

**Commentary on
Shantideva's "A Guide to the Bodhisattva Way of Life"
Chapter 1: The Benefit of the Spirit of Awakening (Bodhicitta) - Part 4 of 4
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Tonight is the last evening of teaching on this text for this year, but it will continue on, hopefully in future years if we are all alive, but remember there is no certainty about that. We just have to do the best we can.

Cultivating a good motivation before listening to teachings

Let's cultivate our motivation. Let's remember the kindness of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas, how they want us to be happy even more than we want ourselves to be happy. Their love and compassion for us is even greater than the love and compassion we have for ourselves.

Let's reflect that all these holy beings work so hard for eons purifying their minds, creating merit, listening to teachings, meditating on the teachings. They did all these for eons just so that they would have the best capabilities to guide us on the path. They really put themselves out there to work for our benefit.

The Buddhas and bodhisattvas will never abandon us. Their compassion for us will never cease. But it is up to us to open ourselves to the inspiration, to the teachings of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas. The way we do that is by generating the bodhicitta aspiration because with the bodhicitta, we think like the Buddhas and bodhisattvas and that makes us very close to them.

So let's generate that marvelous mind aspiring for full enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings.

Then slowly open your eyes and come out of your meditation.

Definition of bodhicitta

We are going to continue talking about bodhicitta this evening. Bodhicitta is the Sanskrit term. In this book, bodhicitta is translated as the spirit of awakening. In other translations, it is called the altruistic intention. But it means the same thing. I will give you the definition of bodhicitta, so remember this. Don't forget it!

Bodhicitta is a primary mind with two aspirations. The first aspiration is to work for the benefit of all sentient beings and the second aspiration is to become a fully enlightened Buddha in order to do that most effectively.

Bodhicitta has those two aspirations so we have to cultivate both aspirations in order to attain the bodhicitta. So bodhicitta is the loving compassionate heart that really cherishes sentient beings and the aspiration for enlightenment. The aspiration for enlightenment involves being sure that enlightenment exists. I talked about how it is possible to liberate our mind on the first evening.

Bodhicitta is the source of all goodness and happiness in the world

This mind of bodhicitta is so precious because it is the source of all goodness and happiness in the world. You might ask how is that? Well, every virtuous mind that we have comes because somebody taught us how to cultivate a virtuous mind, isn't it? Other people taught us. They instructed us how to transform our mind into a positive state.

So every single virtuous mind came from somebody who taught us. Who is the ultimate teacher of how to create a virtuous mind? It is the Buddha, isn't it? Because the Buddha's mind has perfect virtue and knows exactly what to practice and what to abandon.

Even with the bodhisattvas, all their knowledge, all their greatness, all their compassion, all these come because the Buddhas guided them along the path. And even the arhats, the liberated beings, they are able to attain liberation because the Buddhas taught them.

Now, how did somebody become a Buddha? One of the principal factors is having this bodhicitta motivation, this aspiration for full enlightenment, because without the bodhicitta motivation, enlightenment is not possible at all. But with it, that becomes one of the primary causes of attaining full enlightenment.

And once somebody is fully enlightened, that person becomes a genuine source of good and virtue and benefit for the entire world and for all beings in whatever situation they are born in. That is why we say that the bodhicitta is the source of all goodness in the world.

Is there any thought that is nobler and more precious than the bodhicitta?

If you think about it, is there any thought that can exist in the mind that is nobler and more precious than this thought of loving compassion? And not just loving compassion, but really wanting to become fully enlightened in order to have the capabilities from our own side to be of the greatest benefit to everybody. Can you think of any motivation, any type of kindness that is greater than that?

When you think about it, it is very difficult to find any kind of thought, any kind of motivation that has more goodness in it than the bodhicitta. So just to think about bodhicitta, just to hear teachings on it – this mind that is the source of all happiness and well-being for all beings – just the chance to have these teachings is so precious!

I sometimes think that some day when we gain samadhi and clairvoyant powers, we will be able to see for ourselves the kind of karma that we created in the past that brought about the good results that we are experiencing this life. Just to be able to hear teachings on bodhicitta, we created so much good karma in previous lives! And that is why on the first night of the teachings I said I felt so honored and privileged just to be able to teach this text from my own limited understanding, because it is about this very precious attitude.

So let's dig in!

Chapter 1 Verse 7

*"The Lords of Sages, who have been contemplating for many eons,
have seen this alone as a blessing by which joy is easily increased and
immeasurable multitudes of beings are rescued."*

The Lords of Sages refers to the Buddhas. The Buddhas have been contemplating for many eons – not for a short time but for quite a long time – and they have seen the bodhicitta

mind alone as a blessing by which joy is easily increased and immeasurable multitudes of beings are rescued.

So the bodhicitta has the ability to increase the joy of living beings. Since it is the bodhicitta that motivates anybody to teach and guide and help others, that mind has the ability to rescue so many beings from suffering.

The best way to rescue beings from suffering is to teach them the Dharma. We can give people food to satisfy their hunger for a while, but after a few hours, they will be hungry again. When somebody has a flat tire, we can stop and pull over and fix their flat tire, but they will get another one later on. Somebody might be sick and we can take care of them, but they will get sick again later.

So it is good that we take care of people, help meet their immediate needs, but that does not solve the problem of being in cyclic existence. That fundamental problem we have of being in cyclic existence can only be solved by each sentient being practicing the Dharma and freeing their own mind. But in order to practice the Dharma and free their own mind, each sentient being needs to receive the teachings on the Buddha Dharma. And it is the motivation of bodhicitta that motivates the Buddhas and the bodhisattvas to give these teachings to us.

Chapter 1 Verse 8

“Those who long to overcome the abundant miseries of mundane existence, those who wish to dispel the adversities of sentient beings, and those who yearn to experience a myriad of joys should never forsake the Spirit of Awakening.”

‘Mundane existence’ means cyclic existence, being born in this cycle of constantly recurring problems.

If you want to overcome the abundant miseries of cyclic existence, then do not abandon the bodhicitta because the bodhicitta will enable you to do that.

If you want to dispel all the adversities, all the suffering of sentient beings, do not abandon the bodhicitta because the bodhicitta will enable you to do that.

If you yearn to experience immeasurable joy and happiness, then do not abandon bodhicitta because the bodhicitta will enable you to have that joy and happiness.

So Shantideva is really making the point about the benefits of bodhicitta here.

Chapter 1 Verse 9

“When the Spirit of Awakening has arisen, in an instant a wretch who is bound in the prison of the cycle of existence is called a Child of the Sugatas and becomes worthy of reverence in the worlds of gods and humans.”

The ‘Spirit of Awakening’ refers to the bodhicitta.

The measure of having realized bodhicitta

The measure of having realized bodhicitta is whenever we see any sentient being, our instinctive impulse is: “I want to become a Buddha in order to benefit that sentient being.”

That is a pretty high call, isn't it? Whenever you see anybody, whenever you see an ant crawling around in your bathroom, whenever you see a cockroach in the garbage, whenever you see a bird, whenever you see a colleague whom you do not like, whenever you see somebody who hurt your feelings, your instantaneous, automatic thought is: "I want to attain enlightenment in order to benefit that being."

Pretty much something, isn't it? Do we even have that kind of thought for the people we love, let alone the bugs and the insects and the fish and the people we do not like? Do we even have that thought for the people we care about? Even the people we care about, what is our first thought? "What can they do to make me happy?"

What do you think? Is that your thought about people you care about? Is that underlying some of your care and affection for family members and friends – "What can they do that will make me happy?"?

When you look at it, we are pretty self-centered, aren't we? Everything revolves around *me, I, my and mine*. What can somebody do that is going to make me happy? What can they do that will give me more possessions? What can they do that will praise me and make me feel loved and appreciated? That is what we look for in other people.

All that has to be changed and transformed. Instead of putting our mental energy into 'What can other people do for me?', we are going to put our mental energy into 'What can I do for them?' And in particular: 'How can I become enlightened quickly so that I can benefit them most effectively?'

If we do not generate bodhicitta, what are we going to do?

There is a lot of transformation we need to do to actualize this bodhicitta, but what else are we going to do in our life other than this?

Sometimes when I teach, people look at me and say: "The Dharma is so hard! Can't you make it easier? I want something easier. It's just too hard! I have so much attachment. I have so much anger. I really want to harm my enemies. Can't you make me enlightened and enable me to harm my enemies at the same time?" [laughter] It is so funny the way we think sometimes.

So we think: "I can't do it! I'm just little old me. I'm just too selfish to become a bodhisattva." We lack self-confidence.

Or sometimes we think the path is too hard. "It's too hard to practice the Dharma. The Buddha gave his body to a tiger! I don't want to do that. I can't even give a few drops of blood to a mosquito! I don't want to give my body to a tiger. In fact I can't even say anything nice to somebody who harmed me. So the path is just too hard! I can't do it." We get discouraged that way.

Or we get discouraged because we think the result is too high: "Enlightenment? Caring for all sentient beings? There are too many sentient beings. I can't think of them all. It just clutters my mind. How can I think of all sentient beings? I just want to free myself from cyclic existence. Thinking about everybody else? Too difficult! Taking care of all sentient beings? Too hard, I can't do that!"

So we sit there and we make up all these stories why we cannot practice bodhicitta. But my question is: If we do not practice bodhicitta, then what are we going to do?

What are we going to do if we do not practice bodhicitta? We are going to practice attachment. Does attachment bring happiness? Does attachment make you create good karma? No.

If we do not practice bodhicitta, what else could we do? We could practice anger! We could retaliate against all those idiots who criticized us! All those people who talked behind our back. All those mean nasty people that get in the way of our happiness. Is harming them going to make us happy? Are we going to create good karma doing that? Are we going to have a peaceful death if we spend our whole life harming our enemies? Forget it! We are just creating the cause for our own misery.

What else can we do if we do not practice bodhicitta? We can practice being selfish and just think about ourselves all day, all night! What is good for me is the most important thing in all the myriad universes. It is *me* and how *I* can get what *I* want, what makes me feel good. We can practice that. We have been practicing that from beginningless time!

Ignorance, attachment, anger, selfishness – we have been practicing these for eons without beginning. Look where it has gotten us. Where has it gotten us? We are still in samsara! We are still on this merry-go-round going up and down in samsara, getting born, getting old, getting sick and dying. And getting born again and getting sick and old and die, and so on. It's boring!

Samsara is really boring! You do the same thing over and over again and you are miserable and you have been doing it from beginningless time. That is the alternative to practicing bodhicitta. Is that what we want? Think about it.

If we do not practice bodhicitta, what else are we going to do? There is nothing else to do. Nothing!

You could say: "No, there is! I can make money! Forget about bodhicitta, I want to make money! Then I'll be successful. I'll be famous. People will respect me and think I'm important."

Well, you know, we have had beginningless rebirths in cyclic existence, we have made a lot of money in cyclic existence already. If we add up all the money that we have made in all of our previous lives, we would be richer than the richest person alive now. We have made tons of money in previous lives! Where has it gotten us? We are still in samsara! Making money is not a very happy alternative.

So think about it. If we do not develop loving kindness, if we do not try and realize emptiness, every other alternative is not very good. When we think that way, then all these little rationalizations why we cannot practice the Dharma vanish because we realize they do not hold water.

It is just our melodramatic mind saying: "I can't do it! Please Buddha, make the path easier." As if Buddha made it hard to start with! The Buddha did not make the path hard. It is our mind that makes the path hard. The Dharma is not hard; it is our mind that makes it hard.

So the moment this bodhicitta arises, the moment we have the wish to attain enlightenment whenever we see any sentient being, then in that very instant a wretch who is bound in the prison of cyclic existence – that refers to us – is called a child of the Sugatas and becomes worthy of reverence in the worlds of gods and humans.

What an incredible transformation! A wretch who is just going up and down in cyclic existence from beginningless time, all of a sudden becomes a child of the Buddhas. All of a

sudden becomes somebody worthy of veneration in all three worlds. Incredible transformation! And it is the bodhicitta that brings that about.

Chapter 1 Verse 10

“Upon taking this impure form, it transmutes it into the priceless image of the gem of the Jina. So, firmly hold to the quicksilver elixir, called the Spirit of Awakening, which must be utterly transmuted.”

‘The Jina’ refers to the Buddha. Jina means the conqueror. A Buddha is a conqueror because a Buddha has conquered all the defilements.

So we take this ‘impure form’, in other words, this body made of flesh and blood, and transmutes it into the image of ‘the gem of the Jina’. Our body gets transformed when we generate the bodhicitta, when we realize emptiness propelled by bodhicitta.

It is the bodhicitta that enables us to transmute this flesh and blood body into a body of light, into the body of a Buddha, a Buddha who can emanate so many different forms pervading the whole universe manifesting as whatever thing any particular sentient being needs at any particular time. What a wonderful thing to be able to do! And it is the bodhicitta that will enable us to do that.

Chapter 1 Verse 11

“The world’s sole leaders, whose minds are fathomless, have well examined its great value. You who are inclined to escape from the states of mundane existence, hold fast to the jewel of the Spirit of Awakening.”

“The world’s sole leaders”, that is, the Buddhas, ‘whose minds are fathomless’, that is, who understands all of existence, have examined the value of bodhicitta.

‘You who are inclined to escape from the states of mundane existence’, that is, for those of us who want to be free of cyclic existence, ‘hold fast to the jewel of the Spirit of Awakening’ which is the bodhicitta.

Chapter 1 Verse 12

“Just as a plantain tree decays upon losing its fruit, so does every other virtue wane. But the tree of the Spirit of Awakening perpetually bears fruit, does not decay, and only flourishes.”

There is a tree called the plantain tree. After it bears the fruit, it dies. It fizzles. Its strength is sapped. In the same way, any kind of ordinary virtue that we create, if it is not motivated by bodhicitta, if it is not dedicated for enlightenment, it brings a result but then it stops. The power of that virtue stops.

Whereas if we do a virtuous action motivated by the bodhicitta, the power of that good karma never ceases. Why does it never cease? Because the bodhicitta is aimed for the benefit of all sentient beings. All sentient beings are limitless. Whatever small virtue we do – offering an apple to the Buddha, helping an old person to stand up – anything you do with the motivation of bodhicitta, that virtue never ceases. That action, even if it is a small

action, becomes so powerful because it was done in order to attain enlightenment for each and every sentient being.

So it is this bodhicitta that enables us to change the smallest, most common daily life actions into the biggest virtue imaginable, the results of which will never cease.

On the other hand, if we do a virtuous action but our thought is: 'I want a good rebirth', well, then that virtuous action will bring the result of a good rebirth and then that's it. Or if we do a virtuous action with the intention that it will help us attain liberation, it will bring liberation and that is it.

But if we do an action with the motivation of bodhicitta, even if you wash the dishes but you do it with the motivation of bodhicitta, you are creating virtue that never ends because it is dedicated for the highest enlightenment and it is motivated by the wish to help limitless living beings.

Unlike the plantain tree which dies after bearing fruit (like an ordinary virtue), the bodhicitta is like a tree that keeps bearing fruit limitlessly.

Chapter 1 Verse 13

"Owing to its protection, as due to the protection of a powerful man, even after committing horrendous vices, one immediately overcomes great fears. Why do ignorant beings not seek refuge in it?"

Let's say somebody commits a horrible negative action and they are very afraid that the police will come and get them. So what do they do? They take refuge in somebody who is very powerful who will protect them from the police.

We have created all sorts of negative karma. Maybe we have done all ten of the negative actions. I don't know about you, but I have, even in this life, created all ten of them, not once but many times!

'Even after committing horrendous vices, one immediately overcomes great fears'. So instead of having fear of a lower rebirth, instead of fearing that we will have a suffering existence after we die, or instead of fearing that even if we are born human, we will be born impoverished or have tremendous health problems, by taking refuge in the bodhicitta, in other words by generating bodhicitta, then we are safe from all these great fears.

So then Shantideva says: "Why do ignorant beings not seek refuge in it?" Bodhicitta has the power to protect us from the results of our negative karma. Why don't we generate bodhicitta? You can go to the King. You can go to a government official. You can go to a rich person. But none of those people can prevent us from experiencing the results of our own negative karma. But if we practice bodhicitta, even just in small actions, that purifies the negative karma. That is how powerful the bodhicitta is.

Chapter 1 Verse 14

"Like the conflagration at the time of the destruction of the universe, it consumes great vices in an instant. The wise Lord Maitreya taught its incalculable benefits to Sudhana."

They say that the end of the universe will come when a huge fire consumes it. (This is talking in particular about our universe. There are many universes and there is no

beginning or end to the many different universes that there are.) That huge fire will completely burn up everything – all the rocks, the entire planet, even the sun. Everything will burn.

In the same way, bodhicitta is so powerful that any kind of negative karma is burnt in an instant by the power of the virtue of that bodhicitta thought. If we have done things in our life that we have a lot of regret for and we want to purify those negative actions because we do not want to experience the results of them, we do not want the weight of that negative karma on our mindstream, then generating bodhicitta, meditating on bodhicitta is one of the most powerful ways to do that.

If you suffer from guilt or self-hatred, practicing bodhicitta is the best way to stop those psychological problems because it purifies all that negative karma. When we purify the negative karma, then there is nothing to feel guilty about. There is nothing to feel ashamed of. The mind becomes very joyful.

Chapter 1 Verse 15

“In brief, this Spirit of Awakening is known to be of two kinds: the spirit of aspiring for Awakening, and the spirit of venturing toward Awakening.”

There are two kinds of bodhicitta. One is called aspiring bodhicitta and the other is called venturing or engaging bodhicitta.

How do we differentiate between the two types of bodhicitta?

Aspiring bodhicitta aspires to become a Buddha for the benefit of sentient beings.

Engaging bodhicitta engages in the bodhisattva’s actions that will actually lead us to full enlightenment. What are those bodhisattva actions? They are the six paramitas or perfections or far-reaching attitudes: generosity, ethical discipline, patience, joyous effort, meditative stabilization and wisdom. Sometimes they are extended to ten, in which case we add on power, vows or prayer, skilful means and exalted wisdom to make ten. The last four are subsumed in the sixth one when we talk of six paramitas.

The engaging bodhicitta engages in all those deeds that will move us from where we are now to being a fully enlightened Buddha.

Here is an analogy of the difference between aspiring and venturing bodhicitta. Let’s say you want to go to Bodhgaya, the place where the Buddha attained enlightenment. You can sit here in Singapore with this tremendous aspiration: “I want to go to Bodhgaya. I want to see the bodhi tree and sit in the place where the Buddha sat. I want to be in that holy atmosphere.”

That is a very positive wish, isn’t it? You need to have that wish, that aspiration before you go and buy a ticket and get on a plane and go to India. If you do not have that aspiration, you are never going to do what it takes to get yourself to Bodhgaya.

But the aspiration alone will not get you to Bodhgaya. You have to do something, don’t you? You have to call the travel agent. You have to arrange the ticket. And then you fly to Delhi. From Delhi you have to get to Gaya. From Gaya you have to get to Bodhgaya. And then you have to get yourself to the stupa.

So there is a lot of effort that is entailed to get yourself under the Bodhi tree where the Buddha attained enlightenment. That is like the venturing bodhicitta because it involves actually making effort to actualize our aspiration.

Do you see the difference between these two bodhicittas? The aspiring bodhicitta says: "How wonderful it will be to become a Buddha!" But we are still sitting here. Engaging bodhicitta says: "How wonderful it will be to become a Buddha. I'm doing it!" The engaging bodhicitta is practicing the bodhisattva deeds and that is what motivates us to actually take the bodhisattva vows.

In the Tibetan tradition, there are eighteen root bodhisattva vows and forty-six auxiliary ones. In the Chinese Mahayana tradition, there are ten root bodhicitta vows and forty-eight auxiliary ones. Whichever version you take, the important thing is to practice, because it will lead you to generating bodhicitta and to full enlightenment.

Chapter 1 Verse 16

"Just as one perceives the difference between a person who yearns to travel and a traveler, so do the learned recognize the corresponding difference between those two."

Just as we see the difference between a person who yearns to travel and somebody who actually does it, so also is there a difference between the person who aspires for enlightenment and the person who, based on that aspiration, does the practices of the six far-reaching attitudes that lead to enlightenment. Again we are emphasizing the difference between aspiring bodhicitta and venturing bodhicitta.

Chapter 1 Verse 17

"Although the result of the spirit of aspiring for Awakening is great within the cycle of existence, it is still not like the continual state of merit of the spirit of venturing."

The result of the spirit of aspiring for awakening is great within cyclic existence. Just aspiring for enlightenment is very good. It will bring us rebirth in the god realms, in the celestial realms or in the human realms. But it still does not enable us to create the continual state of merit or the continual state of positive potential that the engaging bodhicitta allows us to create.

When we have the venturing bodhicitta, then everything we do is motivated by that bodhicitta, so everything we are doing, even if we are drinking a cup of tea, even if we are sleeping, becomes a cause for enlightenment.

Just think about it. If you really like sleeping, sleep with bodhicitta. If you really like eating, eat with bodhicitta. Anything we do with bodhicitta brings all these immeasurable, wonderful results. The continual state of positive potential never ends when we have that bodhicitta mind.

Chapter 1 Verses 18 & 19

“From the time that one adopts that Spirit with an irreversible attitude for the sake of liberating limitless sentient beings,”

“From that moment on, an uninterrupted stream of merit, equal to the sky, constantly arises even when one is asleep or distracted.”

When we have the bodhicitta with an irreversible attitude, it means that our bodhicitta is so strong that we are not going to lose it. First of all, for us ordinary beings, when we try and think about bodhicitta, our bodhicitta is what is called effortful bodhicitta or artificial bodhicitta. In other words we have to sit there and think about it and talk ourselves into opening our heart and having love and compassion. We have to think about the different meditations and put some effort into generating bodhicitta.

When our bodhicitta becomes effortless, when we have the thought to want to attain enlightenment for a sentient being upon seeing that sentient being, at that point, we enter the first of the five Mahayana paths – the Mahayana path of accumulation. At that point, we become an actual bodhisattva. But at that point we are still a baby bodhisattva even though our bodhicitta is spontaneous, because it is not yet totally stable. It is not yet irreversible. If we meet certain unfortunate circumstances, there is still danger that we lose the bodhicitta because the self-centered thought in us has not been eradicated completely.

But at a certain point on the bodhisattva path, our bodhicitta becomes so firm that it is irreversible. We are no longer in danger of losing it. At that point, from that moment on, an uninterrupted stream of merit or positive potential equal to the sky constantly arises even when one is asleep or distracted.

So the virtue that a bodhisattva creates is equal to the sky in every single moment, even if that bodhisattva is distracted, even if they are eating breakfast, even if they are asleep, because everything they are doing is done for the benefit of sentient beings. Even if the bodhisattva is sweeping the floor, it becomes a continual stream of positive potential.

Chapter 1 Verse 20

“The Tathagata himself cogently asserted this in the Subahuprccha for the sake of beings who are inclined toward the Lesser Vehicle.”

The ‘Tathagata’ refers to the Buddha. The Buddha himself said that a continual stream of positive potential is created when one has irreversible bodhicitta. He described it in the *Subahuprccha* sutra for the benefit of beings who are inclined to attain liberation for their own benefit.

Like I was saying before, some beings have the thought of: “Enlightenment is too high. I just want to get liberated for myself. It’s hard enough stopping my own suffering. I can’t think about *all* sentient beings.” For people who are inclined towards their own liberation and do not have the aspiration for full enlightenment for the benefit of others, the Buddha taught them in this sutra that this magnificent result – a continual stream of positive potential – is created by the thought of bodhicitta.

Chapter 1 Verse 21 & 22

“A well-intentioned person who thinks, ‘I shall eliminate the headaches of sentient beings,’ bears immeasurable merit.”

“What then of a person who desires to remove the incomparable pain of every single being and endow them with immeasurable good qualities?”

There is a story of the Buddha in a previous life when he was an ordinary sentient being. One time he was angry at his mother. He barged out the door and stepped over his mother’s head. He created a tremendous amount of negative karma by doing that, which caused him to be reborn in the hell realm. He was born in a particular hell realm where the beings’ heads get sliced off or compressed or something like that.

So he was in that particular hell realm together with some other beings who were also experiencing that very painful result. Then he thought: “As long as I’m experiencing all this pain in my head, may I take on the suffering of all these other beings who are also experiencing having their head crushed and sawed off and things like that.”

By the power of that virtuous thought of wanting to take on the suffering of the others that he saw around him, his rebirth in hell ended immediately and he was reborn as a deva in the celestial realms.

That is how strong that compassionate attitude is. It completely purifies the remainder of that negative karma and he had a very happy rebirth after that.

So if just a compassionate thought for a few sentient beings bring that kind of good result, then what about the thought that says: “I will remove the incomparable pain of every single being and endow them with immeasurable good qualities”? If such a good result comes from a small thought of compassion, imagine the positive potential and the good results that come from this very large, pervasive sense of compassion that accompanies bodhicitta.

So here Shantideva is really telling us to look at the benefits of bodhicitta. It is very worthwhile to develop bodhicitta.

Chapter 1 Verse 23

“Who has even a mother or father with such altruism? Would the gods, sages, or Brahmas have it?”

This verse always touches me a lot ever since I first studied this text. When we think of the people who have been kind to us, we often think of our parents, don’t we? Our parents gave us this body. They brought us up and gave us an education. They took care of us when we were too young to take care of ourselves. Parents always love their children. Sure, they may get mad at us from time to time, but they always love us.

I work with prisoners and some of the guys I write to have done really horrendous crimes. But you know what? Their mothers always love them. I talked to one mother whose son murdered somebody in a senseless crime. But that mother only saw her son as a wonderful person. She said: “Yes, he did this crime. But that’s not who he is. He is really a wonderful person.”

Parents have so much compassion for their kids. When we ask ourselves who are the people we can always rely on, we will think of our parents. But do our parents have the wish for us to become enlightened for the benefit of all beings? Do our parents have that noble wish and aspiration for us?

When we think about it, our parents mostly want us to have a good education, make a lot of money, have a family, go to nice places on vacation. Our parents only see things in terms of one life. So although they wish us well, all they can wish for us is the happiness of this life. But the happiness of this life is like fog on a mirror. It vanishes just like that. It is gone!

So even our parents do not think: “May my child become a Buddha”, because our parents do not even think about Buddhahood. They are thinking: “Please get married to somebody nice and have some kids and get a good job and make a lot of money.” That is what they are thinking. And yet they are the people who are kindest to us in a worldly sense.

So even these people who are so kind to us in a worldly sense do not have that wish for our highest happiness that the Buddhas and bodhisattvas have; the Buddhas and bodhisattvas really wish for us to become enlightened. That is why it says: who else has such altruism? Certainly not our parents and nor the guards nor the non-Buddhist sages nor the Brahma gods. None of them has that kind of compassion for us.

Share the Dharma with your children

So actually if you are a parent, if you really love your children, the best thing you can wish for your kids is: ‘May they become a Buddha for the benefit of all sentient beings.’ If you really love your children and want them to be happy, wish for them to meet the Buddha’s teachings and practice the Buddha’s teachings and actualize bodhicitta. That is the most wonderful aspiration you could have for your child, because then your child will become the source of benefit and happiness for not just this world but all worlds. So really encourage your children in the Dharma.

Sometimes I meet parents who are so afraid to talk about the Dharma to their children: “I don’t want to push my children. So I won’t teach them any religious values.”

That is not good. Children need religious values. Sure, when they are older they are free to choose whatever religion they want, but when they are young, they need good ethical values.

Little kids always ask: “What happens after you die?” They ask all these kinds of questions, so you’ve got to teach them the Dharma. If you just say: “Oh, I don’t know” or you change the subject, you are denying them the opportunity to learn something very important that could make their lives highly meaningful.

So do not be afraid to talk about the Dharma with your kids. You do not need to push them, but you can certainly talk about the Dharma in your family conversations and you can certainly encourage your kids to practice the Dharma.

I really wish as a teenager I had known the Dharma, because it would have helped me so much during my teenage years. I don’t know about you but I was really a mess when I was a teenager. I was crying. I was depressed. I was angry. I felt unloved. I was really a mess! And I didn’t know the Dharma. There was no Buddhism in the environment I grew up in. If I had known the Dharma at that time, I wouldn’t have had such a painful adolescent period. Why? Because the Dharma teaches us how to deal with all these crazy emotions that we experience.

So I think you being Buddhist parents, teach your kids! Let them encounter these wonderful teachings that can really help them in their daily life. And then also as a parent, model the Dharma. Got to practice yourself.

Chapter 1 Verse 24

“If those beings have never before had that wish for their own sake even in their dreams, how could they possibly have it for the sake of others?”

If all those beings who have been kind to us – our parents, our lovers, our friends, all of our dear ones – if they have never even had the thought for themselves to become fully enlightened, then they would never have that thought for us or anybody else to attain full enlightenment. All these people wish us well, but because they do not know the Dharma, their love is so limited and their good wishes for us is very limited.

Chapter 1 Verse 25

“How does this unprecedented and distinguished jewel, whose desire for the benefit of others does not arise in others even for their own self-interest, come into existence?”

Shantideva is marveling here... this wonderful bodhicitta, this jewel of a mind which does not even arise in sentient beings' own minds for their own benefit, for their own self-interest – how does it come into existence? How marvelous and miraculous that bodhicitta can arise in our minds!

Chapter 1 Verse 26

“How can one measure the merit of the jewel of the mind, which is the seed of the world's joy and is the remedy for the world's suffering?”

This is what I was saying before, that the bodhicitta is the seed of joy for all living beings because all virtuous actions can eventually be traced back to somebody, somewhere who has the bodhicitta.

It is due to the bodhicitta that somebody became a Buddha, due to the Buddha that the teachings were given, due to the teachings that we know how to do even one small virtuous action. So it all traces to the bodhicitta. The bodhicitta is the source of the world's joy and the remedy for the world's suffering.

So many people tell me: “I watch the six o'clock news and it's so depressing! There's murder and rape and social injustice and inequality.” Even our government officials and the CEOs of companies are corrupt, at least in America where I live. People are just losing faith in other human beings and they tend to feel a sense of despair and hopelessness.

But if you think about the bodhicitta and you know that the bodhicitta is the remedy for the world's suffering, then you do not feel despair and hopelessness anymore because you know that there is a remedy for the whole thing. And the bodhicitta is that remedy. And you know that you can realize the bodhicitta because you know that there is a step-by-step method that the Buddha outlined to transform our ordinary mind into the mind of a bodhisattva.

When I first encounter the Dharma, this is something that I appreciated so much. The Buddha did not just say: "Don't be angry." He taught us step by step how to think, so that we can dispel our anger. The Buddha did not just say: "Love thy neighbor as thyself." He taught us step by step how to meditate, how to think, so that we can love other people no matter how they treat us. So there is a real method in the Buddha's teachings. How fortunate we are to meet them!

I do not have time tonight to go through all the steps about how to generate the bodhicitta, but that will come in the following chapters, so you got to come back next year and then we will go into more detail about how to actually cultivate it. In the meantime, there are other teachers in Singapore that you can learn bodhicitta from. Also if you go to the website www.thubtenchodron.org, under the *lamrim* section, there are many talks and information on bodhicitta that you can listen to or read.

Chapter 1 Verse 27

"If reverence for the Buddhas is exceeded merely by an altruistic intention, how much more so by striving for the complete happiness of all sentient beings?"

Imagine that you have the ability to offer skies or oceans of skies full of offerings to an immeasurable number of Buddhas. That would create a lot of good karma, wouldn't it? That kind of good karma is superceded just by the aspiring bodhicitta. If the good karma of making oceans of skies of offerings to infinite Buddhas is exceeded by just the aspiring bodhicitta, then how much more so would it be exceeded by the venturing bodhicitta that is really engaged in the practice of the path to attain enlightenment.

Chapter 1 Verse 28

"Those desiring to escape from suffering hasten right toward suffering. With the very desire for happiness, out of delusion they destroy their own happiness as if it were an enemy."

This verse is also one of the verses that has affected me so powerfully.

When you think about it, nobody wants suffering. Everybody wants happiness. But we are so confused in our ignorance that in our attempt to be happy, we create negative karma which is the cause for more suffering. That is how confused we are. That is what this verse is saying.

'Those desiring to escape from suffering' refers to ordinary beings who do not want misery. Yet they hasten towards suffering. How is this so? Because they do not know the Dharma, all the things they do to try and stop their suffering create negative karma instead.

For example, if we are very poor, what do we do to stop our suffering and poverty? We steal. Does stealing create the cause for suffering or happiness? Stealing creates the cause for suffering, doesn't it?

When we are suffering because somebody insulted us, what do we do? We insult that person back. Does that create the cause for happiness or suffering? It is the cause of suffering.

So you see how even though we want happiness, because we do not understand karma, what to practice and what to avoid, we are constantly creating the cause for misery.

You look at the terrorists. Everybody is so concerned about terrorism. Terrorists just want to be happy. They are just people who are trying to be happy, but they are so confused about the cause of happiness and the cause of suffering that they think engaging in terrorist activities will bring them happiness. Does that bring them happiness? No! They create so much negative karma. Sometimes they even kill themselves doing a terrorist activity. Certainly it does not bring them happiness. But that is the level of confusion these sentient beings have. That is why Shantideva is saying 'we hasten towards suffering'. We are so confused.

'With the very desire for happiness, out of delusion, they destroy their own happiness as if it were an enemy.' If we really think about this, when we think about this in terms of our own life, when we review our life and look at the actions we have done in our life and look at the motivations or why we did those different actions, so often we see that in our attempt to be happy, because we were so confused, we did such stupid, foolish things that harmed other people and that created negative karma for ourselves.

When we see that, we have got to have compassion for ourselves, because we can understand how foolish, how ignorant we were to have done those harmful and cruel actions in our attempt to be happy. Instead of judging ourselves, instead of feeling guilty, instead of feeling ashamed and being judgmental about ourselves, we have some compassion for the person that we were that was so ignorant and did those actions.

If we can have compassion for ourselves that way, then we can also have compassion for all the other living beings who foolishly create so much negative karma and do so many rude, obnoxious and even cruel things in the midst of their delusion and confusion.

When we look at things this way, it becomes impossible to hate others. Totally impossible! It does not matter what somebody does, you cannot hate them because you realize that what they did, they did under the power of their own ignorant mind. How can you hate somebody who has no control over their own ignorant mind? The only possible response towards such a person is compassion. It's the only response. So when we think like that, we free our mind from hatred. We free our mind from judgment and anger.

Chapter 1 Verse 29

"He satisfies with all joys those who are starving for happiness and eliminates all the sorrows of those who are afflicted in many ways."

This verse is talking about a bodhisattva. A bodhisattva is the total opposite of the kind of confused being that we usually are. A bodhisattva satisfies with all joys those who are starving for happiness.

How does a bodhisattva do that? Well, if a bodhisattva has the opportunity to give food to the hungry or a house to the homeless, or become a friend to somebody who is lonely, a bodhisattva does that. But the best way a bodhisattva benefits is by teaching the Dharma to sentient beings. That is why they say the gift of the Dharma excels all other gifts. If we want to be able to give the gift of the Dharma, we have to practice the Dharma and actualize it in our own mind. The bodhicitta is what enables us to do that.

A bodhisattva eliminates all sorrows of those who are afflicted in many ways. So we can trust the bodhisattvas. If we have faith in them and if we follow the teachings that they give, our suffering will definitely come to an end. If we just sit and pray to them, our suffering will not come to an end. If we just sit and go: "Kuan Yin, you are the Goddess of Mercy. I'm miserable. Kuan Yin, please get rid of my misery. In the meantime, I'm going to

watch television, but please you purify my negative karma. Please change all the negative circumstances in my life. And if you bring me happiness, I'll offer you some apples."
[laughter]

This is not the way we should be! We are not going to get anywhere just by praying. Praying is good but we have to act! We cannot just request Kuan Yin and Manjushri and all the other Buddhas and bodhisattvas to save us from suffering but in the meantime, we watch television. I mean, come on, we got to help them somehow! Sometimes I have the image of these bodhisattvas dragging us kicking and screaming to enlightenment. It is like we are saying: "But wait a minute! I want to stay in samsara. I don't want to give up my attachment!"

The Buddhas and bodhisattvas are dragging us and we are like these little infants kicking and screaming and saying: "No! No! I don't want to be a Buddha! I want to stay in samsara and be miserable!" [laughter] But the bodhisattvas do not desert us. They just keep dragging us towards enlightenment. My goodness! We really cause them many headaches, don't we? So maybe we should have some compassion for Kuan Yin instead of always asking Kuan Yin to have compassion for us? Maybe we should try being nice to Kuan Yin for a change and make Kuan Yin's job easier by listening to the teachings and starting to practice them?

Chapter 1 Verse 30

"He dispels delusion. Where else is there such a saint? Where else is there such a friend? Where else is there such merit?"

A bodhisattva can dispel delusion by teaching us emptiness, by teaching us dependent arising. That is the best gift a bodhisattva can give us. Where else is there such a saint? Who else can be a better friend to us than a bodhisattva? A bodhisattva gives us the tools so that we stop our own mental suffering. When we give up ignorance, attachment and anger, then it is impossible to suffer anymore. Even if everybody hates us and everybody says to us: "Go to hell! Go to hell! Go to hell!" If we do not have ignorance, attachment and anger, we are not going to go to hell.

On the other hand, even if everybody loves us and says: "Go to heaven! Go to heaven! Go to heaven!" if we do not create any good karma, this is impossible! Because happiness and suffering come from our own mind.

Chapter 1 Verse 31

"Even one who repays a kind deed is praised somewhat, so what should be said of a Bodhisattva whose good deed is unsolicited?"

When people are kind, they are praised, aren't they? If even a person who does a small kindness receives a lot of praise and acknowledgement, then what about a bodhisattva who helps without even being asked?

The reason we praise them is not because they need praise. When you are a Buddha or a bodhisattva, you do not need somebody to praise you because you do not have an ego problem. We ordinary beings like praise because we have ego problems.

The holy beings do not have ego problems. When we praise them, it is not for their benefit. It is for our benefit because when we praise them, we are opening our mind to understanding their qualities.

When we open our mind to understanding their qualities, then we are much more likely to create the causes to attain and cultivate those same qualities within ourselves. That is why we offer praise.

Chapter 1 Verse 32 & 33

"The world honors as virtuous one who makes a gift to a few people, even if it is merely a momentary and contemptuous donation of plain food and support for half a day."

"What then of one who forever bestows to countless sentient beings the fulfillment of all yearnings, which is inexhaustible until the end of beings as limitless as space?"

In our world, if people give small momentary gifts to others, we think that they are great even when they are arrogant, condescending and contemptuous. We praise those people. Even if they had a bad motivation, even if they helped just a few people, still, what they did is good and they are praised.

If that is the case, what then about somebody who helps countless sentient beings – not just a few sentient beings but countless sentient beings – and who helps them to not just have one small happiness like having dinner on one day but to have the greatest happiness which is the freedom from all suffering forever?

Helping countless living beings have the greatest happiness which is inexhaustible till the end of beings as limitless as space – that is pretty big, isn't it? Well, that is exactly what a Buddha does. That is exactly what a bodhisattva is aiming for. So if we praise somebody who is kind in a small way, then think about the tremendous kindness that the bodhicitta enables a bodhisattva and a Buddha to bestow upon everybody. And so seeing the great benefits of bodhicitta, may we develop it and cultivate it in our own minds.

Chapter 1 Verse 34

"The Lord declared, 'One who brings forth an impure thought in his heart against a benefactor, a Child of the Jina, will dwell in hells for as many eons as there were impure thoughts.'"

'The Lord' refers to the Buddha.

Somebody who is a bodhisattva is our benefactor because he is kind to us. He is a Child of the Jina or a Child of the Buddha. What this verse means is if we have a negative mind towards this bodhisattva and criticize and blame him or gossip about him, then we are creating incredible negative karma ourselves. Why? Because this person is working for the benefit of countless sentient beings. When we inhibit their good deeds, we are inhibiting the happiness of all sentient beings. That is why it creates such negative karma to have impure thoughts or to interfere in the virtuous actions of a bodhisattva.

Chapter 1 Verse 35

"But if one's mind is kindly inclined, one will bring forth an even greater fruit. Even when a greatly violent crime is committed against the Children of the Jinās, their virtue spontaneously arises."

This is the thing. When a bodhisattva is harmed, the bodhisattva will not retaliate. The Buddha will not hold a grudge. Instead the bodhisattva will pray: "May I lead this person to enlightenment."

So even if we in our stupidity create negative karma in relation to a bodhisattva by interfering with their virtuous deeds or criticizing them, still there is some benefit derived from our contact with that bodhisattva because that bodhisattva will sincerely pray: "May I lead this sentient being to enlightenment. By the contact we are having now, even though this sentient being is harming me, in the future, when that sentient being is born in a different situation, may I lead him or her to enlightenment."

Do you understand what I am saying? Even if we have a negative interaction with a bodhisattva, we still benefit by the power of their great compassion. This is the power of bodhicitta.

Chapter 1 Verse 36

"I pay homage to the bodies of those in whom this precious jewel of the mind has arisen. I go for refuge to those who are mines of joy, toward whom even an offense results in happiness."

This is Shantideva's summary of this chapter. Shantideva is paying homage to all these Buddhas and bodhisattvas in whom the precious jewel of the mind of bodhicitta has arisen. He goes for refuge to those who are the mines or treasures of joy, so much so that even a negative action will result in happiness in the long term by the power of that bodhisattva making a prayer to have a strong karmic link with the person who does the negative action towards them. That is the power of the goodness of bodhicitta.

This first chapter is Shantideva's encouragement to us to really make the generation of bodhicitta the foremost thing in our life. Remember I was saying the other evening that when you first wake up in the morning, think what is the most important thing to do. First, not to harm others. Second, to benefit them as much as possible. And third, to hold this bodhicitta mind no matter what happens during the day. When we cultivate bodhicitta again and again, it will lead to these wonderful results not only for ourselves but for all countless living beings.

So we finished the first chapter. We have a few minutes for some questions.

Questions and Answers

[Audience:] I understand that Sravasti Abbey conducts a three-month retreat every winter. Please share the most recent experiences of the retreat. Will there be a retreat again next year? Can Singaporeans participate?

[Ven. Chodron:] At the abbey every winter, it snows and it is so beautiful to meditate in the snow. So we close the abbey to visitors, or should I say, all the visitors come before the retreat, and then we all do retreat for three months. During this retreat, we do six meditation sessions a day. Each meditation session is about one and a quarter hours. A couple of them are an hour and a half. We do the retreat together as a group in the meditation hall. The group energy is tremendous because people are practicing in silence although they may guide a meditation or lead a motivation. Speaking occurs in that kind of way but there is no chit-chat or that kind of stuff during the retreat.

People have had incredible experiences the last two years when we did these retreats. It has been a very life transforming experience for people, because how often in your life do you have the opportunity to do three months of retreat in a place with really perfect conditions where it is very quiet, where other people are cooking and taking care of you, where there is a question and answer session and supportive friends and a teacher to guide you? So people have had very good retreats.

What we also do is, some people do the retreat from afar. Not everybody can take off of work for three months, so some people do the retreat from afar in the sense of instead of doing six meditation sessions everyday, they do one. For three months, they do the same practice as we are doing but for one meditation session everyday. This last year, we had almost eighty people doing the retreat from afar in that way. Twenty of them were prisoners. And it was quite amazing. We had people internationally from so many countries doing the retreat with us from afar.

So yes, we will be having it again in all the subsequent years and certainly Singaporeans can come. It will be a change for you living in the snow, but it is fine and if you wish to do that, you can go to the website (www.sravastiabbey.org) and there is information about it. This coming year (end of 2006), the retreat is going to be on Chenrezig, the Buddha of compassion or Kuan Yin.

[Audience:] You mentioned that a person is arrogant because they are insecure. How then do we deal with this person when they become difficult?

[Ven. Chodron:] Practice patience. That is taught in chapter six. Just practicing patience with them; that is the only thing to do. Do not react to their arrogance. [More explanation available in the previous day's Q&A session.]

[Audience:] Other religions also teach compassion. Is this the same as bodhicitta? Is Mother Teresa a bodhisattva?

[Ven. Chodron:] Yes, other religions teach compassion. But compassion alone is not bodhicitta. Why? Compassion can be for one person. Bodhicitta is for all sentient beings. Compassion can be a small compassion wanting somebody who is sick to be well, wanting somebody who is hungry to have food, wanting somebody who is depressed to be happy. Compassion can also be much bigger, for example wanting somebody who is stuck in cyclic existence to be free of cyclic existence.

We can see that there is a difference between compassion and bodhicitta because compassion is a cause for bodhicitta. Compassion can be for one sentient being. Compassion does not necessarily have the wish for everybody to be free of suffering. Compassion does not have to be towards all sentient beings. Compassion does not have to motivate somebody to want to attain enlightenment for the benefit of all beings. Compassion may motivate somebody to be kind, but being kind does not mean doing all of the six paramitas or perfections which lead to enlightenment.

So bodhicitta is much more vast in scope than compassion. But compassion is definitely important and is the cause for bodhicitta. We should honor and respect anybody who practices compassion. We should honor and respect any teaching of compassion no matter what religion it is in because it is something good. It is teaching kindness. It does not matter who said it.

Is Mother Teresa a bodhisattva? I have no idea. I cannot tell anybody else' level of mind. She might be; she might not be. She has certainly helped many sentient beings.

The Dalai Lama... people ask: "Is he a bodhisattva?" I cannot tell you; I believe he is and I can see the benefit he does for sentient beings.

But I think the issue for us is not who is a bodhisattva, meaning other people, but 'Am I a bodhisattva? And if I am not, how can I become one?' That is much more important for us.

Conclusion and dedication

So you have been a very wonderful audience and some of you have made an effort to come every single night of the teachings. I am sure you have missed some good television programs and maybe you have to combat some drowsiness during the teachings to stay awake and listen to them. No matter whether you have come to one, two, three or four of these evenings of teachings, I am sure you have created a lot of positive potential that will be very beneficial for your mind in this life and bring many good results in future lives. And hopefully because of having planted the seeds of seeing the benefits of bodhicitta, hopefully through that we will all generate the aspiration to generate bodhicitta and from there, the aspiration to become fully enlightened Buddhas for the benefit of all sentient beings.

Let's just sit quietly for a moment and let's just dedicate all these incredible positive potential we have created from just thinking about bodhicitta. Let's send it out and dedicate it to all the infinite sentient beings.

Imagine the light of bodhicitta, the light of our positive potential radiating out from our heart filling the entire universe as we dedicate our positive potential so that each and every living being may generate bodhicitta and become a fully enlightened Buddha.

Thank you all very much.