

English Dharma talk
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A Guide to the Bodhisattva Way of Life (Bodhicaryavatara) – Class 5

By Shantideva

Let's start by thinking about the meaning of stanza from Chandrakirti's Supplement to the Middle Way, in which he pays homage to compassion. This is unusual. He says homage to that compassion for migrators who are powerless like a bucket traveling in a well. Initially adhering to a self and I, and then generating attachment to things is this mind. Compassion is the mind for sentient beings to be quickly freed from their sufferings.

Compassion is the mind observing sentient beings afflicted by sufferings and wants them to be free from suffering. What are the sufferings afflicting sentient beings? When we examine in our conditions we will see that we don't always recognize suffering as suffering. Even if we do, when we identify the causes of suffering, we think suffering comes from outside – external culprit creating my suffering.

Of course there are certain forms of problems and difficulties from external environment, such as problems arising from elements. The climate conditions and so on. But if one's mind is strong, then even though one may encounter such problems, one's mind won't be affected adversely.

Chandrakirti said:

Through initially adhering to a self, an I, and then generating attachment for things, thinking this is mine, then there is suffering.

What he means by that is, we have a tendency to hold ourselves as the most important. There's this palpable sense of an important I. As a result of adhering to a self, we generate attachment to things related to the self. Such as my friends, my possessions. So when there are these objects related to my friends and my possessions, then we become attached to them. If there are certain factors that threaten the I, my friends, possessions or cause harm to them, we generate anger. There's this sense of aversion. As a result, the mind becomes disturbed when attachment arises. Mind becomes disturbed when there's anger. This prevents us from maintaining a relaxed, easy state of mind.

B/c we have this strong grasping to the self, I, this then leads to our attachment people and objects associated with this I. Attachment, anger arises. These mental afflictions cause our attention to be directed outwards such that we engage in improper forms of body and speech. E.g. we speak in unskillful ways motivated by our emotions. We create karma: latency on our consciousness. When meet these conditions, these latencies

are activated. When seed meets proper conditions, warmth, fertilizer, it can grow into a sprout. When latencies of karma are activated, they cause us suffering. Chandrakirti is saying, beings in samsara are suffering powerlessly like a bucket in a well. Like a water mill. In India, they go around and around. Sentient beings are like that. Trapped like that. Chandrakirti pays homage to compassion that wants these sentient beings to be free from suffering.

The analogy in this text is quite an interesting one. It talks about how sentient beings are like this bucket in a water mill. There are many other points related to this analogy. If you are interested, we can talk about this in the future. For now, the main point I want to express is the cause of suffering is the unsubdued mind. It comes from inside. If we have very strong self-grasping. That mind that causes us to engage in unskillful actions then create karma, which lead to suffering. Therefore, if we want to do something about unhappiness, problems, difficulties, then we need to understand what this self-grasping mind is all about. What is the conception of self? What is the self? How does it engage in reality? By engaging in this analysis and working on the self-grasping mind, then we can reduce its power.

In a later stanza, Chandrakirti says

Having seen with intelligence that afflictions and faults without exception arise from the view of transitory collection and having realized that the self is the object of that, yogis refute the self.

These yogis can see the negative emotions and all faults arise from the view of the transitory collection. This is kind of a self-grasping that holds the I as of utmost importance. So as a result of that, there is this grasping to a concrete self when in fact the I or person is merely imputed. It is simply a phenomenon merely labeled by the mind. Yogis can refute the self, the object of this misconception, and as a result of that, eliminate all afflictions and faults without exception.

We should analyze carefully how the self exists. We may perceive ourselves in a particular way. But you need to check: does self really exist like that in reality? Through such investigation, you'll be able to understand more clearly how the I really exists. Eventually, you'll be able to verify for yourself this fact of selflessness or emptiness that's taught in Buddhism. Through our analysis, we are able to discover there's a discrepancy between how the I appears and how it exists. It may appear to be very concrete and independent. But in reality, it depends on causes and conditions. It's just labeled by mind in dependence on certain causes and conditions. By understanding "I" doesn't exist in a concrete way, then we'll be able to reduce the strength of the negative emotions: attachment, ignorance, aversion. We'll suffer less mental disturbances. That's how to obtain peace and happiness. Although we live in a world that's not very peaceful, if we are able to work on our mind, we'll remain peaceful and happy although our external surroundings are chaos.

Therefore, we should understand in this discussion all afflictions, faults without exception arise from the view of their transitory collection. This self-grasping mind. If you want a long-term solution to unhappiness, problems, then you need to work on this self-grasping mind b/c it's at the root of all our problems. If you want to rid a tree, you need to do so from its root. Just cutting the branches/ leaves won't kill the tree. If you just remove leaves and branches but not root, when conditions come together, water, warm and so on, the branches will grow again. That's not a long term solution. Here, what we say is if you want a thorough solution to suffering, we need to do something about the self-grasping mind. If instead of doing that, we identify cause of problems from coming outside, and I need to solve this problem by finding the right food, clothes and so on, then we won't be able to rid our suffering. Such solutions are just temporary. They may remove some little suffering but it'll come up again and again. Long term suffering is to work on the self-grasping mind.

Text

Stanza 1.11

If the perfect leaders of all migrant beings
Have with boundless wisdom seen its priceless worth,
We who wish to leave our nomad wandering
Should hold well to this precious bodhicitta.

In this stanza, it's explained we should hold well to this precious mind of enlightenment. When we examine our minds, we'll see we have concern for our own welfare. We have concern for welfare of those who are close to us: loved ones, friends, so on. But there are many people and beings we don't care about. In other words, if they get injured, so be it. If they get killed, so be it. We don't care about many beings who exist. What we need to do in the context of this mind training is to expand our mind so that we are concerned with not just ourselves, our friends, but also with all other beings. In other words, we want to dispel not just our suffering, but also that of all living beings. The best method for achieving this goal is bodhicitta.

An example here is given. If there's a business man who is not just concerned with him becoming wealthy, but he has this very vast vision of wanting everyone to benefit from becoming rich, so in this country, there are other businessmen who also have the same goals, so he would lead them to a place where there are opportunities to find wealth and grow rich. He won't just think about himself: who cares about others? Like that, mind of enlightenment causes us to have altruistic perspective on life and things. By training in this mind of enlightenment, we can attain true happiness. If we haven't generated this mind yet, then we should make effort to generate it. Once we've generated it, we should ensure it doesn't degenerate. What's more, we should make effort so this bodhicitta grow stronger and stronger.

If you think about it, we are concerned about people who are our friends. There is a huge number of people out there whom we regard with indifference in the sense that we don't

care what happens in their lives. If they have a problem, they have a problem. If they are dishonest, lie, then they do that. We don't really care. If they are killed, so be it. This kind of indifference and coldness, coldheartedness causes us to have many enemies in our lives. So then many people can become our foes as a result of our attitude.

So if we have this mind that disregards others' wellbeing, then we will gain many enemies. If these are the people who are strong minded, they might not harm us back. But most people live in self-grasping. And so they'll come back to us. Cause us problems, cause difficulties for us. If we want to have this situation remedied where we are just surrounded by antagonistic forces, then we need to make effort in compassion, bodhicitta. Remind ourselves all living beings are like me exactly – don't want suffering. In that way we can generate a genuine sense of concern for others, compassion for others, bodhicitta for them.

If you want a lot of friends, then no better method than cultivating bodhicitta, b/c there's no higher altruistic mind of enlightenment. If you want true friends, you should make effort in bodhicitta. Any other means may not work. If you think I share my material wealth, they'll like me. Indeed, some people are like that. But they are not true friends. If you run out of money and they'll just vanish. So this means true friends cannot be bought with money. True friends come from goodheartedness. If we generate altruism, the ultimate form of which is bodhicitta, then it's certain we'll have many true friends.

Is that the only benefit of bodhicitta? No, there's more. Next, we look at an analogy of ever-increasing, exhaustible fruits of bodhicitta.

1.12

All other virtues, like the plaintain tree,
Produce their fruit, but then their force is spent.
Alone the marvelous tree of bodhicitta
Will bear its fruit and grow unceasingly.

Let us look at the first half of this stanza. Here, we have this analogy of plaintain tree. It's said a plaintain tree only produces fruit once. Then the tree will not produce any more fruits. Virtues that are not conjoined with bodhicitta, like a plaintain tree, are able to make results only once. Once the result is done, it won't produce fruits again.

e.g. someone is suffering from some sickness and they think: by making 100,000 prostrations, I'll be able to purify my negativities. Thinking like that, they do so. It may be this person recovers from the sickness, but that will be it. Meaning those 100,000 prostrations produce no other benefit other than causing this person to recover from this sickness.

Another e.g. someone wants to retain a good rebirth next life. This person thinks I want to be reborn as a human / god. To do that, I will practice ethics, abandon the 10 nonvirtues. By practicing ethics in this way, this person is certain to attain a good rebirth next life. But the result of the practice of ethics is just that. Once the person attains a

good rebirth, that's it. Those practices keeping ethics and so on will not bring any other result.

The second half of stanza 12 says alone the marvelous tree of bodhicitta will bear its fruit and grow unceasingly. It bears the fruit again and again. Supposedly, there's a wish-fulfilling tree that bears fruits unceasingly. So this tree of bodhicitta is like that. You can think of trees that produce fruits year after year after year. Bodhicitta is like that.

There's this analogy that's often given to illustrate the infinite fruits of bodhicitta. So if you carry a little vessel of water and you pour that water into the ocean, then basically your container of water will never be exhausted as long as the ocean doesn't dry up. Your water is somewhere in there. It doesn't get lost. Exactly like that, the virtues that are fully dedicated with bodhicitta won't be exhausted. If you create some positive action conjoined with bodhicitta, that virtue will never be exhausted until you achieve enlightenment.

We should try to combine all our spiritual practices with bodhicitta. Basically, if you're making offerings, offering prostrations, reciting mantras, you think that I'm doing this to attain highest enlightenment to benefit all sentient beings. That's generating contrived bodhicitta, thinking with effort I want to benefit all sentient beings and so I engage in this practice. After that, when you've completed the practice, you dedicate the virtues you've created, thinking may all these virtues be a cause for me to become enlightened so I may benefit all sentient beings. So you combine your practice with bodhicitta.

So we should set our sights on the highest goal. In the sense that if you aim for highest enlightenment, then all the other goals, lesser goals will be attained by the way. If you want to plant some crops and you think I can plant say rice. When you plant rice, you'll get byproducts like leaves, stock of rice plant after you've harvested rice. Those leaves and stocks can be used to feed cattle. So this means by the way you obtain products that are useful for lesser goals besides feeding self. If you just think feed my cows and plant some grass, then that grass can only feed the cows and nothing else. If you aim for full enlightenment, then all the other goals will be fulfilled by the way.

If you aim for enlightenment and work toward it, then by the way you obtain causes for attaining a precious human rebirth before you attain enlightenment.

Are there other benefits not mentioned above? Yes. Enlightenment can also protect us from great fears. Next stanza an analogy to show this:

1.13

As though they pass through perils guarded by a hero,
Even those weighed down with dreadful wickedness
Will instantly be freed through having bodhicitta.
Who then would not place his trust in it?

Here, imagine you must pass through a scary place where there are many dangerous wild animals roaming about. If you are not strong, you'll be really scared to go through this area. However, if you have the company of someone who's very strong and powerful so that you're guarded by this hero, then you won't be afraid anymore. Here, bodhicitta is like that. When we have various kinds of negativities through creating misdeeds and so on, we should feel scared in samsara. But if we cultivate bodhicitta, we have this strong powerful person to protect us from all the dangers of cyclic existence. So it's said here who with intelligence would not rely on this strong powerful bodhicitta? An intelligent person would place their trust in the mind of enlightenment.

Let's say there's a person who's committed very grave misdeeds, such as the 5 actions of immediate rebirth that can cause rebirth in lower realm immediately after death. What can this person do to protect themselves from being born in the hell beings? Best way is to confess and purify those negativities through bodhicitta. It's said the heaviest actions can be cultivated by cultivating bodhicitta for just a short instant.

There are still more benefits of bodhicitta to be experienced. The next benefit is explained by the first half of stanza 14. Here, the benefit of destroying negativities without difficulty is explained by an analogy. First two lines:

1.14

Just as by the fires at the end of time,
Great sins are utterly consumed by bodhicitta,

There's this reference to the fires at the end of time. Universe passes through various phases. There will be an eon of destruction: fires destroying the contents so this fire is so powerful it destroys the planet completely in a very short amount of time. So bodhicitta is like that in the sense that great negativities are eliminated, purified by cultivating bodhicitta for a short instant. Through the power of bodhicitta, one's great negativities can be utterly consumed.

Then there are these benefits mentioned in the sutra. Second half:

Thus its benefits are boundless,
As the Wise and Loving Lord explained to Sudhana.

What's being explained in this sutra. The Wise and Loving Lord Maitreya said the mind of enlightenment is like the seed of all Buddha's teachings. It's like a field b/c it causes the wholesome actions of all migrating beings to prosper.

Now we look at nature of mind of enlightenment.

1.15

Bodhicitta, the awakening mind,
In brief is said to have two aspects:
First, aspiring, *bodhicitta in intention*;

Then, *active bodhicitta*, practical engagement.

What's bodhicitta? What's the definition of bodhicitta? We've mentioned this in previous classes. This is an opportunity to revise. It's main mind that's concomitant with aspiration seeking perfect, complete enlightenment for others' welfare.

What this means is one wishes for others' welfare to be enacted. One wonder how this is going to be brought about? In order to free sentient beings from their suffering, I need to teach them according to faculties, mentalities and dispositions. To do so, I need to be fully enlightened. So therefore, I need to attain full enlightenment. For the benefit of all sentient beings, I shall attain perfect complete enlightenment.

In order for anyone to generate this mind, training is required. It's difficult to just generate this wish in a genuine manner. So one has to train one's mind so that one can really feel like I want to attain enlightenment to benefit all living beings.

In the context of this text by Shantideva, the method of generating bodhicitta is called equalizing and exchanging self and others. To employ this method, first, one must train in equanimity: even-mindedness.

What this involves is having compassion for sentient beings. Why want to be concerned about others? Why want others to be free from suffering?

In developing equanimity, we are trying to even out our mind in the sense usual state of our mind is a mind that is afflicted by attachment and aversion. So towards people who are nice to us, people we like, we have attachment. To people who are nasty to us, we have aversion. You can see the mind is bumpy in the sense it doesn't have even-mindedness toward living beings. Usually we have this bumpy mind affected by aversion and attachment.

What we have to do is generate equanimity toward friends, enemies as well as people who are so called strangers. Strangers are such that we don't really care about their welfare. We don't care about their wellbeing. We're just indifferent. If something good happens to them, so be it; if bad, no special feeling either. Contrast with how we react when something bad happens to a friend or enemy. If something bad happens to someone who we like, we feel pain in our heart. However, if something bad happens to someone we don't like, there's almost a sense of happiness through this mishap to the horrible person.

It's easier by cultivating equanimity by focusing on a person like a stranger who's considered neutral b/c we don't have these turbulent emotions with respect to them. We focus on a person whom we consider neutral. You think I feel quite indifferent in relation to this person. But is this the right attitude to have toward this person? Even though this person hasn't benefited me this life, in past lives, they've benefited me greatly. They've been my mother, father in previous lives. When they've been my

mother, father, they've shown me great kindness. By reflecting on this possibility, you become closer to this person. You generate affection for this person.

Next you shift attention to someone you like, something you naturally have affection for. You think I see this person in a positive light now. But possible they've hurt me in the past. They've harmed me in past lives, created difficulties for me. In that way, you try to see things in a more balanced way and not see just one side, aspect of this person. That can reduce your grasping, attachment to this person.

After you've meditated on equanimity in relation to stranger and friend, then you can move onto an enemy, someone you can't get along with. You think this person seems horrible now. But in a previous life, they could have been very nice to me. They could have rendered much help, as a mother or father. They could have sacrificed their life for me in the past. Thinking like this, you try to reduce your aversion to this person. You don't see them in a completely negative light. You try to cultivate equanimity and not attached to some, averse to others, indifferent to strangers.

Now you've made your mind more equanimous, then you can go to the next step, equalizing self and others. How do you equalize self and others? You think about how living beings and you are equal in the sense that nobody wants suffering. All want happiness. Just as you want happiness, they also want happiness. Just as you don't want suffering, they don't want suffering.

Having equalized self and others, and trained mind well, now exchange self and others. Involves shifting your concern for yourself to others. Usually we think I'm the most important. It's important things turn out well for me. It's important good things happen for me. Now exchange self for others: important for good things to happen to others. Important for others to be well. Think it's important for things to go well for others. What happens to me isn't so crucial.

We need to cultivate these steps again and again. Train our mind that others are very important. That they are well and be happy. When one has become very familiar with this kind of thought, eventually one will think I have this great opportunity to train myself to enact the welfare of all living beings. To do that effectively, I need to attain highest enlightenment for the benefit of all living beings. That's the mind of enlightenment.

We didn't go into the 2 divisions of bodhicitta and stanza 15 but let's save that for Q/A.

Question: How do you approach when some people are sending you bad vibrations? And after that you start to have bad dreams, since meeting with that person. How can you be compassionate enough?

Translator: someone is sending you negative thoughts toward you and harming you in some kind of non-physical way and you start to get bad dreams. Is that your question?

Answer: when one's already believed someone is trying to hurt me, just that thought alone is sufficient to cause fear in one's mind regardless of whether or not there's some external harm received. b/c simply believing in that idea can cause that mind to project certain labels onto others, thinking they're sending me negative vibrations and so on. Regardless of whether or not that's happening in actuality, just one's believing intensifies one's suffering.

Since this kind of thought exacerbates the situation, one way to reduce the suffering that one's experienced is to deny that this is happening in the sense that I'm believing they're harming me but this is not the case. This is a thought in my mind projecting this person as harmful. So one makes the decision in one's mind this is not the case.

Let's say you're in some work and someone feeling stressed. In the day this project needs to be done. What if this happens? At night when you go to bed it's likely you'll have dreams about the project. In the dream you're carrying out the project. This is really directed to what has been going on in your mind during the day. So perhaps during the day you are thinking this person is trying to harm me, this person is sending me negative vibrations, then it's likely at night, you'll have bad dreams.

Fact is you can't be really sure this person is trying to harm you. You can't be certain. It's more beneficial for yourself if you decide no, this is not happening. Then you can apply the method: equalizing and exchanging self and others. Think about how they want happiness and not suffering. In that way, your negative feelings for this person will be reduced. Your mind will feel more relaxed.

This is one possibility. Bad dreams caused mentally.

But bad dreams can also be caused physically. If the elements in your body are in a state of imbalance, disturbed, then this can cause bad dreams. If this is the case, then you need to seek out a physical remedy in the sense you may have to see a doctor, eat some medicine and so on.

One method you can use is to soak your feet in warm water before you go to bed. Then after that, when you go to bed, lie on the right side of your body, right palm under your cheek, your left hand on your thigh. If you can, you recite the heart sutra before going to bed. If you can't, at least the mantra 10 or 20 times. Then you lie on the bed on the right side. You think I am not going to have a bad dream instead of worrying. Think I will not have a bad dream and let your mind be relaxed and go to sleep without stress.

If at any point you wake up and think they send me negative vibes, you should in a very decisive way say no, this is not happening. I will allow my mind to be relaxed. In that way, if your mind is truly relaxed, no reason for bad dreams to come up.

Question 2: Why do we project our shadow sometimes? You're very happy and you meet someone who's very stressed?

The circumstances can be due to just present conditions or traced to conditions from the past, meaning a long time ago.

When we encounter people who seem negative, screaming and so on, the first thing we need to do is avoid labeling them as bad. People don't choose to be bad. b/c they encounter certain circumstances in their lives, they have problems, they run into difficulties, they become what they are. They are not intrinsically bad. They didn't choose to be bad. First is avoid project bad onto them. To understand it's a shame they are in a situation and to generate compassion instead of aversion in relation to them.

The fact you generate compassion for them doesn't mean you don't take precautions. They may not be conscious. Also be careful not go close or make them angry. By generating compassion for them and taking precaution for self, then there's benefit.

You can try to cultivate compassion before you go to bed. Put yourself in their shoes. How miserable I would feel. So in that way, try and generate this sense of compassion for them. If I were in their place, in such a pathetic state, repulsive state, how would things be like? How would I feel about myself? Understanding they're in a tough state, generate compassion for them, instead of aversion, annoyed.