Tibetan, there's an expression called the Sangha of fully ordained monks. That would not be different from the Sangha jewel. The Sangha of fully ordained monks may not be beings

who directly perceived reality. Then also loose usage of monks and nuns as Sangha. Regardless of their attainments, then you say they are Sangha. That's loose usage. Even in Tibetan, we won't say they are the Sangha *jewel*. Although we say they are the Sangha, they are not called the Sangha jewel. To say followers of Buddha are Sangha, it's just general usage of word Sangha. To satisfy technical definition of Sangha jewel you need more realizations.

Question: is there word? Asking in Tibetan.

Ge-dun kon-chog = Sangha jewel.