Chapter 1 The Benefits of Bodhichitta

The *Bodhicharyāvatāra* opens with homage to the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, who are considered as the supreme recipients of offerings.

1.
To those who go in bliss, the dharmakāya they possess, and all their heirs,
To all those worthy of respect, I reverently bow.
According to the scriptures, I shall now in brief describe
The practice of the Bodhisattva discipline.

The term *those who go in bliss* is synonymous with *Buddha* and is a translation of the Sanskrit *sugata*. This word is made up of two elements: *sukhā* meaning "bliss," and *gata* meaning "arrived." A Sugata is therefore "one who has reached bliss," or according to the *Treatise on Logic*, "one who has reached, or arrived, perfectly." The attainment of this blissful state has two aspects: realisation and elimination.

As the mind develops spiritual qualities and gets rid of all that hinders them, it increasingly gains the ability to see clearly the nature of phenomena, until it perceives the ultimate nature without any obstruction. **This perception of phenomena as they really are is the wisdom that knows everything without the least misconception. It is a state of wisdom that cannot be veiled, nor can it deteriorate.**

The aspect of realisation refers to meditation on the absence of reality in phenomena. This leads to the perfect knowledge of the multiplicity of phenomena and the perfect knowledge of their nature. Then, through the power of antidotes, we eliminate all the veils that obscure our understanding, which enables us to perceive phenomena in their naked form and attain the perfect knowledge of all phenomena without exception. These three kinds of perfect knowledge constitute the three characteristics of reaching bliss through realisation.

This unmistaken view or understanding develops gradually through practice. As it becomes stronger and more evident, **it acts as an antidote to the mistaken belief in ego and in the reality of phenomena, which as a result becomes weaker and weaker.** Finally, **when this antidote has reached its full strength, the non-conceptual wisdom that sees the *lack of self* arises.**[8] **This wisdom thus counteracts obscurations, and it eliminates negative emotions simply through seeing phenomena as they really are. This is what we call perfect elimination.**

This is not a matter of reducing the strength of the negative emotions temporarily through meditative concentrations of differing degrees of subtlety. **Once the negative emotions have been eliminated by means of non-conceptual wisdom, they are "eliminated forever. They cannot recur even in situations that formerly provoked them. This is known as irreversible elimination. When the**

What is bodhichitta? The word has many nuances and is easier to understand, perhaps, than to translate. For this reason we have used the Sanskrit term, in the hope that by dint of careful definition it may be incorporated into, and allowed to enrich our language. *Chitta* means "mind," "thought," "attitude." *Bodhi* means "enlightenment," "awakening," and is cognate with the term *buddha* itself. This gives us "mind of enlightenment," "awakened mind"; the attitude of mind that tends toward Buddhahood, the enlightened state. It should be noted that ***bodhichitta* is not a synonym for *compassion***; it is a broader term in which compassion is implied.

According to tradition, bodhichitta is said to have two aspects, or rather to exist on two levels.

- First, one speaks of **ultimate bodhichitta**, referring to the direct cognisance of the true status of phenomena. This is the wisdom of emptiness: an immediate, nondual insight that transcends conceptualization.
- Second, there is **relative bodhichitta**, by which is meant the aspiration to attain the highest good, or Buddhahood, for the sake of all, together with all the practical steps necessary to achieve this goal.

The connection between these two bodhichittas (the wisdom of emptiness on the one hand, the will to deliver beings from suffering on the other) is not perhaps immediately clear. But within the Buddhist perspective, as Shāntideva gradually reveals, **ultimate and relative bodhichitta are two interdependent aspects of the same thing. The true realization of emptiness is impossible without the practice of perfect compassion, while no compassion can ever be perfect without the realization of the wisdom of emptiness.**

At first sight, this apparently closed circle suggests that bodhichitta is impossible to achieve. It is nevertheless the startling assertion of Buddhist teaching that the mind itself, even the mind in saṃsāra, is never, and has never been, ultimately alienated from the state of enlightenment. Bodhichitta is in fact its true nature and condition. The mind is not identical with the defilement and distraction that beset and usually overwhelm it, and thus it may be freed from them; it is capable of growth and improvement and may be trained. By using methods and tools grounded in the duality of subject and object, the mind has the power to evolve toward a wisdom and a mode of being (in fact its own true nature) that utterly transcends this duality. At present, of course, for most of us, this is something that remains to be seen, something to take on trust. And so it is with an extraordinary didactic skill, and with an immediacy and relevance that the lapse of over a thousand years has done nothing to diminish, that Shāntideva brings to our attention the realities of egocentric existence, in all its pain and idiocy, and places before us the vision of a wholly new alternative, together with a practical instruction whereby that vision may become an actual experience.

[8] In Mahāyāna Buddhism, the term *lack of self* applies both to the individual's ego and to all phenomena; *self* meaning in this context real or substantial entity. A Bodhisattva has to realise the lack of self in him or herself as an individual and in all other phenomena.

For all its practicability, however, the fact remains that the first stirrings of bodhichitta in the mind are profoundly mysterious, for what could possibly be their origin? "This noble, jewel-like state of mind arises truly wondrous, never seen before" (1.25). Indeed, given the habitual orientation of the mind, fixed as it is upon the supposed reality of ego and phenomena, rooted in the duality of subject and object, wandering in saṃsāra from beginningless time; that an impulse toward perfect altruism and self-forgetting can arise at all seems nothing short of miraculous. What could go more radically against the grain? To say that it is possible is an impressive affirmation of the mind's potential. Even so, bodhichitta is itself so extraordinary that its first impulses appear to come from outside.

> Just as on a dark night black with clouds,
> The **sudden lightning glares** and all is clearly shown,
> Likewise rarely, through the Buddhas' power,
> Virtuous thoughts rise, brief and transient, in the world. (1.5)

It is in this same spirit of an external prompting that Shāntideva begins his poem. **The first chapter consists of a rhapsodic celebration of bodhichitta intended to fill the mind with enthusiasm and orientate it toward a new and wonderful goal. Shāntideva encourages himself and his readers, first toward an interest, then toward practical engagement, in the Bodhisattva path.**

Shāntideva's pedagogical method, pursued throughout the poem and already familiar from the teachings of the Buddha himself, is simple and effective: **first encouragement through reflection on the advantages and excellence of the objective, then a stimulus through meditation on the dire consequences of weakness and backsliding. His basic rule of thumb is that ground gained must be retained at all cost and never yielded. Once attention has been caught, and interest kindled, the task is one of consolidation: the original impulse and fervour must be safeguarded and never allowed to disappear.** The importance of this is only too obvious. We have only to consider the sheer fragility of normal, everyday mental states. **"Virtuous thoughts rise, brief and transient …," and it is one of the most alarming aspects of spiritual and moral life that insights, left unattended and without support, will invariably fade.** Realisations evaporate and enthusiasm drains away into the sands of inadvertence and old habits. It is possible to embark on the practice of Dharma with great energy and interest but later, perhaps years later, to turn away empty-handed, with nothing to show for all the time taken.

Thus, for Shāntideva, as with the Buddhist tradition in general, **in the education of the mind (our own minds) fear and the dread of the consequences of evil are tools as legitimate as those of enthusiasm and encouragement. It is in this spirit of mental training that Shāntideva places before us the unpalatable facts of human existence: its fragility, its impermanence, the certainty and horrible realities of death, and the possibility, if not probability, of postmortem suffering in infernal torment. Perhaps it is because the stakes are so high that he tears away so mercilessly the pretences and facile optimisms with which we veil the facts, trying to convince ourselves that "after all, things are not so bad."** To those new to Buddhadharma, it often comes as a surprise that in a tradition which places such a high premium on love and compassion, so much attention should be given to the sufferings of the lower states: those of animals, of hungry ghosts, and of beings in hell. The scriptures and commentaries abound in detailed descriptions, and Buddhist iconography can be horrifyingly explicit. To the unprepared Westerner, the shock is often severe. And no doubt through an overhasty comparison with similar themes (rightly or wrongly understood), as these have played themselves out in the history of European and Near Eastern religious thought, the Buddhist ideas are not infrequently dismissed as being of morbid and sadistic origin.

Superficial similarity, however, masks a radical difference. According to Buddhist teaching, the definition of moral good or evil is made exclusively in terms of cause and effect. An act is considered evil, negative, non-virtuous, or sinful, not because it is a transgression of a divinely ordained principle, laid down by the creator of the universe, but because it is productive of suffering in this or future existences. Virtue, on the other hand, is that which brings about happiness and tends to spiritual development. The experiences of the infernal states are the ineluctable result of evil attitudes and actions. Whether or not the modern Westerner wishes to believe in the existence of infernal realms is in a sense beside the point. Every evil and unwholesome action simply brings forth suffering; and it hardly matters whether one conceives of this in the picturesque terms of Dante's inferno or shares the view of Jean-Paul Sartre that "hell is other people." Nevertheless, it is important to grasp that the **idea of an *eternal* damnation as a *punishment* for sin is foreign to Buddhist understanding. Suffering is a consequence of one's own action, not a retribution inflicted by an external power. Infernal torments, moreover, though they may last for aeons, belong to saṃsāra and are not exempt from the law of impermanence.** And even if the notion of a divine vengeance is regarded as an approximation, in mythological terms, to the concept of karmic consequences, it is perhaps worth suggesting that the impersonal view proposed by Buddhism should have the advantage of exorcizing the paralysing sense of guilt, or revolt, that can so often be the outcome of a too anthropomorphic theism. **The doctrine of karma has only one message: the experience of states of being follows upon the perpetration of acts. We are the authors of our own destiny; and being the authors, we are ultimately, perhaps frighteningly, free.**

With regard to *The Way of the Bodhisattva*, there are two things we should notice. The **first** is that **Shāntideva both accepts the reality of the lower realms, and he literally forces them on our attention. This has the educative purpose mentioned above, and it also reveals a vital characteristic of the Bodhisattva's attitude. Shāntideva's constant and overwhelming concern is with the predicament of his fellow beings, and from their pain and degradation he does not avert his eyes.** He is ready to confront suffering in all its horrifying reality, and having abandoned all thought for his own comfort and security, he does not draw back in fear or revulsion. He gazes into the heart of darkness unflinchingly, with an intense fixity of purpose. He is prepared to accompany the damned into the pit. He is neither revolted nor depressed, being one who in compassion "will venture into hell of Unrelenting Pain, as swans sweep down upon a lotus lake" (8.107). The keynote is courage, and time and time again in *The Way of the Bodhisattva*, compassion emerges not as a sorrowing, lachrymose state of mind, but as a protective concern that is vibrant with joy and heroic confidence.

The **second** thing to note is that **in Shāntideva's description of sufferings, there is a notable absence of moral comment or judgment. This is brought out clearly in the tenth chapter where the merits of composition are dedicated to the emptying of the hells and the deliverance of their inhabitants.** The fires are quenched in a rain of flower-scented water, the glaciers are thawed, the prisoners of hell are set free and comforted by the presence of the great Bodhisattvas. It is a wonderful vision, and we are borne along by its beauty. But **where, we might ask, is the justice in it? Shāntideva's obvious wish is simply to save from suffering, with no questions asked.** We on the other hand might protest, with a sense of moral indignation and in the name of right, that the damned are indeed damnable and are where they are for good reason. They are, after all, the serial killers, the child murderers, the tyrants of evil regimes, the perpetrators of pogroms, the ethnic cleansers and the keepers of the death camps, the witch-hunters, the interrogators, the torturers, the inquisitors.

The strength and impartiality of Shāntideva's compassion seem to be a subversion of universal order; and in a sense they are. They point to a new vision of things ultimately grounded not in the concepts of right and wrong, but in compassion and the wisdom of emptiness. Instead of dividing the universe now and forever into twin compartments of good and evil, the sinners and the just, the blessed and the damned, Buddhism focuses on the predicament of saṃsāra as such.

In saṃsāra, as we have noted, all experiences, of pleasure and of pain, have their roots in previous action. The mind, conditioned by ignorance, attraction, and aversion, can only respond egocentrically to situations as they arise, contriving its own evolution, favourable or otherwise as the case may be. It passes through a stream of temporary experiences that, good or bad, are all fundamentally flawed by suffering or the possibility of suffering; experiences that lead nowhere and which are thus always and necessarily meaningless. It would, however, be a ridiculous mistake to accuse Shāntideva of moral nihilism, or to suppose that he is in revolt against the doctrine of karma. Yet **his unconditional compassion draws our attention to the fact that the law of karma does not amount to a theory of human justice, neither does it provide the basis for feelings of moral outrage or ethical superiority.** In any case, **since experience is the fruit of action, it must follow that in saṃsāra** (and this in certain contexts may be difficult to accept) **there can be no completely innocent victims.** In response to this, **Buddhism teaches that the object of compassion is simply suffering itself. It would, after all, be absurd to withdraw compassion from the "guilty" and reserve it only for the "worthy," those assumed to be morally innocent; for the simple reason that in saṃsāra, there are no worthy objects in this sense. For Shāntideva, since suffering is all-pervasive, all beings, at all times and regardless of circumstances, are worthy objects. Relatively speaking, of course, the concepts of right and wrong are crucial, and for the practitioner, the importance of pure ethics is fundamental. But to cling to moral values in a spirit of self-righteous judgment is evidence of superficiality and ego-clinging and does not form part of the Bodhisattva's attitude.**

In any case, **the vow of the Bodhisattva is to deliver beings from suffering, in other words, to deliver them from the causes of their suffering. The work of the Buddha or Bodhisattva is therefore to teach, to show the way; first by revealing values to be adopted or abandoned (and thus the means whereby wholesome and propitious existential states are produced); then by teaching the wisdom whereby saṃsāra is wholly transcended. This is of course the definition of Dharma; the *Bodhicharyāvatāra* is itself Shāntideva's liberating message to the world.**

extraordinary non-conceptual wisdom is perfected through practice and all obstacles to it have been removed through the antidote, we then say that elimination is complete.

These three aspects (perfect, irreversible, and complete) are the three characteristics of realisation through elimination. A Sugata, then, is one who has "arrived" through these three realisations and three eliminations.

A Sugata who has the dharmakaya starts by abandoning negative emotions, at which point he reaches the first of ten levels of the Bodhisattva path.[9] He then proceeds along the path to Buddhahood until he reaches the level of *no more learning*. At that moment, he realises the perfectly pure absolute space, the absolute nature, and the absolute body, or dharmakaya. As obscurations to ignorance fall away, all the qualities of primordial wisdom appear, in particular the twenty-one pure qualities of the dharmakaya.[10] What is left after all the obscurations have been eliminated is called primordial wisdom.

The realisation aspect of the dharmakāya is the culmination of the truth of the path, while its elimination aspect is the culmination of the truth of cessation. Together these two truths constitute the Dharma, the second of the Three Jewels in which we take refuge. The dharmakāya is thus the ultimate aspect of the Dharma. The *sambhogakāya* and *nirmānakāya*, which manifest from the dharmakāya, constitute the Sangha of beings who have attained the path of no more learning. And the Buddha, who is free of defects and endowed with all good qualities, is the one who possesses the truth of the path and the truth of cessation. These three (Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha) are the three absolute refuges.

The assembly of the Mahāyāna Bodhisattvas, the Shrāvakas, and the Pratyekabuddhas, who are progressing on the path, can be called the supreme community, or Sangha. It is to them, along with all other teachers worthy of veneration, that Shāntideva prostrates here.

Having paid homage to the Three Jewels, he declares his intention to compose this text, which is a compilation of the activities of the Bodhisattvas, or children of the Buddha. The Buddha is said to have three kinds of heir. His physical son was Rahūla. The heirs of his speech are the *Shrāvakas* and

[9] Ten levels. Stages on the path to enlightenment. The first Bodhisattva level marks the beginning of the path of seeing. The second to tenth levels are progressive stages within the path of meditation.

[10] See Buddhist Glossary Advanced

Pratyekabuddhas. And the heirs of his mind are the Bodhisattvas. These last are referred to as his principal heirs, for they aspire, for the benefit of all beings, to all the sublime qualities of Buddhahood, applying the unmistaken methods of the path of compassion and emptiness. They are the heirs of the Buddha that Shāntideva is referring to, and it is their activities, in all their different aspects, that he describes here, covering the essential points of the spiritual path.

The training of a Bodhisattva consists of the practice of the six or ten pāramitās.[11] This can be summarised as three disciplines: avoiding harmful actions, adopting virtuous actions, and working for the benefit of beings. Shāntideva describes this path in three stages: entrance, training, and accomplishment. The entrance involves taking the Bodhisattva Vow and conceiving for the first time the aspiration for enlightenment, which is called bodhichitta. The main body of the text describes the training that follows the generation of bodhichitta, that is, the practice of the six pāramitās. The goal of this, the accomplishment of Buddhahood, is briefly described at the end of the ninth chapter.

What do we mean by Bodhisattva? Bodhi means enlightenment, the state devoid of all defects and endowed with all good qualities. Sattva refers to someone who has courage and confidence and who strives to attain enlightenment for the sake of all beings. Those who have this spontaneous, sincere wish to attain enlightenment for the ultimate benefit of all beings are called Bodhisattvas. Through wisdom, they direct their minds to enlightenment, and through their compassion, they have concern for beings. **This wish for perfect enlightenment for the sake of others is what we call bodhichitta, and it is the starting point on the path.** By becoming aware of what enlightenment is, one understands that there is both a goal to accomplish and that it is possible to do so. Driven by the desire to help beings, one thinks, For their sake, I must attain enlightenment! Such a thought forms the entrance to the Mahayana. Bodhichitta, then, is a double wish: to attain enlightenment in itself, and to do so for the sake of all beings.

One may, of course, have some vague wish to attain enlightenment or feel it is something one ought to attain. But without having the certainty that enlightenment exists and that it is accessible, one will never accomplish it. It is therefore very important to know what enlightenment means. In this context, **the explanation of emptiness set forth in the second turning of the Wheel of Dharma is crucially important. All phenomena are by nature empty, devoid of true existence.** This is clearly explained in the Prājñāpāramitā texts and the commentaries of Nāgārjuna and his followers.[12] But what is our perception of phenomena at the moment? What Nagarjuna describes is not what we actually perceive at present. What we experience is just the opposite. **Rather than perceiving phenomena as empty, we see everything as existent and real. If, through study and practice, we gain some understanding and confidence that the nature of things is emptiness, then we realise that our perceptions hitherto have not corresponded at all to the way things really are and that we have been ignorantly clinging to our mistaken way of seeing things. Moreover, this ignorance has been the root of desire and hatred; in other words, it is the very root of samsara.**

Ignorance, the belief that things are real, is extremely powerful. But we should remember that it is nothing more than a mistake; it is merely a misunderstanding that we cling to but which in fact has no foundation whatsoever. Its opposite, the understanding that phenomena have no reality, is based on a consistent truth that stands up to all argument. If one familiarises oneself with this understanding, it can be developed indefinitely, since it is both true and a natural quality of the mind. As it develops and grows more powerful, it acts as the antidote to the erroneous belief that things are real, which is bound to become correspondingly weaker.

Can we get rid of this misunderstanding completely? It is said:

> The nature of mind is clear and luminous,
> But obscurations are adventitious.[13]

Although these obscurations may have been present for a long time, they are not of the same nature as the mind. So, as the antidote (the correct perception of things) develops, these obscurations can be completely dispelled.

The nature of mind, clear and aware, is free from defects; it cannot be affected by obscurations. No phenomena, whether mental or occurring in the external world, can affect it. Nothing can alter this natural quality, which is the innate character of the mind itself. The belief in the reality of things is based on incorrect perception and is quite contrary to the mind's nature. But because of present conditions and ways of perceiving that have long grown habitual, we tend to experience things erroneously. Therefore, on the one hand, this mind that sees how things are not real is able to destroy its opposite, the conviction that

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[11] Six pāramitās, or transcendent practices. The six activities of generosity, moral discipline, patience, endeavour, meditative concentration, and wisdom, which form the practice of the Bodhisattva path. They are termed transcendent because, unlike ordinary generosity, etc., they are untainted by attachment and other negative emotions.
The ten pāramitās consist of the six pāramitās together with skilful means, strength, aspiration, and primordial wisdom.

[12] Nāgārjuna (first or second century) was an Indian master responsible for the propagation of the prajñāpāramitā teachings. His teachings on emptiness formed the basis for the Mādhyamika doctrine, or Middle Way.

[13] adventitious (adjective) happening as a result of an external factor or chance rather than design or inherent nature: adventitious similarities.

phenomena are real. On the other hand, however powerful this erroneous belief in reality may be, it cannot affect the innate nature of the mind. As it is said in the *Sublime Continuum*:

> Stains are adventitious,[7]
> Qualities are inherent.

This is very thought-provoking. Because these obscurations are in fact something separable from the mind, we can certainly get rid of them, provided we continue to practice and apply the antidotes again and again. All negative emotions can be uprooted, and since they have never penetrated the nature of the mind, even the habitual tendencies they leave behind as traces will then be eliminated.

When the mind is completely free of these negative emotions and tendencies, it understands and knows all phenomena. By exerting ourselves and using the right methods, we can actualise the potential that we have for such omniscience. It is only because there are obscuring veils between the mind and its object that we are unable to know all things. Once these veils have been removed, no new power is needed. Seeing and being aware is the nature of the mind itself. **As long as the mind exists, it has the ability to know, but this ability does not reveal itself until all obscurations have been removed. This is what it means to attain enlightenment. If we think along these lines, the desire for enlightenment will grow in us.**

As for the wish to work for the benefit of others, this comes from realising that, just like ourselves, all beings, not just humans, want to be happy and not to suffer. In fact, we all have compassion: we want to free others from suffering. And to some degree, we all love and want others to be happy. These feelings may not be very strong or extensive, but everyone has them in some measure. When, for example, we see someone in agony, we spontaneously think, How terrible! and we want to relieve them of their pain. Just as we ourselves do not want to suffer but to be happy, we can have the same wish for others. Although we may have very little compassion and love at the moment, these are things that we can develop. As they grow, so also will our wish to work for others.

In order to have the desire to attain enlightenment, even if it is for our own sake, we have to know what is to be gained by being enlightened and what is lost by not being so. For this we should reflect on the imperfections of samsara; and even those of *nirvāṇa* when considered as the other extreme. As it is said in the Essence of the Middle Way:

> Because they see its defects,
> They avoid saṃsāra.
> Because their hearts are loving,
> Nirvāṇa will not hold them.
> The wise who wish the happiness of beings
> Dwell even in saṃsāra.

They are not imprisoned by saṃsāra, as they have seen its imperfections. Because of their great compassion, they do not linger in nirvāṇa. As they know that there are defects in both, they aspire to an enlightenment that transcends these two extremes.

So first **we have to be aware of what is wrong with saṃsāra, since this is the basis for the wish to attain enlightenment. To turn away and free ourselves, we must reflect on what is considered to be the suffering of saṃsāra; this will give rise to the desire to free others.**

Moreover, if we are to overcome our hopes and ambitions with respect to future existences, we must first confront our clinging to this present life. This is something we can train in, step by step.

Bodhichitta is a very good state of mind, imbued with wisdom, in which kindness is combined with the highest intelligence. It is something quite marvellous. This sort of goodness and kindness brings us peace immediately, so we are less narrow-minded and agitated. When we meet others, we do not feel claustrophobic and distant. On the contrary, we feel close to people. With a mind like this, we are never afraid, but strong and courageous. This is a very useful attitude to have.

The *Bodhicharyāvatāra* is not a compilation of Shāntideva's own personal ideas, nor is it a straight repetition of the sūtras. It is rather the teachings of the sūtras in condensed form. As he says:

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> Here I shall say nothing that has not been said before,
> And in the art of prosody I have no skill.
> I therefore have no thought that this might be of benefit to others;
> I wrote it only to habituate my mind.

"Here I shall say nothing that has not been said before, and in the art of prosody I have no skill" is said simply to ward off pride. To those who wish only to accumulate knowledge, he has nothing new to say. And as he does not think he can be of help to others, he is writing this text to further his own spiritual practice and that of those who are at the same stage as himself.

The first of the ten chapters in the *Bodhicharyāvatāra* deals with the qualities of bodhichitta. As a preparation for bodhichitta, one needs to practice the seven branches[14] so as to accumulate merit and purify oneself. This is the subject of the second chapter. The third then describes how to generate bodhichitta. The subsequent chapters explain how to put bodhichitta into practice through the six pāramitās. The first of these, generosity, is dealt with throughout the text, and there is no specific chapter devoted to it. How to practice pure discipline is explained in the two chapters on carefulness and attentiveness. These are followed by chapters devoted to the last four pāramitās: patience, endeavour, meditative concentration, and wisdom.

Finally, Shāntideva concludes the text with a chapter on the dedication of merit for the benefit of beings.

Minyak Kunzang Sonam, following the tradition of Patrul Rinpoche, explains the structure of the *Bodhicharyāvatāra* around Shāntideva's famous verse:

> May bodhichitta, precious and sublime,
> Arise where it has not yet come to be;
> And where it has arisen may it never fail
> But grow and flourish ever more and more.

For those who have not yet generated bodhichitta, the first three chapters of the *Bodhicharyāvatāra* explain how to do so. Then, to prevent bodhichitta from declining, there follow the instructions in the chapters on carefulness, attentiveness, and patience After this, the chapters on endeavour, meditative concentration, and wisdom describe how bodhichitta can be continuously developed. Finally, the tenth and concluding chapter discusses how to share and dedicate this bodhichitta that has been generated, protected from decline, and increasingly developed. This is how Patrul Rinpoche explained it, and I find it very profound:

> 4.
> So hard to find the ease and wealth[15]
> Whereby the aims of beings may be gained.
> If now I fail to turn it to my profit,
> How could such a chance be mine again?

To be able to practice bodhichitta, which has so many good qualities, we need intelligence, favourable conditions, and in particular, the supreme condition of human life. A human life is difficult to find and very valuable if we have it. We should not waste our lives but should make good use of them.

> 5.
> Just as on a dark night black with clouds,
> The sudden lightning glares and all is clearly shown,
> Likewise rarely, through the Buddhas' power,
> Virtuous thoughts rise, brief and transient, in the world.
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> 6.
> Virtue, thus, is weak; and always
> Evil is of great and overwhelming strength.
> Except for perfect bodhichitta,
> What other virtue is there that can lay it low?

Because of our past karma, it is very rare and difficult to have a positive mind, while it is all too easy to have negative thoughts, since this is what we have been used to. So we should nurture positive thoughts, such as devotion to the Buddhas and compassion for beings. It is through this that we develop bodhichitta.

There is nothing as powerful as bodhichitta for purifying our negative actions and obscurations, for attaining temporary and ultimate happiness, and for helping other beings. **If we wish to free ourselves and others from the suffering of saṃsāra, then we should develop bodhichitta.** As soon as we do so, its immeasurable qualities are such that, even though we may still appear to be ordinary beings subject to suffering, we will be proclaimed as heirs of the Buddhas, worthy of veneration by human and celestial beings.

Our bodhichitta may not yet be spontaneous. It is still something we have to fabricate. Nevertheless, once we have embraced and begun to develop this extraordinary attitude, whatever positive actions we do (prostration, circumambulation, recitation, or acts of generosity) while not appearing any different, will bring greatly increased results.

Bodhichitta itself has two aspects: aspiration and application. Aspiration is simply wishing to attain enlightenment for all beings, the desire to pursue the path. Application begins with taking the

[14] The Seven Branch Prayer is a practice for purifying oneself and accumulating merit through homage, making offerings, confession, rejoicing in others' virtue, requesting teachings, entreating the Buddhas and other teachers to remain in this world, and dedicating one's merit to the enlightenment of all beings.

[15] See Glossary, the Eighteen characteristics of a precious human existence.

vow of bodhichitta[16] and promising to put it into action. Aspiration is like simply wanting to go somewhere; application is actually going.

The good qualities of even aspiration bodhichitta are immense; how much more so are the qualities of one who has taken the vow! From the moment the vow is taken, whatever a Bodhisattva does, whether walking or sleeping, will create great merit simply through the sheer power of the intention. And if there is great merit in wanting to relieve one being of a single discomfort, need one mention the endless benefit of wishing to help innumerable beings?

It is said that to think negatively about such a Bodhisattva has extremely serious consequences. We should therefore take great care to protect ourselves from this sort of fault and consider others as our teachers. And we should never, without a very specific reason, point out other people's faults. As the omniscient Gendun Drubpa[17] said, "Be grateful to all beings and regard all practitioners with pure vision. Subdue the enemy within." Let us follow his advice.

[16] See Buddhism Glossary Advanced

[17] Gendun Drubpa (1391–1474) was first in the line of reincarnations who subsequently (during the life of the third) received the title Dalai Lama. He is thus the "first" Dalai Lama.