Chapter 3 Embracing Bodhichitta

In the third chapter, which deals with the generation of bodhichitta, Shāntideva begins by rejoicing.

1.
With joy I celebrate the virtue that relieves all beings
From the sorrows of the states of loss,
Exulting in the happy states enjoyed
By those who yet are suffering,

2.
I revel in the stores of virtue,
Cause of gaining the enlightened state,
And celebrate the freedom won
By living beings from the round of pain.

3.
And in the Buddhahood of the protectors I delight
And in the grounds of realisation of the Buddhas' heirs.

4
Their enlightened attitude, an ocean of great good,
That seeks to place all beings in the state of bliss,
And every action for the benefit of beings:
Such is my delight and joy.

And so, **borne along on a wave of elation and confidence, supported by the glorious vision of the attainments of the Buddhas and great beings of the past, and spurred by the realization that time is short and the stakes high, Shāntideva is impelled (in chapter 3) toward commitment to the Bodhisattva path; in words that have since become the standard formula, in the Tibetan tradition, for the taking of the Bodhisattva vow.**

When we rejoice in the good qualities and positive actions of others, we accumulate merit ourselves. By rejoicing in our own positive actions, we increase and strengthen their effect. On the other hand, if we show off the few good qualities that we have and are jealous of those of others, we do not even deserve to be called practicing Buddhists. So we should rejoice in all positive actions, whether of the Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, or ordinary beings.

Next comes the request for the Buddhas to turn the Wheel of Dharma and not to pass into nirvana. This is followed by the dedication of merit.

5.
By And so I join my hands and pray
The Buddhas who reside in every quarter:
Kindle now the Dharma's light
For those who grope, bewildered, in the dark of pain!

6.
I join my hands beseeching the enlightened ones
Who wish to pass into nirvana;
Do not leave us wandering in blindness,
Stay among us for unnumbered ages!

7.
Through these actions now performed
And all the virtues I have gained,
May all the pain of every living being
Be wholly scattered and destroyed!

Now begins the actual generation of bodhichitta, both aspiration and application:

23.
Just as all the Buddhas of the past
Have brought forth the awakened mind,
And in the precepts of the Bodhisattvas
Step-by-step abode and trained,

24.
Likewise, for the benefit of beings,
I will bring to birth the awakened mind,
And in those precepts, step-by-step,
I will abide and train myself

Aspiration bodhichitta is the vow to generate the same intention as the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas of the past. Application is the vow to accomplish, as they did, all the activities of the path to enlightenment, for the sake of all beings. Today we shall only take the vow of aspiration. To do this, we shall read through the second and third chapters of the *Bodhicharyāvatāra* up until the second line of verse 23. Try to concentrate on the meaning and afterward rejoice in what we have done.

In order to take this vow, we should imagine that in front of us are the Buddha and his eight close disciples;[26] the six ornaments;[27] the two supreme teachers,[28] including Shāntideva; and all the realised masters of the Buddhist tradition, in particular the holders of the Sakya, Gelug, Kagyu, and Nyingma schools of Tibet; in fact, all the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. Consider also that we are surrounded by all the beings in the universe. With this visualisation, we shall now read the Seven Branch Prayer.

18.
May I be a guard for those who are protector-less,
A guide for those who journey on the road.
For those who wish to cross the water,
May I be a boat, a raft, a bridge.

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

20.
May I be the wishing jewel, the vase of wealth,
A word of power and the supreme healing,
May I be the tree of miracles,
For every being the abundant cow.

21.
Just like the earth and space itself
And all the other mighty elements,
For boundless multitudes of beings
May I always be the ground of life, the source of varied sustenance.

22.
Thus for everything that lives,
As far as are the limits of the sky, .
May I be constantly their source of livelihood
Until they pass beyond all sorrow.

These last two lines are very powerful, are they not? The lives of a great many beings depend on the presence of the five elements, so **let us think: Just like the earth, may I support beings as numerous as the sky is vast. And as long as they have not attained enlightenment, may I devote myself entirely to their happiness. Let us make a heartfelt wish to attain Buddhahood for their sake and vow never to give up this thought.** If some of you are not Buddhists or feel that you are not able to keep such a vow, then you need simply think, May all beings be happy. **Those of you who wish to take this vow of aspiration, please sit up straight, or kneel on your right knee, and fold your hands. Repeat after me, three times, the lines I am going to read in Tibetan. These are the first two lines of verses 23 and 24, preceded by "Teachers, Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, listen!"**

I have visualised the Buddha in front of me, and you should consider that I am a sort of messenger or intermediary. Consider that we are surrounded by all the beings in the universe and generate compassion for them. Think of the Buddha and feel great devotion to him. Now, with compassion and devotion, pray, "May I attain Buddhahood!" and recite:

Teachers, Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, listen!
Just as all the Buddhas of the past
Have brought forth the awakened mind,
Likewise, for the benefit of beings
I will bring to birth the awakened mind. (x3)

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[26] The eight close disciples are the eight Bodhisattvas: Mañjushrī, Avalokiteshvara, Vajrapāni, Ākāshagarbha, Kshitigarbha, Sarvanivāranavishkambhin, Maitreya, and Samantabhadra.

[27] The six ornaments are Nāgārjuna, Āryadeva, Asanga, Vasubandhu, Dignāga, and Dharmakīrti.

[28] The two supreme teachers are Shāntideva and Chandragomin.

When we recite these lines for the third time, at the words, "I will bring to birth the awakened mind," think that you have generated this bodhichitta in the depth of your hearts, in the very marrow of your bones, and that you will never go back on this promise.

Traditionally we now recite the last nine verses of the chapter as a conclusion to taking the vow.[29]

Now that we have taken this vow, we should try to be good human beings in our daily lives. We should not, for example, pretend to be very nice while we are in this tent and start fighting with each other as soon as we get out! We should from now on try to have a positive and kind mind: we are going to be happy in life. I really think that the future depends on the quality of one's mind, on a good mind. So we must try to be good people and be good examples for those around us. The initiative to be like this has to come from each one of us individually.

Thank you all for listening so carefully. I myself try to practice bodhichitta in all situations, and I try as much as possible to encourage others to do so, too. I find it is a practice that is entirely without danger and brings tremendous benefit.

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[29] 26.
"Today my life has given fruit.
This human state has now been well assumed.
Today I take my birth in Buddha's line,
And have become the Buddha's child and heir.
27.
"In every way, then, I will undertake
Activities befitting such a rank.
And I will do no act to mar
Or compromise this high and faultless lineage.
28.
"For I am like a blind man who has found
A precious gem inside a heap of dust.
For so it is, by some strange chance,
That bodhichitta has been born in me.
29.
"This is the supreme draft of immortality
That slays the Lord of Death, the slaughterer of beings,
The rich unfailing treasure-mine
To heal the poverty of wanderers.
30.
"It is the sovereign remedy
That perfectly allays all maladies.
It is the tree that gives relief
To those who wander wearily the pathways of existence.
31.
"It is the universal bridge that saves
All wandering beings from the states of loss,
The rising moon of the enlightened mind
That soothes the sorrows born of the afflictions.
32.
"It is the mighty sun that utterly dispels
The misty ignorance of wandering beings,
The creamy butter, rich and full,
That's churned from milk of holy teaching.
33.
"Living beings! Wayfarers upon life's paths,
Who wish to taste the riches of contentment,
Here before you is the supreme bliss.Here, O ceaseless travelers, is your fulfillment!
34.
"And so, today, within the sight of all protectors,
I summon beings, calling them to Buddhahood.
And, till that state is reached, to every earthly joy!
May gods and demigods and all the rest rejoice!"