

Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life (Bodhicaryavatara)

*A Commentary
by
Geshe Tenzin Zopa*



Editor's Note

Kyabje Lama Zopa Rinpoche said it best: “Buddhas are born from Bodhisattvas; Bodhisattvas are born from bodhicitta.” The Guide to the Bodhisattva’s Way of Life or in Sanskrit, Bodhicaryavatara, is the most celebrated and spectacular exposition on the mighty altruistic intention and conduct of the Bodhisattva.

To embark on the reading, let alone the study of, the Bodhicaryavata takes guts. Its 914 verses challenge every fibre in your body, every corner of your mind and when you complete the book, it leaves you feeling embarrassed at having your innermost thoughts and deeds spread out on a page in front of you. Yet, hope is a little brighter because the possibilities are infinite.

Like a captain on a ship built for the high seas, Geshe Tenzin Zopa skilfully steers us through the turbulent waters of our minds, spotlighting our flaws, praising our efforts, showing the way by his

explanations on the verses. When the brutal honesty of this text gets too much, Geshela steadfastly keeps us afloat by sharing his personal encounters and finally brings us to shore, soggy and whip-lashed but holding a glow in the heart – one that is inspired to take the first baby-step in the Bodhisattva’s way of life. Such is the kindness of Gurus.

With deep gratitude and undying devotion to our Gurus HH Dalai Lama, beloved Kyabje Lama Zopa Rinpoche, HE Dagri Rinpoche and the irreplaceable Geshe Tenzin Zopa, please bless us to accomplish the Bodhisattva’s Way of Life for the sake of others and to please Your holy minds. This is also dedicated to the swift return of the unmistakable reincarnation of Khensur Rinpoche Lhundrup Rigsel, the Virtuous Friend of all sentient beings.

Huei

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Introduction

“Bodhicaryavatara” or “Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life” by Shantideva holds within its glorious verses, the heart-practice of all practitioners of the Tibetan Buddhist tradition.

The word Bodhicaryavatara is a condensed version of the term “Bodhisattva-carya-avatara”. “Bodhi” (Tib. “jangchup”) refers to enlightenment, “sattva” (Tib. “sempa”) refers to the altruistic mind; “carya” (Tib. “choepa”) means action; “avatara” (Tib. “jugpa”) means to engage.

Delving a little deeper into the Tibetan words offers illumination to the title of this text. The Tibetan word for “bodhi” is “jangchup” meaning the Buddha. “Jang” means to purify or abandon the two defilements (the obscuration to nirvana and the obscuration to enlightenment and “chup” means to actualise or to obtain. Therefore, “Jangchup” means one who has purified the obscurations to nirvana and enlightenment i.e. actualising the 6 Perfections. While we train on the Path we are merely training in the 6 Perfections but have not as yet perfected it.

“Sempa” refers to the highest altruistic mind that is inspired to actualise the

6 Perfections and become a Buddha to bring liberation and enlightenment to all sentient beings.

“Choepa” means action: We know that enlightenment is possible because we know we can create the cause (sempa, the altruistic mind) that will produce that result. Therefore one needs to take action and the action is avatara i.e. to engage in the Bodhisattva’s way of life.

Put together, it means to engage in the acts of the altruistic mind which leads to enlightenment.

The magnanimous motivation of Shantideva is seen in his celebrated verse:

*“For as long as sentient beings remain,
May I too remain to dispel their sufferings.”*

Embarking on the study of this text is to learn about Shantideva’s life and thoughts; a life that was solely dedicated to the welfare of sentient beings. If we think only of our own needs, it would be self-centred and such a life would be a life without meaning, a hollow shell of a life.

Having gained the optimum human rebirth, we should be able to differentiate what is to be cultivated and what is to be abandoned; strive to bring benefit to others as well as ourselves. All beings are the objects of our compassion and the rightful beneficiaries of our service.

First, it is necessary to have a glimpse of the author of this extraordinary text. The teachings in this text have come to us through an unbroken

lineage from Shakyamuni Buddha to Manjushri, to Shantideva, through the Tibetan mahasiddhas to our Gurus and now to us.

Life of Shantideva

Shantideva was an 8th century pandit from the famed Buddhist Nalanda University of ancient India. He was born as a prince in South India called Saurashtra and his father was King Karyavaman and his given birth name was Shantivarnan. During his younger years, he displayed brilliance at all the arts and sciences and at the same time showed great compassion, particularly towards the sick and dying. Upon the passing of his father the King, everyone hoped that he would ascend the throne. However, Shantideva had long been inspired towards the Mahayana teachings, in particular the bodhicitta teachings. During that period, he met a wandering yogi. This yogi volunteered to grant him the extensive instructions on Manjushri's Sadhana.

On the eve of his enthronement as King, Shantideva had a dream of Manjushri. In that dream, he saw Manjushri sitting on the King's throne that he was to sit on. Manjushri said, "My child, this throne belongs to me, so how can disciple sit on the seat of the teacher?" Upon waking up, Shantideva felt a deep conviction that he was not meant to merely sit on the throne and be King but to pursue a spiritual life and with that, he renounced his royal life.

At this time, the great Buddhist University Nalanda was a thriving community of scholars and pandits. Shantideva was drawn to the monk's life and thus he headed for Nalanda to be ordained. There were then 500 scholars at

Nalanda and the Abbot Jayadeva, gave ordination to Shantideva. However, during his stay there, Shantideva displayed unusual behaviour. Everyone heard about his brilliance, yet he did not appear to attend teachings and isolated himself in his room. The monks only saw him eating, sleeping and going to the toilet. Later they gave him the nickname busuku i.e. he who only does those three actions.

Soon, there was growing unease about Shantideva. They felt that this kind of poor behaviour would bring Nalanda into disrepute. However, they could not simply expel him unless he had broken a monastic rule. Hence, some of them hatched a plan to ridicule Shantideva with the intent of forcing him to leave Nalanda. During those times, it was customary for Nalanda monks to give public talks and it was decided that they would invite Shantideva to give a public talk, thinking that he would embarrass himself since he never seem to study.

This public talk was arranged at a place called Stupa Triksana. They wanted to further mock him by building a very high teaching throne for him. On the day of the public talk, Shantideva arrived and upon his placing his foot on the first step, the throne as if miraculously, descended to a low height, enabling Shantideva mounted the seat easily. He confidently asked the audience what they wanted him to teach – whether a topic that had been previously taught or something new. Everyone asked for new teachings. Shantideva then said, “I have 3 teachings in mind – firstly the Compendium of Training; secondly the Compendium of Sutra (which he felt was too short) and finally the Bodhicaryavatara, which contained the entire Tripitaka teachings, i.e. those of the Vinaya, Sutra (concentration) and Abhidarmakosha (science).” With that, he decided to teach the

Bodhicaryavatara.

As Shantideva delivered his teachings, all the monk scholars listened in amazement. This monk whom they had scorned, was revealing profound knowledge with unrivalled eloquence. He displayed mastery and depth in the teachings being delivered. Amongst the audience, a group of scholars from the Kashmir region generated great faith in him and started to take detailed notes of his teachings; another group of pandits from central India (Bodhgaya) started to take notes. When Shantideva reached the 34th verse of the 9th chapter (on emptiness), he spoke of emptiness as being that which is "existing, yet not existing" ; existing dependently and not independently nor inherently. By this time, the audience could still hear his voice but they could no longer see him anymore, his physical aggregates had disappeared!

The attending scholars began to feel remorse at their earlier disrespect. They decided that the profound teachings that Shantideva had delivered needed to be archived. They turned to the pandits from Kashmir and central region pandits who had taken notes. The notes from Kashmir pandits covered only 9 chapters containing 700 stanzas. The central region pandits notes had 10 chapters containing 1000 stanzas. To verify the correctness of the notes, the Nalanda pandits went in search of Shantideva and upon finding him, respectfully requested Shantideva to ascertain which set of notes were correct. Shantideva confirmed that the central region pandits' version of 10 chapters was correct.

He went on further to say that the teachings titled "Compendium of Training" which he had earlier composed on palm leaves, were kept in the

ceiling boards of his room. He advised that these teachings were to be carried by way of lineage practice and through oral transmissions.

The pandits then confessed their former misconduct and disrespect to him and requested him to return to Nalanda to become one of their main teachers. However, Shantideva declined saying that during his time in Nalanda, he saw pandits possessing great scholarly knowledge, yet kept missing the point and failed to integrate what they knew into their practices and lives. Thus, the 2 Compendiums (i.e. Compendium of Training and Compendium of Sutra) were written specially for monk scholars, whereas Bodhicaryavatara was suited to both the monk and lay community.

It is said that this text of the Bodhicaryavatara contains the teachings that Shantideva had received directly from Manjushri, as well as his personal experience based on the realisations gained through his study of the Tripitaka and transmitted teachings, such as the bodhicitta teachings received from Lama Serlingpa.

Lama Serlingpa had transmitted the bodhicitta teachings to Lama Atisha who in turn transmitted them to his disciple Dromtoenpa and through the oral transmission practice, it finally went to Dagri Dorjechang, then down to Pabongka Dechen Nyingpo and eventually to the two Tutors of the 14th (and current) HH Dalai Lama, namely Kyabje Ling Rinpoche (living emanation of Yamantaka) and Kyabje Trijang Rinpoche (living emanation of Heruka). I received these teachings from the late Geshe Lama Konchog, who received the transmission twice from Pabongka Dechen Nyingpo himself and more than 20 times from Kyabje Trijang Rinpoche.

The current lineage of the Commentary of these teachings is from Khunu

Lama Rinpoche from Ladakh, whom HH Dalai Lama frequently refers to with great respect. As a result, I have received the transmission of these teachings through an unbroken lineage and likewise, you are now receiving those teachings from an unbroken lineage. Whilst you will get no benefit from listening to me, you will definitely receive the blessing of the lineage, which will help you to transform your mind.

These teachings will help our minds become soft like cotton - un-disturbed notwithstanding surrounding circumstances. It will also help our minds to eliminate grasping, which clings to permanence and ignores death, thereby producing no inspiration to learn or cultivate Dharma. If we do not contemplate death, if we fail to prepare for the next lifetime, how do we prepare for enlightenment?

The entire Bodhicaryavatara is embodied in the 4 line prayer which establishes the bodhicitta motivation:

*May the supreme Bodhicitta
That has not arisen arise and grow
And may that which has arisen not diminish
But increase more and more.*

The entire 10 chapters of the Bodhicaryavatara reveal the view and practices in relation to this bodhicitta motivation prayer: The first line of “May the supreme bodhicitta” is discussed in the first 3 chapters of the Bodhicaryavatara; “May that which has arisen not diminish” is covered in the next 3 chapters; and “May it increase more and more” is dealt with in the last 4 chapters.

The Actual Text

Chapter 1 : The Excellence of Bodhicitta

V1

*To those who go in bliss, the Dharma they have mastered
and to all their heirs*

To all who merit veneration, I bow down.

*According to tradition, I shall now in brief describe
The entrance to the Bodhisattva discipline.*

This is a verse of homage to all the Buddhas and bodhisattvas. The Nalanda pandits always began their works with paying homage. Firstly, this was to reinforce humility. Secondly, by paying homage to the Triple Gem, it would clear all obstacles to composing the text and thirdly, the manner of paying homage would indicate what category of teachings the text came under. This specific homage shows it comes under the Sutra/Discourse category of teachings. If the homage begins with a reference to Manjushri or a deity, then the text would be under Abidhamma category.

Those who go in bliss refers to the fully Enlightened Ones.

The Dharma they have mastered – the omniscient mind understanding every single aspect of phenomena.

To all their heirs – refers to spiritual sons and daughters of the Buddhas who are the Bodhisattvas, the immediate successors of the Buddhas. Therefore Shantideva is not only paying homage to the Buddhas but also the Dharma refuge and the Arya Sanghas.

All those who merit veneration - He also pays homage to all Arhats, including those from the Hearer and the Solitary Realiser Vehicles.

The entrance to the bodhisattva discipline – refers to the practice of the 6 Perfections of morality, generosity, patience, perseverance (joyful effort), concentration and wisdom.

V2

*What I have to say has all been said before
And I am destitute of learning and of skill with words
I therefore have no thought that this might be of benefit to others;
I wrote it only to sustain my understanding.*

Shantideva declares that he is not creating new teachings but is re-stating what has been taught by past Buddhas and is thus a valid teaching. He humbly claims to have no knowledge and even states that this teaching will not benefit others and that he has written it only to fortify his own learning.

V3

*My faith will thus be strengthened for a little while
That I might grow accustomed to this virtuous way
But other who now chance upon my words
May profit also, equal to myself in fortune.*

Shantideva points to the fact that his faith will increase by engaging in the

6 Perfections and expresses the hope that perhaps some people may gain some benefit by reading this text. This illustrates Shantideva's humility. It's worthwhile to reflect and rejoice that having this teaching exist today is indicative of our collective merit, so we should take this opportunity to strive to engage in the bodhisattva's ways and gain perfection.

V4

*So hard to find such ease and wealth
Whereby to render meaningful this human birth
If now I fail to turn it to my profit
How could such a chance be mine again?*

So hard to find such ease and wealth – The pre-conditions for cultivating bodhicitta are firstly, having the precious human rebirth (of the 10 freedoms and 8 endowments) and secondly, the mind as the basis to cultivate bodhicitta.

If I now fail to turn it to my profit, How could such a chance be mine again? If we do not use this life meaningfully, there may be no other chance in the future. The rarity of a precious human rebirth is told in the form of an analogy: Imagine a blind turtle that dwells at the bottom of the ocean and only surfaces once in a 100 years. Next, imagine a golden ring floating on the ocean. What are the chances of this blind turtle which rarely surfaces, coming up from the bottom of the ocean and being able to place its head into the golden ring? The rarity of the precious human rebirth is likened to this.

The causes for a precious human rebirth human rebirth are equally rare. Firstly, one needs ethics/morality. In previous lives, we have cultivated Dharma and avoided the 10 non-virtues, resulting in our gaining this present human life with Dharma. Thus, we should continue in this way – try to uphold vows beginning with the 5 lay vows of avoiding killing, lying, stealing, sexual misconduct and taking intoxicants.

We break our promises to the Buddha, to humans, to animals – all these are unethical actions, creating obstacles to our gaining another precious human rebirth. Without effort in living life ethically, how can we gain another precious human rebirth? Without such a rebirth, we would lose the chance of attaining enlightenment.

To make the teachings a part of our lives, we need to habituate our minds with them. This is simple logic! In order for us to have a very rich practice, we need to study, contemplate and then meditate on the teachings. Like here in the Centre, we have a variety of classes for study, meditation and also practice-sessions like mandala offering, water bowl offerings – all these are opportunities. If we do not grab these opportunities, we might not have them again in the future.

V5

*As when a flash of lightning rends the night
And it its glare shows all that the dark black clouds had hidden
Likewise rarely through the Buddhas' power
Virtuous thoughts arise, brief and transient, in the world.*

The mind of the human being is the basis for generating bodhicitta. God-realm beings, the Form and Formless Realm beings and beings of other realms cannot practice bodhicitta because they do not have the qualities of the precious human rebirth e.g. being born with complete faculties and in a place where Dharma is taught and there are practitioners of Dharma to support spiritual practice etc, which facilitates the cultivation of bodhicitta, the cause of enlightenment.

As when a flash of lightning shows all that the dark clouds had hidden, likewise virtuous thoughts arise rarely and briefly. Even though the nature of the sky is clear, clouds interrupt its clarity. Similarly, our nature of mind i.e. our Buddha nature, is clear and luminous. However, like the darkness of the night, it is completely dominated by ignorance and heavily obscured by the delusions of anger, attachment, jealousy etc . Under these circumstances, it is difficult for virtuous thoughts to arise and when they do, they are like the lightning in the sky, brief, temporary, a mere flash of virtue and it is gone.

By knowing this, in order to regain the clarity of mind, we need to find a way to clear the clouds of delusions and remove the darkness ignorance. To see our own Buddha nature, we need to clear all gross and subtle defilements, one by one, applying antidotes to those delusions. Only then can we challenge the ignorant mind. Otherwise the ignorant mind will not move one inch! However we first need to be convinced about our Buddha nature. That is why this verse talks about the mind being the basis of bodhicitta.

V6

*Thus behold the utter frailty of goodness!
Except for perfect bodhicitta
There is nothing able to withstand
The great and overwhelming strength of evil*

The virtuous mind, the altruistic mind in us is very weak. Even though we may understand virtue and wish to cultivate it, our determination is constantly eroded due to the forceful impact of delusions. We often perform virtue in a distracted way or with mixed motivation but when we engage in delusions like anger, we engage in a very intense and pure way. We are totally overwhelmed by the delusions – there are 6 root ones – ignorance, attachment, anger, pride, doubt and wrong view. It is not an easy task to rid ourselves of delusions.

V7

*The mighty Buddhas, pondering for many ages
Have seen that this and only this, will save
The boundless multitudes
And bring them easily to supreme joy.*

The mighty Buddhas had contemplated on the two bodhicittas (conventional and ultimate bodhicitta) for aeons . This is a hint to us not to take our cultivation too lightly nor be too easily distracted and discouraged. The Buddhas have seen that only the accomplishment of these two bodhicittas can save all beings from suffering and lead them to the supreme joy of Buddhahood. Merely admiring bodhicitta is just not good enough. We

need to cultivate it and make it second nature. There is no other way.

V8

*Those who wish to overcome the sorrows of their lives
And put to flight the pain and sufferings of beings
Those who wish to win such great beatitude
Should never turn their back on bodhicitta.*

Those who wish to overcome the sorrows of their lives, must abide by bodhicitta. The “sorrow of their lives” refers to the condition of ordinary beings like me i.e. there is not one moment of freedom from the 3 sufferings –

- the suffering of suffering (pain, worries, disappointments);
- the suffering of change (being separated from the things one likes; degeneration of what we regard as precious) and in particular,
- pervasive suffering (merely having aggregates brings with it various types of gross and subtle hardships). Samsaric existence is itself pervasive suffering.

Put to flight the pain and suffering of beings is the advice to us to develop the attitude of abandoning the self-cherishing mind which breeds much unhappiness for oneself and all other living beings. “Me, me, me” is the daily mantra of many of us. The habit of thinking about “my happiness, my wants, my likes, my dislikes” has created a stubborn core of self-centredness inside of us. If we really want happiness, the formula is to re-direct our focus, cherish others! Just like that. Bodhicitta and the Mahayana teachings guide us to help others and in so doing, bring contentment and

joy that lasts. Joy for only oneself is shallow.

Question and Answers

Q1: Why is it that god realm beings cannot cultivate Dharma?

Ans: Firstly, to have the cause to meet Mahayanic teachings, one needs to gain rebirth in the Southern Continent (planet Earth). Secondly, as the bodhicitta mind is inspired by compassion, this attitude can only be generated in the human realm where sufferings are obvious and humans have the means to engage in reasoning and cultivation. Do know however, that the manifestations of Buddhas and bodhisattvas in god-realms are not the same as god realm beings.

V9

Should bodhicitta come to birth

In one who sufferings in the dungeons of samsara

In that instant he is called the Buddha's heir

Worshipful alike to gods and men

A suffering being who is trapped in the prison of cyclic existence, who is totally dominated by afflictions and easily influenced by negativity - if such a person is able to generate the altruistic attitude of bodhicitta to benefit all sentient beings, on that very day, that person becomes a bodhisattva, the Buddha's heir.

There are two categories of bodhisattvas – ordinary Bodhisattvas and Arya Bodhisattvas. To become a Bodhisattva, one needs to generate “spontaneous” bodhicitta i.e. the great compassion, the altruistic

mind which has great compassion for all living beings and takes on the responsibility to liberate them and lead them to enlightenment; the bodhicitta that is effortless and continuous. Not the occasional and part-time compassion that most of us have.

The first- time, ordinary Bodhisattva may not realised emptiness directly yet and may still affected by samsara, yet this Bodhisattva enters the Mahayana 5 Paths, namely the Path of Accumulation (and its 3 sub-stages), the Path of Preparation (and its 4 sub-stages), the Path of Seeing, the Path of Meditation and the Path of No More Learning. Entry into these 5 paths is a milestone in one's spiritual path.

Having entered the Path of Accumulation, the Bodhisattva engages in the practices of the 6 Perfections and extensive deeds of virtue. This combination of gathering merit whilst pursuing wisdom through meditation, leads the Bodhisattva towards the significant moment in his cultivation, namely, seeing emptiness directly. The first moment that an ordinary Bodhisattva sees emptiness directly, that is when he/she becomes an Arya bodhisattva and crosses the gateway into the Path of Seeing. Once the bodhisattva is at the Path of Seeing, he enters the 1st of the 10 Bhumis/Grounds.

For purposes of this Commentary, the term "delusions" refer to the 6 root delusions of ignorance, anger, attachment, pride, doubt and wrong view. The term "Defilements" refer to the 2 obscurations, namely, the obscuration to liberation/nirvana and the obscuration to full enlightenment.

The "Grounds" are the various levels of antidotes to eliminate the defilements or obscurations to the omniscient mind. Consequently, at this 1st Ground, what is eliminated is the most gross level of defilements.

When the application of the antidotes gets more intense, the Bodhisattva will then enter the Path of Meditation, erasing increasingly subtle levels of defilements, which continues for 9 more Grounds. At the 10th Ground, he will be able to eliminate the most subtle defilement. When he/she does so, the Path of No More Learning is accomplished; omniscience is accomplished. At this point, the Bodhisattva accomplishes the result of the 6 Perfection practices, namely, Buddhahood.

Where along the 5 Paths are we ordinary practitioners at the moment? Well, most of us ordinary beings have not even entered the 5 Paths yet because we have not fully generated bodhicitta. We may have the wish to generate bodhicitta, we may have a kind heart but we have not actualised bodhicitta because to begin with, we are not convinced that all sentient beings have been our kind mothers and that we need to work for their welfare to repay that kindness. I struggle to recognise even my present mother's kindness, let alone the kindness of all living beings. Due to this, we do not cultivate unconditional love for all beings and thus have not repaid the kindness of all beings.

The bottom line is that we simply have not as yet, created causes to attain bodhicitta. When we check our own minds, we will realise that we are self-absorbed and extremely far from bodhicitta. For instance, we have no equanimity towards people - we tend to treat wealthy or influential people better; we are more tolerant of those who serve our purposes and dislike those who do not. bodhicitta requires us to view all living beings as precious and equal.

When ordinary people worship gods, they often do so for samsaric purposes.

But when we pay homage to Bodhisattvas, we are actually requesting their blessings to be able to perfect our cultivation of the 6 Perfections, the way Bodhisattvas have.

The 6 different analogies to illustrate the preciousness of bodhicitta are considered in the following verses.

V10

*For like the supreme substance of alchemists
It takes the impure form of human flesh
And makes of it the priceless body of a Buddha
Such is bodhicitta: we should grasp it firmly!*

The supreme substance of alchemists refers to gold that alchemists sought to transform from ordinary metals. The transformation of mind from the ordinary to the sublime, is the effect of bodhicitta.

Some doctors are skilled in prescribing a combination of medicines which enable them to heal many sicknesses. Some people are healers of the environment, who know how to recycle unwanted things into useful products. Here, the human flesh is made up of blood, pus and contamination coming from the impure substances of the parents and is easily influenced by the mind that is affected by karma and delusions. Yet this same deluded mind can all be transformed by the bodhicitta mind to the enlightened mind.

When we cultivate bodhicitta, we are cultivating the 5 Dhyani Buddhas,

who are the purified and perfected form of the 5 contaminated aggregates (form, feeling, consciousness, discrimination/cognition and karmic imprints). By knowing our extraordinary potential that can be shaped by bodhicitta, we should never let go of the bodhicitta mind.

V11

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

When leaders, Kings (including the King of the 33 God Realms) and famous people are given precious gems, they regard such gifts as being of great value. Yet, these possessions will not last nor will they necessarily benefit others. However, we as practitioners who have met the Mahayana teachings, if we are able to renounce our worldly life and engage in bodhicitta for the benefit of sentient beings, that would be infinitely more precious than receiving an ordinary jewel because the fruit of enlightenment would be ours.

V12

*All other virtues, like the plantain tree
Produce their fruit but then their force is spent
Alone the marvellous tree of bodhicitta
Will bear its fruit and grow unceasingly!*

When a banana tree bears fruit, the energy to produce more fruit in the future, is finished. Likewise, virtues are like the banana tree. The virtue of bodhicitta however, never stops producing good results and is like a wish-granting tree. Loving kindness, compassion, making offerings to holy objects, chanting mantras are all virtuous but these still require the bodhicitta motivation to give rise to the ultimate result of enlightenment.

V13

*As tough they pass through periods guarded by a hero
Even those who weighed down with dreadful wickedness
Will instantly be freed through having bodhicitta
Who then would not place his trust in it?*

The heroic bodyguard here refers to one who is able to protect one against all suffering and fear. Those who go through the Hinayana path (of the Hearer and Solitary Realiser vehicles) may individually attain freedom from fears and delusions. However, if they remain in that state, it would be self-serving and of only limited benefit to beings. Those who choose the Hearer and Solitary Path have the potential to overcome samsara but when they actualise the peace of nirvana, they remain contentedly in meditation for aeons. However, think for a moment - sentient beings are struggling; they are counting on you to help liberate them from suffering, so how can you just remain in peace by yourself, as only you alone benefit? One needs a wider vision than that. The only thing that can liberate the practitioner from the peace of nirvana, is bodhicitta, for bodhicitta look to liberating not only self but all living beings.

For those who have met the Mahayana teachings and fail to practice bodhicitta are worse than street dogs because animals have the excuse of not being able to understand the benefits of bodhicitta.

V14

*Just as by the fires at the end of time
Great sins are utterly consumed by bodhicitta
Thus its benefits are boundless
As the Wise and Loving Lord explained to Sudhana.*

It is said that as the world comes towards the final dissolution of the elements, the aeon heat will be much more intense than the heat of the suns of the 10 directions'universes. Samsaric suffering is equal to this fiery suffering, yet it can be totally purified by actualising bodhicitta. There is no need to run about, searching high and low for external help. Practice bodhicitta. The two bodhicittas (conventional and ultimate) are the most forceful antidotes to eradicate sickness, problems, aging, death, birth, samsaric suffering, as well as the self-centred peace of nirvana. If we tried to explain the benefits of bodhicitta, there would not be enough time to explain it all. Rather than ruling the country by force, rule through bodhicitta.

V15

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

There are two causes. The first cause is the inspirational mind that seeks liberation and enlightenment for oneself (to benefit others); the second cause is the mind that wishes to lead all living beings to enlightenment. There are 2 aspects of bodhicitta – intentional bodhicitta (the mind that wishes to achieve bodhicitta) and active bodhicitta (the practical engagement in cultivating bodhicitta).

V16

Wishing to depart and setting out upon the road

This is how the difference is conceived

The wise and learned thus should understand

This difference, which is ordered and progressive.

The difference between aspiring bodhicitta and active bodhicitta is wishing to go on a journey and actually setting out on the journey.

Intentional bodhicitta or aspiring bodhicitta wants to accomplish the 6 Perfections and the bodhisattva vows. The active bodhicitta is the actual engagement in the 6 Perfections and the vows. We are presently at the preliminary stage of bodhicitta practice i.e. trying our best to attain bodhicitta but our efforts lack consistency and our compassion is unstable. However, we must never give up on this. There will come a day when we will attain spontaneous, effortless, un-interrupted bodhicitta and thereby enter into Mahayana 5 Paths and become bodhisattvas.

A momentary act of compassion is like the banana tree which is of limited benefit. But when we train in bodhicitta to the point of it becoming

spontaneous bodhicitta, then the benefit that brings to sentient beings is vast and limitless.

V17

*Bodhicitta in intention bears rich fruit
For those still wandering in samsara
And yet a ceaseless stream of merit does not flow from it
For this will rise alone from active bodhicitta*

Wondrous are the benefits of bodhicitta. Aspiring bodhicitta bears fruit but does not produce an endless stream of merit. Engaging bodhicitta however, carries the twin advantage of extensive benefits to all beings and is one of the principal causes for one's Buddhahood. Nothing else. Do not look for excuses to engage in a diluted form of bodhicitta practice. Instead, pursue engaging/active bodhicitta.

V18

*For when, with irreversible intent
The mind embraces bodhicitta
Willing to set free the endless multitudes of beings
At that instant from that moment on,*

When with unchanging mind, bodhicitta becomes merged with our mindstream, the mind no longer struggles with self cherishing. It has become one with the bodhicitta motivation which seeks to free all beings from suffering. That is how bodhicitta becomes effortless and ever-flowing for the bodhisattva.

V19

*A great and unremitting stream
A strength of wholesome merit
Even during sleep and inattention
Rises equal to the vastness of the sky.*

How should we experience bodhicitta? Bodhicitta is like a great and forceful wave, filling the heart to the point of bursting, is never depleted, remains uninterrupted, unstained and certain. Even when one is not focusing on bodhicitta e.g. when one is in sleep, one's mind should be saturated with bodhicitta. Bodhicitta should be as vast as the sky.

V20

*This is the Tathagata
In the sutra Subahu requested
Said with reasoned demonstration
Teaching those inclined to lesser paths.*

This verse is on proving the benefits of bodhicitta via scriptures. The benefits of bodhicitta were spoken by the Buddha himself and not a creation of scholars. In the sutra called "Subahu Pariprichha Sutra" the Buddha expounded numerous benefits of bodhicitta including actualising full enlightenment.

V21

*If with kindly generosity
One merely has the wish to sooth
The aching heads of other beings
Such merit knows no bounds*

Here, “ generosity “ refers to the mind that is willing and eager to help others, to cherish others. If one has a single thought just to relieve others of pain, one’s merit is beyond words.

V22

*No need to speak then, of the wish
To drive away the endless pain
Of each and every living being
Bringing them unbounded virtues*

If the thought to relieve others of physical pain is meritorious, all the more so, the wish to remove the pain of all aspects of samsara together with its causes, for every living being. In this verse, we see the first two of the 4 Noble Truths, namely the Truth of Suffering and the Truth of the Causes of Suffering.

Suffering is a word that no one likes to hear. We try our best to avoid talking about this subject. Yet the point is, if we wish to rid our lives of suffering, we first have to know what it is we are trying to rid of!

That is why the Buddha taught the 1st Noble Truth of Suffering. He was

being realistic. Since we all seek lasting happiness, the Buddha wants us to be clear about what it is we need to adopt and what we need to abandon, to achieve ultimate happiness.

One's contaminated aggregates, including environmental contamination (due to one's impure perceptions arising from karma and delusions) are all part of the Truth of Suffering. The Truth of Suffering is reflected in (i) how all beings in samsara experience the 3 general sufferings and (ii) the respective specific sufferings of the 6 realms. The 3 general sufferings are the suffering of suffering (pain); the suffering of change (e.g the inevitable change from pleasant to unpleasant or separation from things we regard as desirable) and pervasive suffering (merely having aggregates brings with them, difficulties in all forms).

The suffering of the 6 realms has been discussed many times so I will just briefly mention here some of the sufferings of each of the 6 realms. The sufferings of the hell beings is one of intense suffering in the hot hells or cold hells, where one's body is either inseparable from agonising and terrifying flames or pierced with icy cold, bleeding from every crack of one's skin; the suffering of the pretas is one of unimaginable hunger and thirst lasting thousands of years and having mirages of lakes only to find them transformed into thorns and poisonous needles; the suffering of the animal realm is one of never-ending fear and being pursued by others as food; the suffering of the human realm is well understood by all of us, including always separating from what we desire and constantly meeting what we wish to avoid; the suffering of the demi-god realm is that of all-consuming jealousy and aggressiveness, always fighting with the god-realm beings and getting mortally wounded, losing the battle, dying but

only to be resurrected to fight another battle and re-experience all its torments; the suffering of the god-realm beings is the extreme anguish when the karma to experience their luxurious existence finishes, their radiance fades and friends abandon them and see their next lower realm rebirth of great suffering.

The 1st Noble Truth of Suffering extends to objects being “suffering” in nature. How can trees and stones and even a beautiful flower be suffering? They too come under the category of suffering because when we perceive them, we grasp at such objects as being inherently, independently existing and our emotional afflicted minds get activated in relation to them. The root cause for this is ignorance i.e. grasping at self and at phenomena.

V23

*Could our fathers and our mothers
Ever have so generous a wish?
Do the very gods, the rishis, even Brahma
Harbour such benevolence as this?*

V24

*For in the past they never
Even in their dreams, conceived
Such profit even for themselves
How could they have such aims for others' sake?*

We have known the great love and care from our parents, yet, do they have this great aspiration called bodhicitta which cherishes all beings and seeks to liberate them? Even some of those worldly gods with supernatural powers, who have a sense of kindness towards living beings, do not possess the altruistic, bodhicitta mind. Even Brahma who had a mind of concern for suffering beings and thus, requested the Buddha to turn the Wheel of Dharma, did not generate bodhicitta. By reflecting on this, we turn our minds to the bodhisattvas whom we can truly admire and pay homage to for their great compassion and courage to rescue all living beings without exception.

Our parents, gods, worldly beings never generated true compassion for themselves, not even in their dreams, how can we expect them to generate bodhicitta, which is compassion towards all sentient beings ? Generation of compassion towards oneself is actually the renunciation of suffering. Bodhicitta is the compassion towards others by helping them renounce suffering. Therefore one can see here, that without generating renunciation, there is no way for bodhicitta to be actualised.

Since one now knows the power and benefit of bodhicitta to eradicate samsara and causes of samsara, we should rejoice at our own inspiration to practice it. If we do not engage in the practice of bodhicitta at all, we have wasted our lives.

V25

*For beings do not wish their own true good
So how could they intend such food for others' sake?
This state of mind so precious and so rare
Arises truly wondrous, never seen before.*

The nature of samsaric beings are such that they do not wish suffering but do not know how to eradicate suffering but instead due to ignorance of reality, create causes for more suffering; they wish for happiness to endure but they do not know how to create the causes for it and dash all opportunities to secure this. They do not know how to purify the causes which obstruct their happiness and end up only trying to help themselves.

Due to this, it is impossible to transform the cherishing of oneself to the cherishing of others, so necessary for the cultivation of bodhicitta. The altruistic mind is the answer, yet rarely does it appear and is thus a worthy object of veneration and praise.

V26

*The pain dispelling draft
This cause of joy for those who wander through the world
This precious attitude, this jewel of mind
How shall it be gauged or quantified?*

The pain-dispelling draft refers to conventional and ultimate bodhicitta, which removes all suffering and its causes. The Bodhisattvas remain among

us to help and guide us on the benefits of the the altruistic attitude.

V27

*For if the simple thought to be of help to others
Exceeds in worth the worship of the Buddhas
What need is there to speak of actual deeds
That bring about the weal and benefit of beings?*

The verse is one of encouragement to pursue engaging bodhicitta . Merely having intentional bodhicitta (aspiring bodhicitta) itself exceeds even the merit of one's prayers to the Buddha, no question about actually engaging in the actions of bodhicitta.

V28

*For beings long to free themselves from misery
But misery itself they follow and pursue
They long for joy but in their ignorance
Destroy it, as they would a hated enemy.*

Engaging bodhicitta is superior because beings of the 6 realms are likened to the blind. Since beginningless time, living beings have longed to be free from suffering but due to ignorance, they have endlessly pursued the objects of desire and harmed the objects of anger, continuously performing negative deeds and creating a multitude of causes for more samsara, destroying the very happiness they so desperately seek. Even though most of us know that negative actions bring negative results, we

are habituated; we continue to engage in them.

We are strange beings. On the one hand, we strive for joy but at the same time, we ruin the very causes for joy to be ours. For example, whenever we are asked to do Dharma practices, we think it tiring and inconvenient but when we are invited to do negative things like indulge in excessive eating which also require time and effort, we delight in these. It is bodhicitta which enables us to persevere in helping living beings.

V29

*But those who fill with bliss
All beings destitute of joy
Who cut all pain and suffering away
From those weighed down with misery*

Buddhas and Bodhisattvas guide living beings to cut-off “all pain and suffering away” through the practice of the altruistic mind. This can be interpreted as the 3rd and 4th Noble Truth of the Path and the Truth of Cessation.

V30

*Who drive away the darkness of their ignorance
What virtue could be matched with theirs?
What friend could be compared to the?
What merit is there similar to this?*

Buddhas and Bodhisattvas drive away the ignorance of not understanding cause & effect and of the mistaken view of believing that all self and phenomena truly and inherently exist). What other virtue can match this and who would be a greater friend?

V31

*If they who do some good, in thanks
For favours once received, are praised
Why need we speak of Bodhisattvas
Those who freely benefit the world?*

In ordinary life, when we receive a favour from someone, we praise them. What more Bodhisattvas who freely and unconditionally benefit the world? Take a few moments to reflect on this. One should recognise the vastness of the Bodhisattva's mind and aspire towards it.

V32

*Those who, scornfully with condescension
Give, just once, a single meal to others
Feeding them for only half a day
Are honoured by the world as virtuous*

V33

*What need is there to speak of those
Who constantly bestow on boundless multitudes
The peerless joy of blissful Buddhahood
The ultimate fulfilment of their hopes?*

Some of us have offer food to others without generating any positive motivation but offer it just once and get acknowledged as being virtuous. Or when we offer food to the Sangha or sponsor a puja, we are treated well at the monastery and receive better quality food and offerings than the Sangha. We then act like we are big sponsors who have granted great favours to the monastery. All this pride and self cherishing over offering one meal. Think then of the bodhisattvas who constantly and selflessly give to others their time, effort, their virtues and even their limbs, all for the purpose of fulfilling sentient beings' hopes for the ultimate happiness of enlightenment.

V34

*And those who harbour evil in their minds
Against such lords of generosity, the Buddha's heirs
Will stay in hell, the Might One has said
For ages equal to the moments of their malice*

For those who have harmful thoughts towards Bodhisattvas will create the negative karma to fall into the hell existence. One moment in hell brings means aeons of suffering. We have already created negative causes for rebirth in the hell realms, so if we do not rescue ourselves now, while we

have the inspiration to cultivate bodhicitta, we will not find another chance to do so. If we actualise bodhicitta, we will purify karma. Previous negative action has created karma, which in turn influences present actions but we have power to choose to do a negative act or not.

V35

*By contrast, good and virtuous thoughts
Will yield abundant fruits in greater measure
Even in adversity, the Bodhisattvas
Never bring forth evil – only an increasing stream of goodness.*

Due to being overwhelmed by anger, attachment and ignorance, we cannot seem to avoid hurting others directly or indirectly; we cause damage and injury to others through carelessness or ill-will. The Bodhisattvas however, never harm others, even when facing hardship of all kinds, including from the very beings they are seeking to help.

V36

*To them in whom this precious sacred mind
Is born – to them I bow!
I go for refuge in that source of happiness
That brings its very enemies to perfect bliss.*

Whoever attains ultimate bodhicitta, namely bodhicitta conjoined with wisdom realising emptiness, is an object of Refuge.

Chapter 2: Confession

Verse 1

*To the Buddhas, those thus gone
And to the sacred Law, immaculate, supreme and rare
And to the Buddha's offspring, oceans of good qualities
That I might gain this precious attitude, I make a perfect offering.*

The “sacred law” refers to the Buddha’s teachings which are extremely precious and effective in overcoming suffering and bringing joy. The Bodhisattvas are the Buddha’s children who possess great qualities such as great compassion, realisations of emptiness, emanate hundreds of bodies to travel to 1000 Buddha realms to receive teachings and thereafter bring benefit and protection to sentient beings. It is for this reason that one makes offerings to them with the aspiration and prayers to gain the altruistic mind, to gain bodhicitta which Bodhisattvas possess.

The term “perfect offering” has 3 aspects, namely,

- pure motivation of the giver to bring all sentient beings to enlightenment;
- the object to which offering is being made (Buddhahood);
- the purity of the substance offered (offerings obtained honestly; not through selling any representation of the Triple Gem (unless the proceeds are segregated from monies used for ordinary beings’ upkeep) or selling weapons; alcohol; money obtained from falsely declaring your realisations).

The categories of offerings are external, internal, secret and suchness offerings.

Verse 2

*I offer every fruit and flower
And every kind of healing medicine
And all the precious things the world affords
With all pure waters of refreshment.*

Verse 3

*Every mountain rich and filled with jewels
All sweet and lonely forest groves
The trees of heaven, garlanded with blossom
And branches heavy, laden with their fruit.*

Verse 4

*The perfumed fragrance of the realms of gods and men
All incense, wishing trees and trees of gems
All crops that grow without the tiller's care
And every sumptuous object worthy to be offered.*

Verse 5

*Lakes and meres adorned with lotuses
All plaintive with the sweet voiced cries of water birds
And lovely to the eyes, and all things wild and free
Stretching to the boundless limits of the sky.*

External offerings include fruits, flowers, medicines, jewels and even mountains and caves chosen by mahasiddhas (“sweet and lonely forest groves”). When offering fragrances, offer first to the Buddha and then to oneself as a self-generated deity (for those engaging in tantra practice). Other external offerings include natural incense which has cleansing properties; Gaden Khenpa (a plant used to polish wooden floors to purify them and also serves as a medicine); salu rice (this rice grows with ease). All offerings to the Buddhas and bodhisattvas should be consecrated with OM AH HUM.

It should be known that one does not need physical objects in order to make offerings. One can generate offerings through one’s visualisations e.g. beautiful lakes blessed and protected by deities (like the 4 holy lakes of Tibet) that are filled with 5 coloured lotuses; beautiful sounds and sights; all things that are free in the wilderness such as forest animals, sun & moon, snow, sparkling pure mountain waters. One’s visualisation can conjure up a variety of wonderful offerings and if one multiplies one’s visualised offerings, they become extensive offerings. From this, one can see how easy it is to make offerings and thus, how easy it is to generate merits.

Verse 6:

*I hold them all before my mind and to the supreme Buddhas
And their heirs will make a perfect gift of them
O think of me with love, compassionate lords
Sacred objects of my prayers, accept these offerings.*

The potency of any offering made to Buddhas and Bodhisattvas is influenced by the state of mind accompanying the offering. As an illustration, during Buddha's time and in his presence, there was a boy playing in the sand, who was inspired to make offerings but was only able offer sand to Buddha's begging bowl. This boy was later reborn as the great Buddhist Emperor Ashoka. Plain water seems like an ordinary offering. Yet Lama Atisha said that the water in Tibet was so pure, that it was a great offering to the Buddhas. Hence, the practice of water-bowl offerings is not of Tibetan origin but from the Indian Buddhist tradition.

Verse 7

*For I am empty handed, destitute of merit
I have no other wealth. But you protectors
You whose thoughts are not for the good of others
In your great power, accept this for my sake.*

Why should we be earnest in making offering? Offering is the 2nd of the important 7-limb practice of:

- Prostration and homage (as explained in the previous verses)
- Offerings
- Confessing
- Rejoicing
- Requesting the Guru to remain
- Requesting the guru to teach Dharma
- Dedication

We should put full effort and heart into making offerings because we are destitute of merit. That is why one often hears of pitiful stories about people who have no protection, no contentment, no peace at the time of death nor are cared for in life. Such experiences arise due to a lack of merit. One should therefore with sincerity think “This offering I am making through actual substances (or through visualisations) is to the Buddhas, who only work for the good of others. Please accept my offering, so that I may generate merit and dedicate it for the welfare of all beings”.

Verse 8:

*The Buddhas and bodhisattva children
I offer them myself throughout all my lives
Supreme courageous ones, accept me totally
For with devotion I will be your servant*

Offering of oneself in the service of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas through all of one’s lifetimes is a mammoth act of merit because they bravely and selflessly act for the benefit of living beings.

Verse 9:

*For if you will accept me, I will be
A benefit to all and freed from fear
I’ll go beyond the evils of my past
And ever after turn my face from them.*

This verse sets up a promise that if one is accepted into the bodhisattva

path, one too resolves to become like a bodhisattva to benefit others and in so doing, will be released from past negative karma and be protected from committing non virtue.

Verse 10:

*A bathing chamber excellent fragrant
With floors of crystal, radiant and clear
With graceful pillars shimmering with gems
All hung about with gleaming canopies.*

The purpose of offering a bathing chamber is to purify one's negative karma. Offering an elaborate and magnificent bathing chamber requires mental effort and in so doing, one is working with the negative karmic imprints deeply embedded in one's mindstream, to wash them out. Thus when we do ritual bath offering, it is deeply symbolic to have crystal bowl.

Verse 11

*There will be blissful buddhas and their heirs
I'll bathe with many a precious vase
Abrim with water, sweet and pleasant
All to the frequent strains of melody and song.*

When making offerings to the Buddhas and bodhisattvas, one should strive to offer the best. This combats miserliness and worldly thought. With visualisations, there is no limit to what one can offer. Therefore, when offering the bath, not only is the bathing chamber exquisite but

the precious vase contains the purest, freshest water. If one is engaging in deity yoga practice, when one showers, one should visualise the bath offering being made to the self-generated deity. This is how to combine practice with one's daily life activities.

Verse 12

*With cloths of unexampled quality
With peerless, perfumed towels I will dry them
And offer splendid scented clothes
Well dyed and of surpassing excellence.*

Verse 13

*With different garments, light and supple
And a hundred beautiful adornments
I will grace sublime Samantabhadra
Manjugosha, Lokeshvara and their kin.*

Verse 14

*And with a sumptuous fragrance that
Pervades a thousand million worlds
I will anoint the bodies of the Buddhas
Light and gleaming bright, like pure and burnished gold.*

It will be noticed that every item and manner of offering is expressed in great detail. This is part of training one's mind in concentrated offering to holy objects of refuge and virtue. This not only gives rise to merit but helps to keep out distraction and the self-centred mind. The offering of jewels, necklaces and such adornments are to Buddhas residing in the sambogakaya aspect (the Buddhas

manifest in sambogakaya aspect with adornments and are seen as such all bodhisattvas). The Buddhas have no need for such ornaments but is a method for the giver, we practitioners, to practice generosity and gather merit.

Verse 15

*I will place before the Buddha, perfect object of my worship
Flowers like the lotus and the mandarava
Utpala and other scented blossoms
Worked and twined in lovely scented garlands*

This relates to one of the preliminary practices of arranging one's altar beautifully and extensively for the objects of veneration, namely the Buddha, Bodhisattvas etc . There are 6 preliminary steps to one's daily practice – cleaning the place, setting up the altar with beautiful & honestly obtained offerings, inviting the Merit Field, sitting in the Vairochana position (the lotus position), if possible; if not , then be seated comfortably but respectfully;, offering mandala to the Merit Field; making supplications. The utpala flower is mentioned here because of its beauty and rarity in blooming only when a Buddha descends onto earth. This gives one an idea of the type of offerings one should make.

Verse 16

*I will offer swelling clouds of incense
Whose ambient perfume ravishes the mind
And various foods and every kind of drink
All delicacies worthy of the gods.*

When one offers incense, one is not allowed to use that made using even bits of blood, bones, poisonous plants or animal parts after one has killed the animal. It is always good to offer in abundance. Sometimes, people might think that since the altar offerings will eventually be discarded, there is no need to offer good quality items nor to offer a lot. This is improper thinking. Offer as much as you can manage, offer good quality offerings and set up the right motivation of making offerings to create the positive potential for Buddhahood.

Verse 17

*I will offer precious lamps
All perfectly contrived as golden lotuses
A bed of flower petals scattering
Upon the level, incense-sprinkled ground.*

In Tibet, butter lamps were offered because yaks and cows were the most common animals found there. To enable the yak or cow to also gain the merit from making offerings, not only was the yak or cow milk used for human consumption but also made into butter lamps as offering to the Buddhas. In this way, when one makes offerings, one can also think of helping others generate good causes too.

Verse 18

*I will offer palaces immense and resonant with song
All decked with precious pearls and pendants gems
Gleaming treasures fit to ornament the amplitude of space
All this I offer to the loving bodhisattvas*

Verse 19

*Precious parasols adorned with golden shafts
And bordered all around with jewelled fringes
Upright, well-proportioned, pleasing to the eye
Again, all this I give to all the Buddhas.*

The detailed description of the offerings made is to focus one's mind on sincere and joyful giving. This will create a mass of positive karma which will support one's spiritual and material well being.

Verse 20

*May a multitude of other offerings
Accompanied by music sweet to hear
Be made in great successive clouds
To soothe the sufferings of living beings*

Verse 21

*May rains of flowers, every precious thing
Fall down in an unceasing stream
Upon the jewels of sacred Dharma
The Triple Gem and all supports for offering.*

Verse 22

*Just as Manjugosha gentle and melodious
Made offerings to all the conquerors
Likewise I will make oblation
To the Buddhas and their bodhisattva children.*

Verse 23

*I will offer prayers by every way and means
To these vast oceans of good qualities
May clouds of tuneful praise
Ascend unceasingly before them*

These verses relate to offerings made through the power of aspiration: “Other offerings” refer to those offered through visualisation with the thought, “May these offerings be like wish-fulfilling gems to fulfil the needs of all sentient beings”. The transmission of Dharma, entire scriptures and all forms of joy can be offered to all holy beings, as well as to holy objects like stupas. There are 6 qualities that must be present for verse of praise to be “tuneful” – rising, pausing, changing, slurring (with heart-felt sentiment), high and low.

Verse 24

*To the Buddhas of the past, the present and all future time
And to the Doctrine and Sublime assembly
With bodies many as the grains of dist
Upon the ground, I will prostrate and bow.*

Verse 25

*To all shrines and all supports
Of bodhicitta I bow down
All abbots who transmit the vows, all learned masters
And all noble ones who practice the Dharma*

This is the Refuge verse. The objects of Refuge are Buddha, Dharma and Arya Sangha. One should also offer respect and homage to all holy shrines, those who transmit vows and those who live an ethical life because all of these support the attainment of bodhicitta.

When reciting the refuge prayer, one should emanate as many bodies as the grains of dust and visualise oneself leading all sentient beings in prostration to the Triple Gem. One needs to have a clear understanding of what taking refuge means. Refuge vows are the basis of all other vows e.g. 5 lay vows, ordination vows, Bodhisattva vows, tantric vows.

What are the 2 causes of refuge? (1) Faith and (2) Fear of the lower realms.

“Faith” here is not about blind belief. It refers to vivid faith, yearning faith, confident faith, irreversible faith towards Buddha, Dharma and Sangha based on reasoning. It is about acknowledging that the Triple Gem are the supreme protector because through their teachings on how to think and act, one is protected from harming others and harming oneself. As for the fear of the lower realms, we already have an idea of what the suffering of the lower realms (animal, preta and hell-realm beings) are, so if we wish to avoid such terrifying rebirths, we require reliable guides to help us to avoid creating causes for such rebirths.

It is useful to know that there are different kinds of taking Refuge – there is the common worldly refuge, where people worship worldly gods and have worldly goals; and then there is the beyond-worldly refuge such as taking refuge in the Triple Gem.

Within Buddhist Refuge, there are also different levels of taking refuge, i.e. there are different levels of aspirations. These varying levels of aspiration give rise to what is called the 3-capability beings i.e. the small-capability practitioner, the middle-capability practitioner and the higher-capability practitioner.

The small capability being's manner of taking refuge centres around understanding the life and deeds of the Buddha, how he eradicated defilements and attained liberation and admires the Buddha's qualities and realisations. For such persons, the main purpose of taking refuge is to avoid the lower realms and rely on the Triple Gem as saviour and guide.

The middle capability being's manner of taking refuge likewise regards the Triple Gem as the guide based on the understanding of the sufferings of all realms of samsara (not only that of the lower realms) and yearns to be free from samsara. Here, the main purpose of taking refuge is to achieve liberation from samsara (attain nirvana) and become an Arhat.

The higher capability being's manner of taking refuge is much broader and is discussed in greater details in the next Verse 26.

Verse 26

Until the essence of enlightenment is reached

I go for refuge to the Buddhas

Also I take refuge in the Doctrine

And all the host of bodhisattvas.

This verse speaks of the Mahayana refuge. According to Mahayana teachings, Buddha gained enlightenment a long time before he descended on earth as Prince Siddhartha to display the 12 deeds towards enlightenment namely, birth into a royal family, renunciation, personal sacrifice, etc leading up to the moment of enlightenment.

The higher capability being's (Mahayanic practitioner) manner of taking refuge is again reliance upon the Triple Gem but is motivated beyond mere self-liberation. The motivation here is to attain enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings and to bring them to Buddhahood. It goes beyond personal relief from suffering and individual liberation. When one aspires to attain enlightenment for sake of all beings, one enters the Mahayana path. The causal refuge here is having such an aspiration; the resultant refuge, is Buddhahood itself.

Verse 27

*To perfect Buddhas and bodhisattvas
In all directions, where they may reside
To them who are the sovereigns of great mercy
I press my palms together praying thus*

Here begins the 3rd of the 7-limb practice of confession of one's negative actions. This verse is referring to the 4 demons or maras within ordinary sentient beings –

- (1) aggregates
- (2) emotions

- (3) samsaric death and
- (4) torturing pride.

We need to apply the 4 Opponent Powers (refuge, regret, remedy and resolve) when engaging in confession and purification practices. Verse 27 here explains the first of the 4 Opponent Power of Refuge, namely refuge.

Verse 28

*In this and all my other lifetimes
Wandering in the round without beginning
Blindly I have brought forth wickedness
Inciting others to commit the same.*

This verse refers to the 2nd Opponent Power of regret. Regret is not about guilt. It is about objectively recognising one's wrong actions as mistaken. For countless lives while circling in samsara, one has brought immense harm to others, causing others to do likewise, deliberately or careless inflicting harms of body, speech and mind. Due to this, we lead lives of sorrow and trouble, circling in suffering, never to be liberated. We should recognise the error of our ways and be determined to improve. That is proper regret.

Verse 29

*I have taken pleasure in such evil
Tricked and over-mastered by my ignorance
Now I see the blame of it and in my heart
Great protectors, I declare it!*

Verse 30

*Whatever I have done against the Triple Gem
Against my parents, teachers and the rest
Through the force of my defilements
By the faculties of body, speech and mind.*

Verse 31

*All the evil I, a sinner, have committed
The sin that clings to me through many evil deeds
All the frightful things that I have caused to be
I openly declare to you, the teachers of the world.*

Here, one owns up to committing harm and negativities. One fully recognises that ignorance has overwhelmed oneself, resulting in one doing evil deeds without remorse. For this reason, one can only blame oneself.

As an example of great humility, Shantideva openly expresses to the Buddhas, how he has committed evil actions through force of negative emotion, thereby causing suffering to so many beings.

Verse 32

*Before my evil has been cleansed away
It may be that my death will come to me
And so that, come what may, I might be freed
I pray you, quickly grant me your protection.*

Here we see the 3rd of the four Opponent Powers, namely, the power of the remedy or antidote to one's delusions, which can take various forms such as reciting purification mantras with the proper mindset of regret; meditate on emptiness. The verse speaks of the concern that one may die before one is able to purify all negativities and thus, never be able to gain freedom from suffering. We get easily inspired in the gompas or when we meet great teachers or when we see relics. However, the moment we leave the centre, poof !! We forget every bit of Dharma we have learned. Therefore, we need to engage in the 4th of the opponent powers of resolve or making the determination not to repeat negativities. One needs to make earnest prayers to be able to practice Dharma consistently.

Verse 33

*The wanton Lord of Death we can't predict
And life's tasks done or still do, we cannot stay
And whether ill or well, we cannot trust
Our lives, our fleeting, momentary lives.*

Death is certain, yet the time of death is uncertain. Oblivious to this, we busy ourselves with endless and meaningless tasks that keep us chained to samsara. We seem to happily continue this prisoner-existence. We live our

lives on baseless assumptions – for example - it is not necessary that sick people die before healthy people; or old people die before young people. It simply does not work this way. One’s life span cannot be assumed as it is in the nature of impermanence.

Verse 34

*And we must pass away, forsaking all
But I, devoid of understanding
Have for the sake of friend and foe alike
Provoked and brought about so many evils.*

Whatever plans we make, whatever projects that we are involved in, whatever friends or businesses we cherish, however large a bank balance we have or the number protection-amulets we place around our necks or homes, when death comes, we have to leave all of it behind and journey on alone. We commit limitless negativities because of attachment, anger and ignorance. We indulge in only wanting to be with friends, avoiding enemies and are indifferent to strangers.

Verse 35

*My enemies at length will cease to be
My friends and I myself
Will cease to be
And all is likewise destined for destruction.*

Everything has to come to an end – enemies, friends, including our bodies

that we treasure so much - all have to cease. Therefore, there is no need to grasp at any of this. The late Khensur Rinpoche used to advise people “Don’t get stressed out. Everything is in the nature of change. All things will pass, so have a cup of tea”.

Verse 36

*All that I possess and use
Is like the fleeting vision of a dream
It fades into the realms of memory
And facing will be seen no more.*

The 5 senses (“all that I possess”) and the objects of the 5 senses (all that I use), likewise is in the nature of a dream. Whether one is experiencing pleasure or unpleasant circumstances, there is not need to be obsessive. Loosen one’s clinging. If at the time of death, we are attached to anything or to anyone, it can cause one to enter into the lower realms. Even in relation to the Guru – if one is attached to Guru, it can pull one back into samsara.

It is important to differentiate between inspiration and attachment. Similarly between husband and wife - if attachment to the spouse is strong at time of death, the clinging mind of the deceased can create a disturbance to one who is dying, as well as the surviving partner. Let go. Everything is like an illusion and will fade.

Verse 37

*And even in the brief course of this present life,
So many friends and foes have passed away
Because of whom, the evils I have done
Still lie, unbearable, before me.*

If one cannot understand the subtle aspects of impermanence, at least recognise the gross examples of impermanence e.g. the passing away of friends. Because of the 3 discriminations i.e. labelling people as friend, enemy or stranger, the continuation of negative karma occurs, like a shadow following the body, bringing unbearable mental torture. Here, one is not being discouraged from giving love but rather to avoid desirous attachment i.e. love due to selfishness, fulfilment of one's own self-cherishing. Dharma is teaching us to cultivate unconditional love, virtuous love that is only concerned for the well-being of the other party. As long as affection is mixed with the self-centred mind, that is nothing but attachment and negative. During death time, when the elements begin to dissolve, the hallucinations occurring at that time due to past negative karma look terrifying. Thus we cannot afford to have negative karma which includes the karma generated by these 3 kinds of discriminating mind.

Verse 38

*The thought came never to my mind
That I too am a brief and passing thing
And so, through hatred, lust and ignorance
I've been the cause of many evils.*

We may attend many Dharma talks and yet, never look into ourselves. We never realise that one is also impermanent. Due to not reflecting on death and impermanence, there is hatred for the enemy, desirous clinging loved ones and total indifference towards strangers. An immense amount of negative karma stems from the emotions stirred up by one's concepts of enemy, friends and stranger.

Verse 39

*Never halting, night or day
My life is slipping, slipping by
And nothing that has passed can be regained
And what by death could be my destiny?*

From our conception till now, there has not been a single moment where we are not marching towards death. Past moments of our precious human life is gone; death is near and the time to practice Dharma is short and even if one wants to regain the lost time, it will not be possible. Death is our destiny. However, we can use every remaining moment well if we live in Dharma.

Verse 40

*There I'll be, prostrate upon my bed
And all around, the ones I know and love
But I alone shall be the one to feel
The cutting of the thread life.*

Shantideva is illustrating a person on his the death-bed or coffin. Whatever lifestyle one has lived, death comes. Although one's loved ones may be around us at that time, only oneself will experience the separation from life. The only companion at death and beyond, the only thing that can help us then is whatever understanding one has of virtue, the right path, faith and conviction in Dharma.

Cultivating Dharma will bring about the wisdom that realises that images at death are just from the mind. They are hallucinations of the mind. One of our long time member's aunt experienced clinical death and experienced the stages of the death process up to the white appearance (2 steps before clear light mind) and saw a tunnel filled with bright light and a voice telling her to follow the bright light and at one stage, she saw a beautiful lotus flower. On one of the petals of the lotus, she saw her name and then heard a voice saying that she has not purified enough yet, thus she must return. When she heard this, she heard her sister calling her and she regained consciousness. On the second occasion, she saw the same images and had the same experience. This time, her son called her and she regained consciousness. She had liver cancer and suffered a lot but in the final few days, she had no pain and was in a good frame of mind.

Hence that lone journey of death is one where faith in Dharma helps. It was clear that she had Dharma imprints from past lives and thus had no fear of death. Hence faith and conviction in Dharma creates throwing karma to be born in the pure lands.

Verse 41

*When the vanguard of the Deadly King has gripped me
What help to me will be my friends or kin?
For only goodness gained in life will help me
This alas is what I shrugged away*

When due to one's past karmic imprints, the hallucinated image of Yama, the Lord of Death with his scary appearance looks ready to consume one's life, loved ones and one's possessions cannot relieve one from anxiety and fear of death. Only virtues committed by oneself can provide support. Is there any choice left but to seriously adopt the practice of Dharma but build up the storehouse of merit?

Verse 42

*Oh protectors! I, so little heeding
Had hardly guessed at horror such as this –
And all for this brief, transient existence
Have gathered so much evil to myself.*

This is a cry to the Buddhas and bodhisattvas. As one has put so little attention on virtue and cultivated so little awareness of the Dharma, at the time of death, there will be much suffering due to the ripening of past negative imprints.

Verse 43

*The day they take him to the scaffold
Where his body will be torn and butchered
A man is changed, transfigured by his fear
His mouth is dry, his eyes start from his brow.*

Verse 44

*If so it is, then how will be my misery
When stricken down, beside myself with fear
I see the fiend, the messenger of death
Who turns on me his fell and dreadful gaze?*

These verses describe the state of fear of the person who is brought by his/her own karma, to the state of punishment, where no second chances are given. This arises when one has no understanding of the law of cause and effect and behaves exactly as one pleases with no regard for others nor consequences.

Verse 45

*Who can save me, who can now protect me
From this horror, from this frightful dread?
And then I'll search the four directions
Seeking help, with panic stricken eyes.*

Even though there is no actual, physical being called the Lord of Death, if we do not put effort to learn and practice Dharma which implant positive imprints, when we face death, we will hallucinate a very “real” Yama, feel fearful, vulnerable and lost without any protection and powerless to

overcome the fearful visions at the time of death.

Verse 46

*Nowhere help or refuge will be found
And sunk beneath the weight of sorrow
Naked, helpless, unprotected –
What when this befalls me, shall I do?*

Verse 47

*Thus from this day forth I go for refuge
To the Buddhas, guardians of wandering beings
Who labour for the good of all that lives
Those might ones who scatter every fear.*

By the time past negative karma ripens, it will be too late to purify that particular negative karma. Hence when death comes and the frightening hallucinations are already appearing, it would be too late to search for effective protection. Without cultivation of Dharma or proper purification during life, seeking protection at the time of death will be too late. We need to protect ourselves now. In the case of Milarepa, he purified all his negative karma in that lifetime and thus, as he approached death, he sang with joy. His heart had no longer any fear.

Ours is a story of an empty life – first one says “I had no time to study Dharma because I had to go to school “ ; then 20 years pass and our next declaration is that “ I had to earn a living and thus didn’t have good conditions to practice Dharma “. Soon another 20 years pass. Then when

we retire, we have the urge to say “Oh I first need to go on holiday and travel “ and soon we find ourselves too old, without energy to cultivate; then a few more years pass by and death knocks on our door. What meaningful thing have we gained from such a life?

We work solely for worldly purposes because of self cherishing and having a wrong view of existence, which in turn bring about the constant commission of negative karma and a terrifying end of one life.

Verse 48

*In the Dharma that resides within their hearts
That scatters all the terrors of samsara
And in the multitude of Bodhisattvas
Likewise I will perfectly take refuge.*

The manner in which Bodhisattvas abide in the Dharma refuge is of being constantly aware of the emptiness of the person (the concept of the I) and the emptiness of phenomena (aggregates and external world). In this way, all terrors of samsara are eliminated.

Verse 49

*Gripped by dread, beside myself with terror
To Samantabhadra I will give myself
And to Manjushri, the melodious and genetle
I will give myself entirely.*

When overwhelmed by the fear of death, let me follow the Bodhisattva Samantabhadra (who honoured the Buddhas through extensive offerings) and Manjushri (who blesses with wisdom).

Verse 50

*To him whose loving deeds are steadfast
O my guardian, Avalokita
I cry out from the depths of misery
“Protect me now, the sinner that I am!”*

Consumed by sorrow and misery, one calls out to Avalokitesvara/ Chenresig, Buddha of Compassion, confessing all of one’s mistakes and seeking protection.

Verse 51

*Now to the noble one Akashagarba
And to Kshitigarbha, from my heart I call
And all protectors, great compassionate
To them I go in search of refuge.*

One goes for refuge to Akashagarbha (Namgye Nyingbo) to use our minds to perform merit and Kshitigarbha (Sai Nyingbo) which purifies the elements of the aggregates and the lower realms.

Verse 52

*And to Vajrapani, holder of the diamond
The very sight of whom will rout
All dangers like the deadly host of Yama
To him indeed I fly for safety.*

One also goes for refuge to Vajrapani, who is holding the vajra (representing wisdom realising emptiness) which is the antidote to the suffering of death.

Verse 53

*Formerly your words I have transgressed
But now I see these terrors all around
To you indeed I come for help
And pray you, swiftly save me from this fear.*

One acknowledges past misdeeds and now realise that Bodhisattvas can give experiential protection, so one goes to them for help.

Verse 54

*For if, alarmed by common ills
I act according to the doctor's words
What need to speak when I'm constantly brought low
By lust and all the hundred other torments?*

As one would follow a doctor's advice when one is suffering greatly

from sickness, likewise, one should listen to Buddha's teachings now wholeheartedly as it is the ultimate medicine to delusions and suffering.

Verse 55

*And if, by one of these alone
The dwellers in the world are all thrown down
And if no other remedy exists
No other healing elsewhere to be found.*

Verse 56

*Than words of the omniscient physician
Uprooting every ill and suffering
The thought to turn on him deaf ears
Is raving folly, wretched and contemptible.*

Even one of these delusions alone can bring about intense suffering. There is no cure apart from Dharma, which trains us to recognise the causes of suffering (delusions and defilements) and the methods to overcome them.

Verse 57

*If along a small and ordinary cliff
I need to pick my way with special care
What need to speak of the immense crevasse
That plunges down, unnumbered fathoms deep.*

If walking along a small cliff, one has to tread carefully, what more walking through the depth of the lower realms, in particular, the hell realms.

Verse 58

*“Today at last, I shall not die
So rash to lull myself with words like these!
My dissolution and my hour of death
Will come upon me ineluctably.”*

This verse cautions us to remember that death can come at any time. If we try to comfort ourselves that we will not die today, we are fooling ourselves, as the time of death is uncertain and there are many factors which lead to the shortening of one’s life and few factors which prolong it.

Verse 59

*So why am I so unafraid
For what escape is there for me?
Death, my death will certainly come round
So how can I relax in careless ease?*

False courage: Although we may speak of death, we do not truly have a fear of impending death (and thus the need to cultivate Dharma) because we are not convinced of the certainty of death and how it can strike anytime, anywhere. Therefore, Shantideva urges us to seriously contemplate and meditate on impermanence and death, to inspire ourselves to cultivate.

Verse 60

*Of life's experience, all seasons past
What's left to me what now remains?
By clinging to what now is here no more
My teacher's precepts I have disobeyed.*

We need to look into our own life's experience to see whether we have followed our Guru's advice; the Buddha's advice; we need to analyse how we have conducted our lives and where we are, in terms of spiritual cultivation.

Verse 61

*This span of life and all that it contains
My kith and kin are all to be abandoned!
I must leave them, setting out alone
What grounds are there for telling friend from foe?*

There is no benefit to continuously differentiate between friend, enemy and stranger. Instead, put effort to gain unconditional compassion to all beings.

Verse 62

*And therefore, how can I make sure
To rid myself of evil, only cause of sorrow?
This should be my one concern
My only thought both night and day.*

Verse 63

*Therefore, all the sins I have committed
Blinded in the dark of ignorance
Actions evil by their nature
Or the faults of broken vows.*

One should be serious about overcoming delusions as they are the cause of all sorrow. The cause of all wrong actions including damaged vows, is caused by ignorance. If one does not endeavour to throw light on one's delusions and how to eliminate them, one would fail to fulfil the Buddha's hopes, fail oneself and all sentient beings as well. As there are many sentient beings who have karmic connection with us, which means we are in a position to help them. However, if we fail, they lose all the chance to receive help.

Verse 64

*Mindful of the suffering to come
I join my palms and ceaselessly prostrate
And all my evils I will now confess
Directly in the presence of the Buddhas.*

To protect oneself from negative karma and harvest the painful fruits from that, one should engage in confession and purification and constantly remind ourselves of our refuge in the Triple Gem. When practising refuge, one should know and reflect on the qualities of each of the objects of Refuge i.e. Buddha, Dharma and Sangha.

Verse 65

*I pray to you guides and guardians of the world
To take me as I am, a sinful man
And all these actions, evil as they are
I promise I will never do again.*

This verse is the 4th of the 4 Opponent Power practice of purification, where one reflects with regret on the mistaken deed committed; one generates reliance on the Triple Gem to guide oneself from repeating such negativity, apply the remedial action e.g. doing prayer and finally resolve not to repeat the wrong action again, even at the cost of one's life.

Chapter 3: Commitment

Verse 1

With joy I celebrate

The virtue that relieves all beings

Form the sorrows of the states of loss

And places those who languish in the realms of bliss

Expressing joy and appreciation towards one's own virtuous deeds, in other words, rejoicing – which is the 4th of the 7-limb practice.

Two objects of rejoicing are in respect of one's own good deeds and the good deeds done by others. The term “by others” refers to the 3 capability beings i.e. the small capability beings who seek higher rebirth (as illustrated by verse 1 of this chapter); the middle capability beings who seek to overcome samsara (as shown by verse 2 of this chapter) and the higher capability beings who seek the complete happiness of not only self but of all beings (as shown by verse 3 here).

Just by obtaining nirvana (attain self-liberation) will not bring complete happiness to all beings. Only when oneself becomes Buddha, can one truly benefit sentient beings. If one is a Buddhist practitioner, one's heart should be overwhelmed by compassion (even if not great compassion, at least compassion). “States of loss” in this verse refers to the 3 types of suffering – the suffering of suffering (pain), suffering of change (from joy to dissatisfaction) and pervasive suffering (which is the nature of our samsaric existence). Even when we have momentary joy, it is not true happiness but merely the experience of decreasing intensity of suffering). Samsara is like a poisonous snakes' nest.

“and place those who languish in the realms of bliss “ means bringing all beings to lasting happiness through compassion.

Verse 2

*And I rejoice in virtue that creates the cause
Of gaining the enlightened state
And celebrate the freedom won
By living beings from the round of pain.*

In this verse, the term “enlightened state” is not referring to full Buddhahood but the nirvana of the Shravaka (Hearer) and the Pratyekabuddha (Solitary Realiser). There are the states of nirvana with remainder and nirvana without remainder. Those practitioners who attain nirvana but still possess the samsaric body attain what is called nirvana with remainder. Those who attain nirvana and then pass away are said to attain nirvana without remainder. The Shravaka and Pratyekabuddha practitioners regarded Shakyamuni Buddha’s passing away as the nirvana without remainder.

“freedom won” refers to Cessation and “ round of pain” refers to the 1st Noble Truth of Suffering and the 2nd Noble Truth of the Cause of Suffering respectively.

Verse 3

*And in the Buddhahood of the protectors I delight
And in the stages of the Buddhas offspring.*

Verse 4

*The intention, ocean of great good
That seeks to place all beings in the state of bliss
And every action for the benefit of all
Such is my delight and all my joy*

The virtues of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas and their cultivation are celebrated by Shantideva, as he rejoices every single act that is induced by bodhicitta.

Verse 5

*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 suffering.*

“Kindle now the Dharma’s light” is the 6th of the 7-limb practice i.e. limb of requesting the Teacher to turn the Wheel of Dharma. Shantideva illustrates how to make the request, namely placing one’s palms together with thumbs placed inside (so as not to be empty-handed) and visualise one’s hands as the wish-fulfilling gem, requesting the teacher to teach Dharma; one’s right knee is on the ground and left knee up and palms resting on the knee about 4 inches away from chest. The request is made on behalf of all beings to all Guru-Buddhas to teach (this includes all the various aspects of the Buddha, which are particularly effective in actualising various aspects of one’s potential to bless one’s mind). The request should not be about health, wealth, long life or be more popular but instead one

should request for the teachings of the altruistic/bodhicitta mind and the instructions on emptiness.

The 7-limb practices should be performed whenever one does any kind of Dharma practice. If doing the 7-limb practice at home, at this stage of requesting the Guru-Buddhas to teach, offer the Dharma wheel or anything very precious kneeling with right knee, placing palms together etc. then the practice becomes profound and very beneficial.

Verse 6

*I join my hands beseeching the enlightened ones
Who wish to pass beyond the bonds of sorrow
Do not leave us in our ignorance
Remain among us for unnumbered ages!*

Here, one is requesting the Guru-Buddhas not to pass on but requesting them and the Dharma to remain with us . This verse creates the condition for us to have longevity to practice Dharma. If someone is sick in hospital or one wants one's parents to have long and meaningful lives, one can help him/them by thinking of this manner of requesting the Guru-Buddhas to remain and for the Dharma to flourish. Gain full conviction in this practice and then dedicate this to the sick person or to one's parents. Thinking this way is even more effective than reciting mantra.

Upasaka Chunda requested Shakyamuni Buddha 3 months before Buddha passed away to live longer, and on account of this, Buddha extended his life by 3 months. It is good to make such requests to one's living Gurus to live

aeons and aeons until all beings attain enlightenment. This appears in the prayer verses of the long mandala offering prayer; likewise, in the thanksgiving mandala prayer to thank the Guru for accepting the request to live long.

When doing this practice, it should move your heart. Some lamas incorporate the mandala offering as an additional limb, when they do the 7-limb practice. An offering of mandala with concentrated meditation is so satisfying. It is as if a huge amount of money went into one's bank account! Infinitely better than that! If you forget all these points of practice and motivation and merely acquire wealth for this life purposes, then no matter how hard you work and no matter much money you keep away, before you can enjoy it fully, your life will be at an end and your family will fight over your wealth.

“Who wish to pass beyond the bonds of sorrow “ – our Gurus come into this world taking on conventional, samsaric bodies and then manifest passing away. We must make strong requests for them to live long, even though outwardly, they show the outer aspect of illness, it is their way of teaching us impermanence, so we should not view any illness in the ordinary sense and ask them to quickly pass away (to spare them from their seemingly poor health)! Instead, beseech them not to abandon us but remain for a very long time.

Verse 7

*And through these actions now performed
By all the virtue I have just amassed
May all the pain of every living being
Be wholly scattered and destroyed!*

This is the last of the 7-limb practice i.e. the limb of dedication of all roots of virtue for the welfare of others, which is referring to the 4 immeasurable practices. May all beings be free from the entire samsaric suffering, never encounter in causes of suffering, may they abide only in happiness and cultivate only virtue.

Verse 8

*For all those ailing in the world
Until their every sickness has been healed
May I myself become for them
The doctor, nurse, the medicine itself.*

This verse is a prayer dedicating one's existence to the training of the mind. As long as samsaric beings exist, may oneself alone become a cure for all sentient beings sufferings, the full protection for them and for those who need shelter, may one become their shelter. These exemplify the cultivation of the strong altruistic intention to become whatever is needed by sentient beings.

Verse 9

*Raining down a flood of food and drink
May dispel the ills of thirst and famine
And in the ages marked by scarcity and want
May I myself appear as drink and sustenance.*

Verse 10

*For sentient beings, poor and destitute
May I become a treasure ever plentiful
And lie before them closely in their reach
A varied source of all that they might need.*

Verse 11

*My body, thus and all my good besides
And all my merits gained and to be gained
I give them all away withholding nothing
To bring about the benefit of beings.*

Here, the characteristics of generosity are set out. When giving, one should give unconditionally without hoping for even merit for oneself and think only to offer all for the benefit of others. Generosity should be the antidote to our self-grasping ego. In general there are 3 bases of ego – the clinging to - our body, our possessions and our virtues. Yes, we cling to our virtues. How? When we do good, often we do it with some element of personal benefit, which according to Mahayanic teachings, is not pure practice. So whatever good we do, we must make sure that we do not feed our ego; not to fortify our ego through our grasping at our body, possessions or virtues.

Verse 12

*Nirvana is attained by giving all
Nirvana the objective of my striving
Everything therefore must be abandoned
And it is best to give it all to others.*

If we are able to let go of the grasping at one's body, possessions and virtues, liberation or nirvana becomes achievable.

For Hinayana path, nirvana is to be attained; for the Mahayana path, it is an important stage of cultivation but also needs to be eventually abandoned. Why? Because nirvana or self liberation means that oneself is free from samsara but countless living beings continue to suffer tremendously in cyclic existence. For this reason, it is most beneficial to give up one's attainment of the peace of nirvana and strive to benefit sentient beings by attaining enlightenment.

There are 2 obcurations to be overcome: (i) the obscuration to liberation and (ii) the obscuration to omniscience. The attainment of nirvana/liberation does not remove the obscuration to omniscience.

The Hinayana (nowadays terms Theravadan) practices of the Sharavaka and Pratyekabuddhas seek self-liberation/nirvana; whereas the Mahayana path seeks to attain enlightenment of oneself and of all sentient beings.

Verse 13

*This body I have given up
To serve the pleasure of all living beings
Let them kill and bet and slander it
And do to it whatever they desire.*

“Given up “ refers to freeing oneself from the self-cherishing thought and

the deceptive guidance of ignorance and the egoistic mind. For countless lives, we have been a slave to the self grasping attitude. This time, we must resolve to dedicate this body to bring about the lasting happiness of others and make this body as a wish-fulfilling gem. In Highest Yoga Tantra practices, through generating the body mandala, one's body can be transformed into the deity's form which can bring immense benefits of purification of self and other living beings. Through the understanding of emptiness, one transforms one's ordinary body into emptiness and arises as a wish fulfilling gem and offer it to benefit the different mental dispositions of beings.

“Kill and beat” does not mean offering oneself up for abuse! However, even if that happens, one should never give up working for sentient beings. Whether they do good or bad, one should continue to strive to guide them and be beneficial to them.

Verse 14

*And though they treat it like a toy
Or make of it the butt of every mockery
My body has been given up to them
There is no use now, to make so much of it.*

Ridicule and bad treatment should not deter you. Even though others treat oneself as a toy, as rubbish or make fun of you, there is nothing to grasp at and for purpose of developing bodhicitta heart, one should apply logic and transformational thinking. We have already resolved to offer ourselves to benefit sentient beings, so why grasp when sentient beings accept our

offer and do as they please with us? Even though it is very difficult and one may not be able to totally let go by tomorrow, we should try by reflecting on this verse repeatedly. Eventually, one will be able to do exactly that. The verses here refer to the body because the body is something we cling to the most, it is the object of all our efforts and causes us to circle in samsara. All negative emotions are triggered in relation to this body.

Thus, when this body separates from consciousness at time of death, there is great fear and intense grasping. It is wise for us to start practising less attachment to our body. This way when we are criticised, we will not feel offended and when inevitable death comes, clinging will not intensify our suffering.

Verse 15

*And so let being do to me
Whatever does not bring them injury
Whenever they catch sight of me
Let this not fail to bring them benefit.*

The treachery of the self-cherishing mind is great. In a single action of self centredness, it injures others and accumulates negative karma for oneself. Rather, every engagement with other living beings, even one glimpse of us, should bring meaning and benefit to others. Thinking this way fortifies our cultivation of bodhicitta.

Verse 16

*If those who see me entertain
A thought of anger or devotion
May these states supply the cause
Whereby their good and wishes are fulfilled.*

Whomever relates to us, either through emotions of anger or faith, from our side, we should treat them with equanimity in benefitting them. We should not be partial in our thoughts and actions towards others, helping some greatly and helping others less. Without equanimity towards all, bodhicitta cannot develop. According to the Mahayana, if one generates compassion towards a sick dog, to fulfil the purpose of benefitting that dog, one has to continuously offer help to that dog until that dog becomes a Buddha. It is not about being selective and benefitting only if it suits us or is convenient for us to do so.

We should not be distracted by temporary goals. As between the generosity of giving material help and giving Dharma, the generosity of Dharma is more far-reaching. We should seize opportunity to take higher vows. If placed in a situation where one is forced to make a choice of committing negative karma by oneself alone, rather than cause others to create negative karma, we should choose to spare the others from creating negative karma. This is illustrated in one of the accounts from Buddha's past lives – Buddha was on a merchant ship and due to his clairvoyance, he saw that one amongst them had intentions to murder everyone on the ship. Out of great compassion to save the 500 lives aboard that ship, he decided to take the life of that person who had murderous intentions. However, it must be understood that to do this, one needs to be able to see the karma

of others as well as the advantages, disadvantages and consequences of taking such an extreme act. It is not recommended for ordinary beings.

Another example – there may be situation where we have to either save a human or save an animal. The saving of the human life is more important because of the potential of the human to become a Buddha and rescue numberless beings. When we look into our own lives – the choices we make are shallow and self-centred. If we have to choose between a dinner party invitation or Dharma, we will choose the party (Laughter).

Verse 17

*All those who slight me to my face
Or do me any other evil
Even if they blame or slander me
May they attain the fortune of enlightenment.*

The bodhisattva attitude is that whatever harm is inflicted upon the Bodhisattva, whether great or small, the Bodhisattva's reaction is only one of care and the rescue of the harm-giver. There is no blaming, cursing, retaliating or getting offended by the harm-giver. From here, one can see the expanse of the Bodhisattva's mind of compassion.

Verse 18

*May I be a guard for those who are protectorless
A guide for those who journey on the road
For those who wish to go across the water
May I be a boat, a raft, a bridge.*

This verse is typical of the lojong teachings, i.e. the teachings which train the mind to transform all adversity into the path, for the purpose of benefitting others; to be a protector for those who do not have one; to be whatever others need.

No one said it would be easy to develop the Bodhisattva attitude. Often enough, it is difficult enough to merely give physical help, let alone bear no offence when harm is received from others. All of us should integrate the Dharma we have learned and share the Path with others. In doing so, one can be a protector towards them, helping them to avoid causes which bring danger and troubles.

Many of our lives are like hollow giant trees i.e. outwardly well developed but inwardly totally consumed by the destructive rat of samsara, as we endlessly grasp at desire, anger, frustrations, wants, personal needs. When death comes, one is totally defeated by samsara.

The worst situation is where during the death process, just before reaching the clear light stage, one has fear or generates a negative thought. This can throw one into a lower realm rebirth. But by being familiar with bodhicitta and reflecting on it at that stage, it acts as a powerful powa, a conduit to transfer one's consciousness to a higher rebirth. That would be far more reliable than ritual powa.

There is no point talking about the welfare of sentient beings but yet not be moved to truly help.

Therefore, for those who need to cross the water, one should become a boat or a bridge for them. Bodhicitta practice is not about expressing flowery words of comfort but offering real practical help. Bodhisattvas always live their lives calmly, undisturbed, without fear, without confusion, without superstition, yet are infused with compassion for others and directly engage with sentient beings' mental dispositions.

When we do hospice work or go into the ICU wards, we might feel uneasy or fearful – we might bear some quiet fear that we might contract the sicknesses of the patients or gain ill fortune on account of having gone to such an “unclean” place. Bodhisattvas never think this way. For them, there is no such thing as post-session or intermission from bodhicitta. They are consistent in giving great compassion help to all.

Another point to note is that we should not be the object of another person creating negative karma. For example, we think to go to see a patient in the hospital but at the same time, we get fearful about contracting illness by going there. By being in this way, we have created a situation where the patient has become the cause of your fear which is a form of negative karma and at the same time, you also gain the negative karma of being fearful. Through one fearful thought, negative karma arises in two persons! So we should be mindful at all times and maintain a bodhicitta mind when we visit sick people. While we help others, we should be mindful of not creating a situation which causes others to create negative karma.

Previous negative emotions not purified will arise again more forcefully, bringing heavier consequences. Some people complain that since coming into Dharma, they seem to be experiencing more trouble. This is because

they do not realise the past karma they had created and that had they not come into Dharma, the ripened karmic suffering would have been far greater! Due to one meeting the Dharma and its practices, those have enabled that person to survive to situation. Further, due to one engaging in Dharma, one's faults become more obvious but this renders it easier to apply the antidotes upon.

Verse 19

*May I be an isle for those who yearn for landfall
And a lamp for those who long for light
For those who need a resting place, a bed
For all who need a servant, may I be their slave.*

Verse 20

*May I be the wishing jewel, the vase of plenty
A word of power and the supreme healing
May I be the tree of miracles
And for every being, the abundant cow.*

Verse 21

*Like the earth and the pervading elements
Enduring as the sky itself endures
For boundless multitudes of living beings
May I be their ground and sustenance.*

Verse 22

*Thus for every living being that lives
As far as the limits of the sky
May I provide their livelihood and nourishment
Until they pass beyond the bonds of suffering.*

The bodhisattvas' and prayers are illustrated by this verse. The 7 royal symbols referred to when offered, create auspiciousness and the karma to be those precious items for all beings. Pervading elements are required for the survival of the world and the lives of all beings. Similarly with the sky and space itself and the earth are all required to support beings. The Bodhisattva prays to be all of these for the sake of sentient beings.

Verse 23

*Just as all the Buddhas of the past
Embraced the awakened attitude of mind
And in the precepts of the Bodhisattvas
Step by step abode and trained.*

From this verse onwards, Shantideva offers advice on the actual generation of bodhicitta, both at the aspirational level and the engaging level. One of the traditional bodhisattva practices is the taking of vows. Arya Asanga's tradition is one that takes the bodhisattva aspirational vows and engaging bodhisattva vows separately; Arya Nagarjuna tradition is one where the taking of both aspirational and engaging vows are taken simultaneously.

First one should perform all the 6 preparatory practices like cleaning the

place of practice, setting set up the offerings and recite these 2 lines and make bodhicitta dedication.

“Just as all the Buddhas of the past, Embraced the awakened attitude of mind”- this is expressed when one takes the aspirational vows – recite the first 2 lines, 3 times. “Step by step abode and trained” means that in one’s day to day life, one must try one’s best to apply what one has learned. Even if we do not do this 100% of the time, we should try our best as there is still great benefit from doing so.

Verse 24

*Just so and for the benefit of beings
I will also have this attitude of mind
And in those precepts, step by step
I will abide and train myself.*

The “attitude of mind” here refers to the 6 Perfections of generosity, morality, patience, perseverance, concentration and wisdom. The term “those precepts ...I will abide and train myself” refer to the Bodhisattva vows consisting of 18 root vows and 46 secondary vows.

Verse 25

*That this most pure and spotless state of mind
Might be embraced and constantly increase
The prudent who have cultivated it
Should praise it highly such words as these.*

Shantideva joyfully concludes by raising the prayer for the 7 limb-practice and the two types of vows (aspiring and engaging Bodhisattva vows) to be frequently undertaken by all, so that the awakening bodhi mind will increase to the point of becoming spontaneous and that every practitioner should honour bodhicitta.

Verse 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*

Having taken the two sets of Bodhisattva vows, one should on a daily basis, feel from the heart that one's life is really meaningful because one has generated the bodhicitta motivation to benefit others and of course, oneself. How fortunate. One has taken one's place in the lineage of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas and one's prayers will become easy to achieve. Every day of our lives should begin with rejoicing in this way. By doing so, we will gain the positive mind and energy, such that when anyone sees us, hears us or meets us, they too will gain the benefit of such positivity.

Verse 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.*

This verse expresses one's resolve to ensure that one will not disappoint the Buddha nor break the vows nor neglect any practices of this faultless lineage of bodhicitta, descended from the Buddha to Shantideva, to our Gurus and now vest in us.

Verse 28

*For I am like a blind man who has found
A precious gem within a mound of filth
Exactly so, as if by some strange chance
The enlightened mind has come to birth in me.*

One has been totally stuck in samsaric contamination for a long time. Yet, by some incredible stroke of good fortune, one has met the bodhicitta teachings. Thus, one ought not take this encounter with the precious Dharma for granted but rather, make full use of this opportunity.

Verse 29

*This is the draft of immortality
That slays the Lord of Death, the slaughterer of beings
The rich unfailing treasure, mine
To heal the poverty of wanderers.*

Shantideva says that bodhicitta is the nectar of immortality which overcomes death, as it can transform one's ordinary body into a deity's rainbow body and overcomes the fear arising during the dissolutions at

death-time. Bodhicitta is the reliable, abundant, infallible treasure that is the medicine to heal all forms of mental, spiritual and eventual material poverty, which arise due to ignorance.

Verse 30

*It is the sovereign remedy
That perfectly allays all maladies
It is the wishing tree bestowing rest
On those who wander wearily the pathways of existence.*

Bodhicitta is the supreme remedy which eliminates the most chronic and intense of sufferings due to defilements, contaminated karma and uncontaminated karma (karma committed that is not based on delusions e.g. the Arhats of the lower Vehicles do not commit karma based on delusions but they commit actions which without intending, could still harm sentient beings like walking on a road and harming some insects there). Bodhicitta can bring about the ultimate fruit of enlightenment and is therefore, the perfect instruction to cultivate.

Verse 31

*It is the universal vehicle that saves
All wandering beings from stated of loss
The rising moon of the enlightened mind
That soothes the sorrows born of the afflictions.*

The altruistic mind or bodhicitta is relevant and important to all

practitioners of the 3 vehicles (the Hearer, Solitary Realiser and Bodhisattva practitioners), as without it, even if is able to attain liberation, one will not be able to progress to enlightenment. The rising moon refers to the qualities of the Buddha, complete with all the major and minor marks and the most outstanding of those qualities is bodhicitta.

Verse 32

*It is like the mighty sun that utterly dispels
The gloom and ignorance of wandering beings
The creamy butter, rich and full
All churned from the milk of holy Teaching.*

The qualities of bodhicitta are numerous and range from being like the wisdom sun which eradicates the darkness of ignorance; to being like the best creamy cake in being enriching, nourishing and endows glorious qualities. The entire 84,000 teachings of the Buddha can be found in ultimate bodhicitta.

Verse 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 wanderers, is your fulfilment!*

The beings from the Peak of Samsara down to the lowest hell, constantly desire happiness and peace but due to being misguided by ignorance,

true happiness eludes them. This verse appeals to us to awaken from this terrible mistake and adopt the supreme teachings of the Buddha, which contain all the direct antidotes to suffering and renders enlightenment attainable by all.

Verse 34

*And so, within the sight of all protectors
I summon every being, calling them to Buddhahood
And till that state is reached, to every earthly joy!
May gods and demigods and all the rest, rejoice!*

Shantideva here offers rejoicing to all those who practice bodhicitta and supplicates all beings to cultivate this blessed bodhi mind to attain Buddhahood.

Chapter 4: Awareness

Awareness or mindfulness is the sentinel of the mind. It guards one from committing negativities such as harming others, committing non virtuous actions, being distracted by samsaric pleasures, forgetting about precious human rebirth; stressing ourselves due to delusions. Instead of seeing the true nature of existence, we are overwhelmed by the self-grasping and self-cherishing mind. We hold on tightly to things that are not truly existent because we wrongly believe them to be truly and inherently existent. Mindfulness and vigilance (introspection) discussed in Chapter 5, will direct our minds in the correct manner, facilitating our practice of the 6 Perfections, thereby accomplishing the two collections of merit and wisdom.

Verse 1

*The children of the conqueror who thus
Have firmly grasped this bodhicitta
Should never turn aside from it
But always strive to keep its disciplines.*

The “ children of the Conqueror” here refer to the Arya Bodhisattvas (those Bodhisattvas who have perceived emptiness directly), ordinary bodhisattvas (who have not perceived emptiness directly but who have generated continuous bodhicitta); those who take Bodhisattva vows or persons who at least consciously refrain from harming others . Such beings should never turn away from cultivating bodhicitta no matter what the circumstances may be. We have taken those vows from a qualified Guru and presently have the conditions to practice it, thus we should not throw

away that incredible opportunity to attain enlightenment for the sake of all living beings. However, our ability to succeed is dependent on our sustaining the vows we have taken and that in turn, is reliant upon the discipline we have. Without discipline, vows and consistent practice, there remains the risk of our being swayed and giving bodhicitta up altogether. Discipline is inextricably linked to maintaining awareness/mindfulness and introspection. I cannot over-emphasise the important of mindfulness. It is a vital to successful practice.

Verse 2

*Whatever was begun without due heed
And all that was not properly conceived
Although a promise and a pledge were given
It is right to hesitate – to press on or draw back.*

The message here is about how to apply mindfulness to protect vows and prevent bodhicitta from weakening. One should always put effort into understanding the vows that one takes and then try one's very best to uphold those. If having taken vows, one faces a situation where a doubt arises in one's mind as to whether one should carry out a particular action or not, as it may damage the vows, it may be better to hesitate doing the action rather than carelessly proceed with it. Nevertheless, it is still better to take the Bodhisattva vows than not to take them because of the vast merit and benefit to others that arises when one simply tries to act in the Bodhisattva's conduct.

Verse 3

*Yet all the Buddhas and their heirs
Have thought of this in their great wisdom
I myself have weighted and pondered it,
So why should I now doubt and hesitate?*

As one can clearly see that the great wisdom, bodhicitta and power of past Buddhas, bodhisattvas, the great pandits and mahasiddhas possessed which were then used to save countless beings, why should we doubt and delay in cultivating bodhicitta?

Verse 4

*For if I bind myself with promises
But fail to carry out my words in deed
Then every being will have been betrayed
What destiny must lie in store for me?*

This is a red-flag verse, a warning message: If after meeting the Mahayana teachings, one still harms others instead of carrying out the promise to benefit others, one would have disappointed and failed all sentient beings. If so, what kind of result or rebirth can one expect? One would be born in the lowest realms, to experience great suffering and hopelessness. The point is that if we are not mindful about the Bodhisattva vows, one would be careless with one's actions of body, speech and mind, giving rise to the likelihood of harming others. Hence, there is no substitute for mindfulness in every aspect of one's daily life, especially after having taken the vows.

If we consciously apply mindfulness, there will come a time when it arises spontaneously and then we will effortlessly remember the vows and act accordingly. Mindfulness is integral in helping us to enhance our practice of bodhicitta.

Verse 5

*If in the teachings it is said
That one who in his thought intends
To give away a little thing but then draws back
Will take rebirth among the hungry ghosts,*

Miserly thinking pervades our mindstream. Even when we occasionally think to help others, the self-cherishing mind comes springs forward to question whether we have enough for ourselves.

Shantideva reminds us of the advice of the Buddha that whoever thinks to offer the smallest thing, like spoonful of water or rice to another living being but then withdraws from doing so due to doubt or personal gain, will create the karma to take a rebirth in the hungry ghost realm. This is not punishment from the Buddha. It is the inevitable consequence of being miserly. This principle also applies to failing to offer protection or offer Dharma, due to pure self-interest. If one turns away from what one intended to give, that is enough to create the karma of miserliness.

Conversely, if one gives Dharma or give one's life or effort for the benefit for others, imagine how much merit one will accumulate. Bodhicitta aspiration is about giving happiness not only to some beings but to all

living beings equally. The merit is profound and immeasurable.

Verse 6

*How can I expect a happy destiny
If from my heart I summon
Wandering beings to the highest bliss
But then deceive and let them down?*

One prays for ultimate happiness and one may even generate the positive motivation for others but due to selfishness, one decides to do nothing; to neglect others. This is denying oneself of lasting happiness.

One should not give up a single living being. No matter how difficult a person is, one should cherish that person because that person needs our compassion and that person becomes the perfect condition for one's practice of patience and all the 6 Perfections. Let us take the example of our Kyabje Lama Zopa Rinpoche. Due to Rinpoche being in the perpetual state of bodhicitta in action, we see that the more difficult the person is, the more care Rinpoche gives. The more distant Rinpoche appears to us, is a sign that we are in a reasonably favourable condition, thereby not requiring his attention nor counsel. If we were heading down the wrong Path, he would spend much more time and energy on us. If we fail to understand this, it means our guru devotion is inadequate.

To 100% surrender one's ego and self-cherishing is the most difficult. The moment one is able to do that, everything becomes easy. That is the challenge posed by the guru devotion practice i.e. how to see the

Buddha and the Guru as inseparable. This can only happen when one is able to totally submit and surrender to Guru in terms of one's spiritual life. Hence, in the Bodhisattva practice, the more hardship one receives from a sentient being, the more we have to provide time, effort and attention towards that being. For if we give up one single living being, then we have deceived that person because we have raised the bodhicitta motivation and then failed to act in that manner. We have let that sentient being and also ourselves, down.

Verse 7

And as for those who, losing bodhicitta

Nonetheless attain to liberation

This is through the inconceivable effect of karma

Only understood by the Omniscient.

Those who give up bodhicitta but are still able to attain liberation, is due to past karma which can only be understood by the Buddha. Firstly the Mahayanic teachings is already rare but the bodhicitta teachings themselves are even more rare. We may talk about being kind and forgiving and engage in social service but we rarely think to commit one's entire life to benefit others (i.e. bodhicitta). This is due to one's insufficient good karma to be inspired to practice bodhicitta. And even when we do meet the bodhicitta teachings, very few people take it seriously enough to practice it; to treat it as important as life itself. Some practitioners take bodhicitta very seriously but later give it up – again, it is due to their immense past negative karma. Therefore we should feel so fortunate to have met realised beings like HH Dalai Lama and Kyabje Lama Zopa Rinpoche and received so many

teachings on bodhicitta and take it as one's main practice. This is due to the great merit one has from the past.

Verse 8

*This failure is indeed the gravest
Of all Bodhisattva downfalls
For should it ever come to pass
The good of every being is cast down.*

The heaviest bodhisattva downfall is the failure to sustain the inspiration of bodhicitta in the Bodhisattva's heart. Even if we do not remember all the vows, we must at least retain the altruistic mind of becoming a Buddha to liberate all beings from samsara – one should feel this from deep within your heart. If we lose bodhicitta, we become incapable of liberating even one other being.

Verse 9

*And anyone who for a single instant
Halts the merit of a Bodhisattva
Will wander endlessly in states of misery
Because the welfare of all beings is brought low.*

If anyone of us, for even a fraction of a moment, becomes an obstacle to the creation of the merit of a Bodhisattva or if we generate delusion which becomes an obstacle to our generating bodhicitta, the consequence will be wander endlessly in misery. Why? Because bodhicitta or cherishing others

is the cause for ultimate happiness. The moment we let this principle go, we abandon the welfare of others.

It is mindfulness that secures our efforts at generating bodhicitta and to never be an obstacle to it. For example, if a holy object is to be erected and one prevents it or causes the person to doubt or hesitate doing it, inevitable harm will come to the person causing this because it is hindering bodhicitta. Therefore, when it comes to holy projects being undertaken, be mindful – if one cannot rejoice at this virtuous deed, then as a minimum, one should have a neutral mind towards it. Being an obstacle will incur heavy negative karma.

Verse 10

*Destroy a single being's joy
And you will work the ruin of yourself
But if the happiness of all is brought to nothing
What need is there to speak of this?*

If one causes harm to one single living being, one will become the creator of one's own disaster. Harming others includes having a single moment of anger towards that person, having desirous attachment towards another; having thoughts of guilt, jealousy, pride, ego – these are all gross negative emotions will bring harm to others. It will demolish all the past positive karma one has created and blocks the accumulation of new good karma. A very dangerous situation indeed.

Verse 11

*And one who wanders in samsara
Who time and time again embraces bodhicitta
Only to destroy it through his faults
Will long be barred from Bodhisattva grounds.*

We have observed within ourselves, times when we generated some level of bodhicitta, helped someone selflessly. However, if we let our minds run wild, the feeble seeds of bodhicitta within us can get destroyed and should that happen, the Bodhisattva Grounds and Path will be closed to us and the attainment of enlightenment impossible.

Mindfulness is therefore a great friend. It holds us up in our efforts to overcome delusions, which are powerful yet mere temporary obstacles. It helps us nurture the bodhicitta-seed within us and gradually allows us to gain mastery over the deluded mind and eradicate the delusions altogether.

Verse 12

*Therefore I will act devotedly
According to the promise I have made
For if I fail thus to apply myself
I'll fall from low to even lower states.*

This verse is a self-reminder to apply mindfulness when practising bodhicitta or else, not only are others not saved but one may be reborn into the lower realms. In this way, awareness confers protection from the lower realms.

Verse 13

*Striving for the benefit of all that lives
Unnumbered Buddhas have already lived and passed
But I, by virtue of my sins have failed
To come within the compass of their healing works.*

The advice here is to uphold the precept of benefitting others without allowing mindfulness to grow lax. All the past Buddhas and bodhisattvas actualised full enlightenment because life after life, they benefitted other living beings with full concentration. For us, due to a lack of mindfulness, we have failed to cherish others. We may have some level of contrived bodhicitta but the ability to benefit others has been limited. Hence, there is no way other than to strengthen our bodhicitta practice.

Verse 14

*And this will always be my lot
If I continue to behave like this
And I will suffer pains and bondage
Wounds and lacerations in the lower realms.*

Wake up!! If we do not pay attention to commit virtue, our lot in life will be one of constantly creating negative karma and be bound to the sufferings of samsara and rebirth in the lowest realms. We need to think carefully about how we live our lives.

Verse 15

*The appearance of the Buddhas in the world
True faith and the attainment of the human form
An aptitude for good; all these are rare
And when will all these come to me again?*

The great Buddhist masters frequently encourage us to practice by reminding us of the precious human rebirth we have and our potential to attain enlightenment. Ponder a while about the rarity of our condition: We have the 8 freedoms and 10 endowments of such a human rebirth. We have full faculties to generate faith and wisdom; we have the ability for good; we might even have some conviction in liberation. All of these are rare. Yet, we seem to have more faith in samsara than in liberation! We admire people with wealth and fame but we only occasionally think of the Buddha and his qualities and accomplishments. Our present lives are mostly spent on creating negative karma. To get another human rebirth is extremely rare and one should never waste this human rebirth.

Verse 16

*Today I'm hale and hearty
Have enough to eat and am without affliction
And yet this life is fleeting and deceptive
This body is but briefly lent to me.*

At the moment, we are healthy and our delusions are not dominant all the time. Therefore, there is no excuse not to practice bodhicitta. If we were devoid of conducive conditions, one could say cultivating bodhicitta would

be difficult. However, the fact is that we have good conditions for practice right now. Our life is transient, brief, in the nature of illusion, impermanent and deceptive. Our bodies will not last forever and we do have it for a short span of time, so we should use these good conditions to eliminate self-cherishing.

Verse 17

*And yet the way I act is such
That I shall not regain a human life
And losing this, my previous human form
My evils will be many, virtues, none.*

Through the lack of mindfulness, we commit numberless negativities and harms towards others, securing evil consequences for ourselves. One should not delay practising bodhicitta, a great source of merits. We cannot afford to be careless or carefree about letting this human life slip by and leave this life empty-handed, as another human life is not guaranteed to us.

Verse 18

*Here is now the chance for wholesome deeds
But if I fail now to accomplish virtue
What will be my lot, what shall I do
When trapped in lower realms, enmeshed in misery.*

We have all the conditions and opportunities to commit wholesome deeds. If we wait till tomorrow, end of life might arrive before that and there will

be no tomorrow to cherish others. Time is not on our side! Cherish others without delay nor pause.

Verse 19

Never there, performing any virtue

Only ever perpetrating evil

Thus for a hundred million aeons

Happy states will never come to me.

Our thinking is mostly upside down. From countless past lives right up to this moment, instead of focusing on accumulating virtue which will secure the happiness for oneself and others, we have been embroiled in an endless chain of negative deeds, securing suffering for ourselves and others.

Verse 20

This is why Lord Buddha has declared

That like a turtle that perchance can place

Its head within a yoke adrift upon a shoreless sea

This human birth is difficult to find!

This verse is to illustrate the rarity of the precious human rebirth. It is likened to the story of the blind turtle who only swims up to the surface of the ocean once every hundred years. Imagine that there is a yoke floating on the wide ocean. The chances of that blind turtle being able to place its head through the yoke are extremely slim. Such is the rarity of obtaining another precious human rebirth. So we cannot take this precious human

rebirth and the practice of bodhicitta for granted.

Verse 21

*If evil acts of but a single instant
Lead to deepest hell for many ages
The evils I have done from time without beginning
No need to say that they will keep me from the states of bliss!*

If we keep committing negative karma, we cannot escape the lower realms. If we do not purify our negativities, there will be obstructions for us to attain lasting happiness. Accumulation of merit and purification are a must.

Verse 22

*And mere experience of such pain
Does not result in being freed from it
For in the very suffering of such states
More evil will occur and then in great abundance*

Now that one has learned some Dharma, there is a danger of applying Dharma points incorrectly or in an incomplete manner. For example, when something goes wrong in one's life, one tends to say that it is purification and think nothing more of it.

The mere experience of difficulty does not mean that one has purified the entire karma related to it. Karma is only totally purified when the ignorant mind (which caused one to commit the negative karmic cause in the first

place), is totally eliminated. Hence, one should resolve never to commit such negative action again. For this, one needs to undertake the practice of the 4 Opponent Powers, keeping in mind the goal of eliminating the ignorant mind. If we just mindlessly attribute all our troubles to karma or merely chant prayers in a mechanical way, the ignorant mind will not be affected at all and will laugh back at us (laughter).

Further, rebirth in a lower realms will also not purify all past negative karma and once we are born in the lower realms, it will be harder to commit virtue there, so the purification of negative karma cannot be taken lightly.

Verse 23

*Thus, having found reprieve from all these things
If I now fail to train myself in virtue
What greater folly could there ever be?
How more could I betray myself?*

If while possessing all the freedoms and leisures of the precious human rebirth, we fail to train in virtue, what greater loss and deception to oneself?

Verse 24

*And though all this I understand
But later waste my time in foolish idleness
Then when my time to die comes round
My sorrows will be lack indeed.*

Though we Buddhist practitioners may have some understanding of the value of the precious human rebirth and karma, if we indulge in negative actions and samsaric distractions, when death comes, we will be filled with hallucinations and dark ignorance; pierced by sorrow and have to journey on alone with tremendous suffering up, ending up in a lower realm rebirth. We have heard all this but we remain un-convinced. We lack the determination to apply the teachings because we simply do not reflect on impermanence nor death, which can come at any time.

Verse 25

*And when my body burns so long
In fires of hell so unendurable
My mind likewise will also be tormented
Burned in flames of infinite regret.*

As most of us commit more negative karma than virtue, pain, problems and regret await us and we will eventually find ourselves in the lower realms where our minds and bodies will be burned .

Verse 26

*For it's as if by chance that I have gained
This state so hard to find, wherein to help myself
And now, when freedom – power of choice – is mind,
If once again, I'm led away to hell.*

Due to blessings of the Buddhas and some virtue that one has generated through deeds like animal liberation, giving food or protection to others, one has gained this precious human rebirth. We need to extract the full benefit from this rebirth by cultivating the Path!

Verse 27

*I am as if benumbed by sorcery
My mind reduced to total impotence
With no perception of the madness overwhelming me
O what is it that has me in its grip?*

When we look into the self-grasping mind and all that it perceives and thinks i.e. the mental scenery which is filled with grasping at the “I “ , is almost like one is being affected by black magic. This is the poisonous nature of the self grasping mind.

Verse 28

*Anger, lust – these enemies of mind –
Are limbless and devoid of faculties
They have no bravery, no cleverness
How then have they reduced me to such slavery?*

Here, a profound question is being raised here i.e. since anger and desire have no hands or legs, and have no energy on their own nor possess courage nor cleverness, how have they enslaved us? The answer lies in the next verse.

V29

*It is I who welcome them within my heart
Allowing them to harm me at their pleasure
I who suffer all without resentment
Thus my abject patience, all displaced!*

It is the self-grasping “I”, the self that mistakenly perceives itself as inherently existing – this is the one which surrenders to the delusions and gives it free rein to torment our existence. The self-grasping, egoistic mind allows all these delusions to operate in any way they wish, thereby harming ourselves and others. Instead of having patience whilst accumulating virtue, we offer our patience towards the self-grasping, egoistic mind. Why are we surprised by the suffering results?

Verse 30

*If all the gods and demigods besides
Together came against me as my foes
Their mighty strength – all this would not avail
To fling me in the fires of the deepest hell.*

If all the gods and demons joined forces to harm us, they would not be able to send oneself to hell. However, the actions of the inner enemy i.e. the delusions (ignorance, anger, attachment), have this power.

Verse 31

*And yet, the mighty fiend of my afflictions
Flings me in an instant headlong down
To where the mighty lord of mountains
Would be burned, its very ashes consumed.*

One moment of our surrender to the afflictions will see us in the jaws of the Lord of Death, throwing us into the lower realms.

Verse 32

*No other enemy indeed
Has lived so long as my defiled emotion
O my enemy, afflictive passion
Endless and beginningless companion!*

The enemy of negative emotions have lived so long in our mental continuum that they have become deeply rooted in our minds and acts as ourselves. This has happened not only in one lifetime. It has been like this since beginningless lives. We need to recognise this. And then apply the antidotes.

Verse 33

*All other foes that I appease and wait upon
Will show me favours, give me every aid
But should I serve my dark defiled emotions
They will only harm me, draw me down to grief.*

All external enemies can be pacified and in some cases, might even become a help to us. This is not the case with our delusions. If we serve our deluded emotions, they will harm us beyond what enemies can inflict upon us and bring us much more suffering. The manner in which one should subdue external enemies and internal enemies are totally opposite. We should be compassionate and helpful to external enemies but unyielding and forceful towards the internal enemy of delusions. We should never give the self-grasping mind and the self-cherishing mind a chance.

Verse 34

*Therefore, if these long-lived, ancient enemies of mind
The wellspring only of increasing woe
Can find their lodging safe within my heart
What joy or peace in this world can be found?*

We pursue happiness, yet it eludes us because ill-will and negative emotions have long lived in our hearts. The delusions of ignorance, attachment and anger only bring sorrow and suffering. When mindfulness is applied, it will guard against the arising of negative emotions.

Verse 35

*And if the jail guards of the prisons of samsara
The butchers and tormentors of infernal realms
All lurk within me in the web of craving
What joy can ever be my destiny?*

The self grasping attitude has constructed the prison of samsara. The conventional appearance of the butcher of life is Yama, the Lord of Death but ultimately, it is the self grasping that tortures us and denies us everlasting happiness.

Verse 36

*I will not leave the fight until before my eyes
These enemies of mine are all destroyed
For if, aroused to fury by the merest slight
Incapable of sleep until the scores are settled.*

We need to put strong effort to eliminate negative emotions. Do not neglect one's mindfulness until the negative emotions are destroyed, including the seed of the delusions.

Verse 37

*Foolish rivals, both to suffer when they die
Will draw the battle lines and do their best to win
And careless of the pain of cut and thrust
Will stand their ground, refusing to give way.*

In the case of some soldiers, they are proud they are of their wounds. The more wounds the better. This is wholly unwise. In particular, we should not wish for the wounds inflicted by delusions for they promise present and future suffering.

Verse 38

*No need to say that I will not lose heart
Regardless of the hardships of the fray
These natural foes today I'll strive to crush
These enemies, the source of all my pain.*

Verse 39

The wounds inflicted by the enemy in futile wars
Are flaunted by the soldier as a trophy
So in the high endeavour for so great a prize
Why should hurt and injury dismay me?

In ordinary war, wounds are symbols of pride as they show fierce battles have been engaged in and one has survived. Likewise, when we fight inner enemies, we should have courage and be unafraid to face the destroyers of merit and rejoice in our efforts to combat delusions.

Verse 40

*When fishers, butchers, farmers and the like
Intending just to gain their livelihood
Will suffer all the miseries of heat and cold
How can I not bear the same to gain the happiness of beings?*

Fishermen and farmers have to bear all forms of hardships of heat and cold. For a long time, the monks in Sera Monastery, before Kyabje Lama Zopa Rinpoche took over the responsibility of providing food for all the monks there, meals consisted of small portions of rice and watery dhal

at a token sum of 50 Indian Rupees to be paid by each monk. One had to work in cornfields to earn the 50 Rps and unfortunately, harvesting time coincided with exams – so one had to work in the fields from morning till noon and then rush off to take the exams in the afternoon. Since people endure hardship for livelihood reasons, all the more so, one should happily bear hardship for the ultimate happiness of oneself and all living beings.

Verse 41

*When I pledged myself to free from their afflictions
Beings who abide in every region
Stretching to the limits of the sky
I myself was subject to the same afflictions.*

If we fail to purify negativities and eradicate delusions within ourselves, we will not be able to help other beings. Time is running out. Such is the urgency.

Verse 42

*Thus I did not have the measure of my strength
To speak like this was clear insanity
More reason, then for never drawing back
Abandoning the fight against defiled confusion.*

If we never put any effort to combat delusions and merely mouth the words about wanting to help others, it is a kind of craziness, as it is simply not possible to do so. So we must steel our resolve and embark on the

battle against the poisonous attitudes. There is no time to lose in being fully committed to this battle.

Verse 43

*This shall be my all consuming passion
Filled with rancor I will wage my war
Though this emotion seems to be defiled
It halts defilement and shall not be spurned.*

Verse 44

*Better if I perish in the fire
Better that my head be severed from my body
Than ever I should serve or reverence
My mortal foes, defiled emotions.*

This verse expresses the determination to fight delusions. That is the only way negative emotions can be eradicated. Defilements go deep, so we cannot relax our mindfulness. It is better to endure hardship now, than to give up fighting negative emotions which will destroy all happiness of the present and the future.

Verse 45

*Common enemies, when driven from the state
Retreat and base themselves in other lands
And muster all their strength the better to return
But our afflictions are without such strategems*

We need to know what the delusions are and how they function, as well as their specific antidotes. That way, we can succeed in combating them and gaining victory.

Verse 46

*Defiled emotions, scattered by the eye of wisdom!
Where will you now run, when driven from my mind?
Whence would you return to do me harm?
But oh – my mind is feeble, I am indolent.*

Delusions and defiled emotions can be destroyed by the wisdom realising emptiness. After gaining such wisdom, there will be no way for defilements to return to harm us. They only have strength when our mindfulness is lax and wisdom weak.

Verse 47

*And yet defilements are not in the object
Not yet within the faculties, nor somewhere in between
And if not elsewhere, where is their abode,
When they might wreak their havoc o the world!
They are simple mirages and so – take heart!
Banish all your fear and strive to know their nature
Why suffer needlessly the pains of hell?*

Defilements are not external factors nor inherently existing within our

faculties and yet, they create destruction in the world. In truth, they are like mirages and in the nature of hallucinations, which are conjured by the wrong view of existence. Therefore, it is vital that we do everything within our means to banish those hallucinations. To accomplish this, we first need to know the true nature of existence i.e. dependent-arising and the lack of inherent existence. With this knowledge, hallucinations vanish and one can free oneself from delusions and thus, liberate oneself and others from suffering and the lower realms.

Verse 48

This is how I should reflect and labour

Taking up the precepts just set forth

What invalid in need of medicine

Ignored his doctor's words and gained his health?

As a sick person needs to carry out the doctor's advice and consume the medicine prescribed in order to be healed, likewise, one needs to adopt the Buddha's advice for without doing so, one's entire existence cannot be healed. The ability to do this is dependent on the practice of mindfulness in remembering and applying the Buddha's teachings.

Chapter 5: Vigilance

Vigilance is synonymous with introspection, the mind that repeatedly examines the actions of body, speech and mind. In some of the texts, they also use the word attentiveness. This is different from awareness, as vigilance checks awareness/mindfulness.

Verse 1

*Those who wish to keep a rule of life
Must guard their minds in perfect self-possession.
Without this guard upon the mind
No discipline can ever be maintained.*

This verse is addressed to those who hold refuge vows, the 5 lay vows, Bodhisattva vows, tantric vows. Even those who have not taken these vows but regard themselves as followers of the Mahayana, who are inspired by bodhicitta, need to listen to the advice of this verse: Vows and ethics are upheld through mindfulness and sustained through full introspection (the meaning of “self-possession” in the verse). These will not degenerate if we apply introspection at all times. Otherwise, maintaining the discipline of upholding vows and ethics will be patchy and weak.

Verse 2

*Wandering where it will, the elephant of the mind,
Will bring us down to pains of deepest hell
O worldly beast however wild
Could bring upon us such calamities.*

One's mind is the source of all the harms we receive when it creates the causes for negative results. Our present state of mind is like a mad elephant, more scary than that of a demon. The deluded mind has a raging strength that can destroy everything in its path. We are often unaware of where our mind wanders to and are rarely able to control it. Though elephants may destroy entire towns, they do not bring us the pain of hell rebirths like mind can.

Verse 3

*If, with mindfulness' rope
The elephant of the mind is tethered all around
Our fears will come to nothing
Every virtue drop into our hands.*

To calm down one's wild mind requires the rope of mindfulness. By controlling our mental tendencies, the creation of negativities can be reduced, suffering can subside and merits can be generated more easily.

Verse 4

*Tigers, lions, elephants and bears
Snakes and every hostile beast
Those who guard the prisoners in hell
All ghosts and ghouls and every evil phantom.*

The intense suffering in the hells experienced in the form of enduring

different forms, labelled as hell guards, monsters with fierce animal faces and torments of every imaginable kind, arise because the mind with negative imprints exists. These forms are non-existent from their own side. By knowing this, we need to change our imprints through negating non virtue, cultivating virtue and training one's mind to understand that whatever arises are mere hallucinations manifested by mind. To do this, we need to purify ignorance.

Verse 5

*By simple binding of this mind alone
All these things are likewise bound
By simple taming of this mind alone
All these things are likewise tamed.*

The simple truth is this: Rather than invest one's time and effort to manipulating external circumstances to gain some ordinary happiness, it is far better to look into our own mind, to tame this creator of experiences, in order to achieve lasting happiness. When one's mind is tamed, all scary images and disturbing experiences will be subdued. Without doing so, no external circumstances will make any difference.

Verse 6

*For all anxiety and fear
All sufferings in boundless measure
Their source and wellspring is the mind itself
Thus the Truthful One has said.*

The Buddha has clearly revealed that all troubles and fear have as their source, the mind. There are different types of mind – root delusions and secondary delusions – they are the source of suffering.

Verse 7

*The hellish whips to torture living beings
Who has made them and to what intent?
Who has forged this burning iron ground
Whence have all these demon women sprung?*

Sufferings and harm-givers are solely caused by one's own past negative karma. Thus, when negative circumstances surround us, we need to reflect on how we are the creators of our problems and this will encourage us not to blame others nor grasp too tightly onto it.

Verse 8

*All are but the offspring of the sinful mind
Thus the Mighty One has said
Thus throughout the triple world
There is no greater bane than mind itself.*

The triple world (“kam sum”) refers to the 3 realms of the Desire realm, the Form and Formless Realms. It could also be taken to refer to the lower realms, middle realms and upper realms. Even the gods at the Peak of Samsara, are the by-products of samsaric, negative mind. Long periods without meeting the Dharma is due to one having a sinful mind; meeting

the Dharma is due to having a virtuous mind. Whilst the mind has the potential for enlightenment and also the potential for the most terrifying hell existence. The choice is entirely ours.

Verse 9

*If transcendent giving is
To dissipate the poverty of beings
In what way, since the poor are always with us
Have former Buddhas practiced perfect generosity?*

Verse 10

*The true intention to bestow on every being
All possessions – and the fruits of such a gift
By such, the teachings say, is generosity perfected
And this, as we may see, is but the mind itself.*

The supreme generosity is to dispel the poverty of living beings. There are 3 kinds of generosity, namely giving material possessions, giving protection and giving Dharma. The best is the generosity of Dharma (in particular the Dharma on dependent-arising and emptiness), which is greater than the generosity of giving material possessions.

In order for the act of giving to qualify as Dharma generosity, the act of giving has to mean total giving – not only parting with the object but all the good causes and results of one's generosity as well. This requires one to have the altruistic attitude. Right now we are merely training in the practice of generosity. We only perfect generosity when we become Buddhas.

All Buddhas have continuously engaged in the generosity of Dharma, yet many suffering beings continue to exist. Why? It is because beings have received the teachings, yet do not apply them. Hence, very little benefit can arise. It is all dependent on our minds and actions.

V11

*Where indeed, could beings, fishes and the rest
Be placed, to shield them totally from suffering?
Deciding to refrain from harming them
Is said to be the perfection of morality.*

The Perfection of morality is determined by the attitude that accompanies the act of helping others. For example, if one sees some fish struggling due to inadequate water, merely pouring water onto them does not complete the act of morality. One needs to have a sense that one cannot bear the suffering of the fish, wishes to free them from the causes of their suffering and motivates to help. When one proceeds to take action to pour water on them based on that thinking, the act of morality complete. From this, one can see that it's not only about the act itself but the mind and the nature of the intention to benefit others. Mindfulness and introspection help one to achieve the perfection of morality.

Verse 12

*The hostile multitudes are vast as space
What chance is there that all should be subdued?
Let but this angry mind be overthrown
And every foe is then and there destroyed.*

This verse offers very valuable advice: If one feels that one has many enemies or has a constant sense of insecurity and fear or that one's friends or colleagues may cheat oneself or there is a fear that one day our colleagues or friends may betray us, one should realise that these circumstances and thoughts are due to our having committed negative karma in the past. To be rid of all external enemies may be impossible but once we tame our aggressive minds, all concepts of "enemy" will subside and it will be as if one has overcome all enemies. Hence, the real enemy is our own emotional mind.

Verse 13

*To cover all the earth with sheets of hide
Where could such amounts of skin be found?
But simply wrap some leather round your feet
And it's as if the whole earth has been covered!*

Verse 14

*Likewise, we can never take
And turn aside the outer course of things
But only seize and discipline the mind itself
And what is there remaining to be curbed?*

It is obvious that it would be impossible to cover the whole earth with leather in order to protect our feet while walking. However, by just wrapping some leather around one's feet, it would be as if the entire earth has been covered. Using this analogy, if we guard our mind with mindfulness and introspection, nothing can disturb us nor cause distress and suffering. Therefore, in essence, protecting and guarding one's mind is the solution to all problems.

Verse 15

*A clear intent can fructify
And bring us birth in lofty Brahma's realm
The acts of body and of speech are less –
They do not generate a like result.*

There should be no doubt about the value of the bodhicitta motivation. A pure intention can only produce good fruit and higher rebirth. It is more potent than mere speech or actions. The Vinaya practitioner, as well as small and middle capability practitioners, focus on physical and verbal deeds and less on mental intention (e.g. they could be engaged in neutral intention such as merely watching the mind; or train in concentration purely to stabilise the mind). However, higher capability beings [of the Mahayana (Sutra and Tantra)] are similarly concerned about physical deeds and verbal speech but emphasise the state of mind and intention. In the Bodhisattva vows, there are certain situations whereby forgoing vinaya might be acceptable in order to benefit others. To become a Buddha, bodhicitta and wisdom realising emptiness are needed.

Verse 16

*Recitations and austerities
Long though they may prove to be
If practiced with distracted mind
Are futile, so the Knower of the Truth has said.*

Without establishing a positive intention, spending time and effort in reciting sutras or mantras and even undergoing hardship whilst doing

so, would be useless. It is not solely the act of prayer but the mind that accompanies the prayer that produces the result. If one can truly cultivate bodhicitta while living the family-life, that would be even better than living a monastic life without such bodhicitta motivation.

Verse 17

*All who fail to know and penetrate
This secret of the mind, the Dharma's peak
Although they wish for joy and sorrow's end
Will wander uselessly in misery.*

One who aspires to be enlightened needs to know the nature of the mind. Mind is luminous, clear, has the potential to be all-knowing, is the basis of all Dharma up to enlightenment and is devoid of inherent existence. If one does not seize this important fact, then one's Dharma practice is doomed and no matter how much we wish to be free from suffering, we will continue in struggle in misery.

Verse 18

*This is so and therefore I will seize
This mind of mine and guard it well.
What use to me so many harsh austerities?
But let me only discipline and guard my mind.*

If we have a choice between cultivating external disciplines and cultivating bodhicitta, the altruistic intention of bodhicitta which is committed to the welfare of all beings is the choice to be made.

Verse 19

*When in wild, unruly crowds
We move with care to shield our broken limbs
Likewise when we live in evil company
Our wounded minds we should not fail to guard.*

Verse 20

*For if I carefully protect my wounds
Because I fear the hurt of cuts and bruises
Why should I not guard my wounded mind
For fear of being crushed beneath the cliffs of hell?*

There is an urgent need to guard the mind. When we are wounded or a poisonous snake bites us, we feel great urgency in getting the appropriate medical care. In like fashion, negative thoughts give rise to evil and suffering, so we need preventive care in the form of vigilance or introspection. As we fear hell, we should protect ourselves from the cause of hell, namely negative mind and action.

Verse 21

*If this is how I act and live
Then even in the midst of evil folk
Or even with fair women, all is well.
My diligent observance of the vows will not decline.*

Verse 22

*Let my property and honour all grow less
And likewise all my health and livelihood
And even other virtues – all can go!
But never will I disregard my mind.*

Once one has awareness and introspection, our ethics, vows and manners will be in a strong and serviceable condition. Then, even when one is in the midst of negative friends or distracting companions, one will not be affected. If one meets dishonest women or men, one's vows will not degenerate. This strength of one's mindfulness and introspection depends on consistent effort.

There is some debate between Buddhist philosophical schools on the need for the diligent observance of the vows. The schools which assert that diligence is required, premise their argument that when the gross mind is activated, mindfulness and vigilance are required to sustain vows because when the gross mind declines (e.g. during sleep), there may still be situations where one sub-consciously commits actions of one's body, speech and mind which contravene the vows; if one consciously contravene the vows due to e.g. alcohol, both of which will result in a degeneration of the vows. This is the debate on the impact of the subtle consciousness on the vows. If one's training on concentration is well established, it would be possible to use the subconscious mind to continue observing ethics and vows even during sleep. A person in a coma may also be able to use his/her subtle consciousness to be aware/mindful of vows.

The more widely held conclusion is that as long as one's life's force exists,

mindfulness and introspection must be constantly applied in order for our vows not to decline. In this manner, whatever happens to our gross mind, we will be able to rely on our subconscious mind that is imbued with mindfulness and introspection, to preserve our vows. This is only possible if our minds are habituated with these in the first place.

We are currently heavily dependent on our gross consciousness. When we fall asleep, we become mentally numb, surrendering our minds to all past imprints which manifest as uncontrollable dreams. If we are well trained in introspection, then even during sleep, we will have control over our dreams and thoughts. We can forgo all external possessions but we should never forgo guarding the mind.

Verse 23

*All you who would protect your minds
Maintain awareness and your mental vigilance
Guard them both, at cost of life and limb
Thus I join my hands, beseeching you.*

Here, we see that being mindful alone is not enough, for we need introspection as well. Mindfulness is alertness and the recogniser of virtue. Vigilance or introspection checks what is being done by mindfulness and differentiates between what is to be adopted and what is to be abandoned. If mindfulness loses its focus and concentration, vigilance reminds mindfulness to strengthen its alertness. Vigilance sits at main gate; mindfulness sits at the inner gate.

Verse 24

*Those disabled by ill health
Are helpless, powerless to act.
The mind, when likewise cramped by ignorance
Is impotent and cannot do its work.*

The moment our mind is controlled by ignorance, it is like a tortured person who is helpless and incapacitated in terms of cultivating virtue.

Verse 25

*And those who have no mental vigilance
Though they may hear the teachings, ponder them or meditate
With minds like water seeping from a leaking jug
Their learning will not settle in their memories.*

Without introspection, even if one hears teachings, one cannot retain them. One's quality of introspection tends to be feeble for example, while listening to teachings, one's mind goes to one's bed or the warm cup of teh tarik.

Verse 26

*Many have devotion, perseverance
Are learned also and endowed with faith
But through the fault of lacking mental vigilance
Will not escape the stain of sin and downfall.*

Even though we may have devotion to Buddha, Dharma and Sangha and possess a strong wish to receive more vows, to become Sangha, aspire to go to caves to practice and have a capacity for perseverance, such as working long hours at the office as well as putting effort to come to Dharma class - if we do not also develop introspection or vigilance, we will slip, incur negative karma and damage vows. Our sins of the past are firmly planted in our mindstreams and cause us to commit them again. In order to effectively guard against this, one needs the mental discipline of vigilance.

Verse 27

*Lack of vigilance is like a thief
Who slinks behind when mindfulness abates
And all the merit we have gathered in
He steals and down we go to the lower realms.*

Verse 28

*Defilements are a band of robbers
Waiting for their chance to bring us injury
They steal our virtue, when their moment comes
And batter out the life of happy destinies.*

In our pursuit of enlightenment, we embark on the accumulation of merit and wisdom. Yet without mindfulness and vigilance, the defilements of ignorance, anger and attachment which have followed us through countless lifetimes, continue to threaten our virtues and steal our merits.

Verse 29

*Therefore, from the gateway of awareness
Mindfulness shall not have leave to stray
And if it wanders, it shall be recalled
By thoughts of anguish in the lower worlds.*

One of the tasks of vigilance is to prevent mindfulness from straying. It nudges mindfulness to recall the object of concentration. As a method to encourage oneself to cultivate this crucial duo of mindfulness and introspection, is to meditate on the suffering of the lower realms. Open up any Lam Rim text and recollect the pain of the lower realms. Once we are convinced how easy it is to find ourselves in a lower rebirth, we will be inspired to develop mindfulness and introspection.

Verse 30

*In those endowed with fortune and devotion
Mindfulness is cultivated easily –
Through fear, and by the counsels of their abbots
And staying ever in their teacher's company.*

Verse 31

*The Buddhas and Bodhisattva both
Possess unclouded vision, seeing everything:
Everything lies open to their gaze
And likewise, I am always in their presence.*

Another way of strengthening introspection is to accumulate more virtue. Seek virtuous friends and being near the Teacher helps one to cultivate mindfulness. Buddhas and bodhisattvas cultivated vigilance and likewise, one should do the same.

Verse 32

*One who has such thoughts as these
Will gain devotion and a sense of fear and shame
For such a one, the memory of Buddha
Rises frequently before the mind.*

When a person's mind is infused with introspection, one will naturally avoid negative actions because recollection of the Buddha will often arise in the mind of such a person.

Verse 33

*When mindfulness is stationed as a sentinel
A guard upon the threshold of the mind
Mental scrutiny is likewise present
Returning when forgotten or dispersed.*

When one develops mindfulness, it will always be present, like a guard of virtue and when it weakens, introspection will come forward to bring the mind back to virtue and mindfulness.

Verse 34

*If at the outset, when I check my mind
I find within some fault or insufficiency
I'll stay unmoving, like a log
In self possession and determination.*

A simple, yet effective piece of advice is set out in this verse: Whenever one feels negative emotions arising in one's mind, steady oneself and remain unmoving like a log. In such circumstances, do not react; do not act. Remain still. Do not give defilements a chance to be active.

Verse 35

*I shall never, vacantly
Allow my gaze to wander all about
But rather, with a focused mind
Will always go with eyes cast down.*

Verse 36

*But that I might relax my gaze
I'll sometimes raise my eyes and look around
And if some person stands within my sight
I'll greet him with a friendly word of welcome.*

Divide your mind into two parts – one part fully engaged in concentration; the other part always inspecting the quality of mindfulness, protecting it against negativity making an entry. When introspection observes mindfulness engaging in virtue, it should direct mindfulness to continue

doing so; when it observes mindfulness slacking or moving towards negativity, it needs to re-direct mindfulness to virtue. This process should be ongoing in all of one's daily activities,

Verse 37

*And yet, to spy the dangers on the road
I'll scrutinise the four directions one by one
And when I stop to rest, I'll turn my head
And look behind me, back along my path.*

Verse 38

*And so, I'll spy the land, in front, behind
To see if I should go or else return
And thus in every situation
I shall know my needs and act accordingly.*

Verse 39

*Deciding on a given course,
Determining the actions of my body
From time to time I'll verify
My body's actions, by repeated scrutiny.*

These 3 verses illustrate how mindfulness and vigilance are to be applied to guide all actions of body, speech and mind. Nothing should be done in a distracted manner.

Verse 40

*This mind of mind, a wild and rampant elephant
I'll tether to that sturdy post: reflection on the Teaching
And I shall narrowly stand guard
That it might never slip its bonds and flee.*

Verse 41

*Those who strive to master concentration
Should never for an instant be distracted
They should constantly investigate themselves
Examining the movements of their minds.*

The Buddha's teachings on concentration and special insight will help us to transform the deluded mind to virtue. However, to gain realisations on the Path, one needs to develop stable concentration that is well scrutinised by introspection.

Verse 42

*In fearful situations, times of celebration
One may desist, when self survey becomes impossible
For it is taught that in the time of generosity
The rules of discipline may be suspended.*

Verse 43

*When something has been planned and started on
Attention should not drift to other things
With thought fixed on the chosen target
That and that alone should be pursued.*

Verse 44

*Behaving in this way, all tasks are well performed
And nothing is achieved by doing otherwise
Afflictions, the reverse of vigilance
Can never multiply if this is how you act.*

When facing stressful situations or when one is overly excited, one will become easily distracted from Dharma. When we are training in one of the 6 Perfections e.g. generosity, we need to cultivate the rest of the Perfections as well. Otherwise, our practice of mindfulness and introspection has failed.

Never allow one's attention to drift away when training. With mindfulness and vigilance, all Perfections can be actualised.

Verse 45

*And if by chance you must take part
In lengthy conversations worthlessly
Or if you come upon sensational events
Then cast aside delight and taste for them.*

The degeneration of vows and precepts can occur under any circumstances but it usually happens during extreme experiences of mental disturbance such as great anxiety or great excitement.

Once our 5 senses are distracted by their objects, there is the risk of damaging our vows. Even during sleeping, one can break a vow due to lack of mindfulness and introspection. Yes, we need to protect vows when we our gross consciousness becomes dulled e.g. during sleep, in a coma,

having Alzheimer's disease. This protection is achievable when one has developed stable mindfulness and introspection/vigilance.

During the periods when gross consciousness is no longer active e.g. during the death process when clinical death has been declared, the subtle consciousness has not necessarily left the heart chakra within the deceased's body, if during this period, one engages in powa practice (the transfer of one's consciousness) before the appropriate time, it could cause harm and give rise to the downfall of harming a human, thereby committing the transgression of the vow to protect life.

Verse 46

*If you find you're grubbing in the soil
Or pulling up the grass or tracing the idle patterns on the ground
Remembering the teachings of the Blissful One
In fear, restrain yourself at once.*

Instead of indulging in trivial, mundane activities like gardening or decorating the house or entertaining others for hours and hours, remind oneself of the Buddha's teachings. Even if one engages in social service e.g. giving food, clothes and shelter and offering comfort for this life's purposes only, it is virtue but not entirely Dharma virtue. Cultivate bodhicitta instead as it is a superior goal and activity. Whatever action you do, all should be motivated by bodhicitta.

Verse 47

*When you feel the wish to walk about
Or even to express yourself in speech
First examine what is in your mind
For they will act correctly who have stable minds.*

It is good to regularly check one's mind. Before performing any action with one's body, speech or mind, one should examine them to see if they are based on bodhicitta, the altruistic intention to benefit others and lead them to enlightenment.

Verse 48

*When the urge arises in the mind
To feelings of desire or wrathful hate
Do not act! Be silent, do not speak!
And like a log of wood be sure to stay.*

When strong desire or anger arises, the first response should be silence and calm one's mind. It may be difficult to find the appropriate antidotes at the time when such emotions arise, thus silence is the wisest action. Remain still like piece of wood (guarding body) and focus one's mind on one's breath (guarding mind).

To train in antidotes, it is best done when one is in a reasonably neutral, stable situation – during a quiet period, one can reflect with distraction, on the faults of ignorance, anger and attachment and meditate deeply on their respective antidotes. By habituating one's mind in this manner, when

a real crisis involving these defilements arise, one will be able more agile to apply the correct antidote.

Verse 49

*When the mind is wild with mockery
And filled with pride and haughty arrogance
And when you want to show the hidden faults of others
To bring up old dissensions or to act deceitfully.*

Verse 50

*And when you want to fish for praise
Or criticise and spoil another's name
Or use harsh language, sparring for a fight
It's then that like a log you should remain.*

Verse 51

*And when you yearn for wealth, attention, fame
A circle of admirers serving you
And when you look for honours, recognition
It's then that like a log you should remain*

Verse 52

*And when you want to do another down
And cultivate advantage for yourself
And when the wish to gossip comes to you
It's then that like a log you should remain*

Verse 53

*Impatience, indolence faint heartedness
And likewise haughty speech and insolence
Attachment to your side – when these arise
It's then that like a log you should remain.*

These verses expose the different types of negative emotions which commonly arise. One should be quick to recognise them as faults, neutralise one's mind and be motionless like a log of wood.

Gossiping is specifically mentioned here. Its danger lies in the ease in which gossip happens and once started, spreads like wildfire. The moment one feels like gossiping, immediately focus on one's breath instead. Once gossip starts, all forms of negative results arise, e.g. oneself being the subject of gossip; encountering untrustworthy companions; loss of influence. In a Dharma centre, gossip is poison. Even when scolding one's child, use compassion. Do not let the negative mind have a free hand.

Verse 54

*Examine thus yourself from every side
Note harmful thoughts and every futile striving.
Thus it is that heroes in the bodhisattva path
Apply the remedies to keep a steady mind.*

Verse 55

*With perfect and unyielding faith
With steadfastness, respect and courtesy
With modesty and conscientiousness
Work calmly for the happiness of others.*

One should examine oneself well so as to secure a steady the mind that never strays from the Bodhisattva's conduct. Develop unshakeable faith in the advantages and benefits of cultivating bodhicitta. The higher realisations one has, the greater one's humility ought to be.

Verse 56

*Let us not be downcast by the warring wants
Of childish persons quarrelling
Their thoughts are bred from conflict and emotion
Let us understand and threat them lovingly.*

Sentient beings, which of course include ourselves, live samsaric lives, dominated by negative emotions. We wish for loving help when our troubles flood in. Therefore, as sentient beings' hopes are no different from ours, we should deal with them lovingly and likewise, be gentle and compassionate towards ourselves.

We can accomplish the benefit of sentient beings and ourselves by learning about the advantages of bodhicitta and putting the bodhicitta practice into action.

Verse 57

*When doing virtuous acts, beyond reproach
To help ourselves or for the sake of others
Let us always bear in mind the thought
That we are self-less, like an apparition.*

An understanding of emptiness is a must: Whatever benefit we wish for oneself and others, everything we think, say or do must involve the mind of emptiness; the mind that is mindful of selflessness.

“ We are self-less like an apparition”- refers to both the emptiness of self (the concept of “I”) and the emptiness of phenomena (the aggregates and the outer world). In order for all our Dharma efforts to be pure Dharma action, they need to be premised on bodhicitta and a remembrance of these 2 emptinesses. Otherwise, whatever virtue we perform will be shallow.

Verse 58

*This supreme treasure of a human life
So long awaited, now at last attained!
Reflecting always thus, maintain your mind
As steady as Sumeru, king of mountains.*

The mind is slippery. It forget discipline and virtue very quickly. To sustain our continuing the Bodhisattva deeds, we should recall the qualities of the precious human rebirth and keep the concentrated mind alert, in the face of all circumstances.

Verse 59

*When vultures with their love of flesh
Are tugging at this body all around
Small will be the joy you get from it, O mind!
Why are you so besotted with it now?*

Shantideva beckons us to see the temporary and impure nature of our aggregates. We apprehend our body as something truly existing, joyful and act as if we can preserve this body, when in truth it is the total opposite. Why should we be so obsessed with our body? When we analyse properly, we will discover that there is no true happiness offered by the body but rather, only the promise of decay and cessation. For this, one should meditate on the 3 types of suffering, in particular, pervasive suffering, for only then will we be able to awaken from the deceptive dream that this physical existence is a happy and inherently-existing one.

Verse 60

*Why O mind, do you protect this body
Claiming it as though it were yourself?
You and it are each a separate entity
How ever can it be of use to you?*

This verse challenges oneself to analyse how the “I” and one’s body exists. Each of us regards one’s body and the “I” as a single entity, thereby giving rise to strong attachment to the self. This is why we suffer so much. When people tell us we are old or criticise us, it is offensive and all our systems go haywire and we become unhappy. This is due to our not reflecting on impermanence.

We are all afflicted by Zang-dak i.e. zang (we perceive things and events to be happiness but it is not really so) and dak (we apprehend true existence, when there is none) – this brings about great suffering.

Verse 61

*Why no cling, O foolish mind, to something clean
A figure carved in wood or some such thing?
Why do you protect and guard
An unclean engine for the making of impurity?*

Why do we have so much regard for our body? We mistakenly see the body which is contaminated and ceasing, to be something clean and worthy of veneration. Rather than grasp so tightly to our physical body, it would be far wiser to focus on our mind.

Verse 62

*First, with mind's imagination
Shed the covering skin
And with the blade of wisdom, strip
The flesh from off the bony frame.*

This is a meditation technique on how to overcome attachment to one's body. First, mentally strip off one's skin – how appealing is that image to your mind? Then strip off the flesh – again, check your mind's view on that image. Attractive? Next, strip the flesh off the bones of one's body – how pleasant and worthy of clinging onto is it now? This process helps us to

reduce and finally eliminate our grasping to our aggregates as something beautiful, pure and lasting.

Verse 63

*And when you have divided all the bones
And searched right down amid the very marrow
You should look and ask the questions:
Where is the “thingness” to be found?*

Upon completion the meditation on verse 62, one will arrive at the question of where is the “I”? You will discover that there is not a single atom of independent, true existence in the aggregates, including one’s name, person, mind, qualities, karma, realms, enlightenment, there is no inherent existence; no independently existence (that exists on its own, without factors and mind’s involvement giving it substance and meaning). There is dependent-existence but no independent existence.

Through this meditation, one will be able to conclude that there is no substantial, inherent existence of self (hence, the emptiness of self/selflessness); similarly there is not inherent existence of phenomena (hence, the emptiness of phenomena) .

Verse 64

*If, persisting in the search
You find no underlying object
Why still cherish – and with such desire –
The fleshy form you now possess?*

Verse 65

*Its filth you cannot eat, O mind:
Its blood likewise is not for you to drink;
Its innards too unsuitable to suck
This body, when then will you make of it?*

Verse 66

*As second best, it may indeed be kept
As food to feed the vulture and the fox
The value of this human form
Lies only in the way that it is used.*

The conclusion of the above meditations is that the body, in whose name one commits all sorts of negative actions and harms others, is un-deserving of the attention that one has given it. It is pointless grasping at the self. We cannot eat the flesh of our own body, nor its blood and inner organs, so why do we cling to it so desperately? The value of this body lies only in the manner in which we can use it to benefit others.

Verse 67

*Whatever you may do to guard and keep it
What will you do when
The Lord of Death, the ruthless, unrelenting
Steals and throws it to the birds and dogs?*

Verse 68

*Slaves unsuitable for work
Are not rewarded with supplies and clothing
This body, though you pamper it, will leave you –
Why exhaust yourself with such great labour?*

When death strikes, one's body will degenerate. Clearly, there is no true permanent existence of the body. We have enslaved ourselves to our body and serve it without end, yet the body offers no loyalty to us, as it will abandon us at death. Why then do we exert so much effort upon it?

If we had realised the absence of true existence (of body, aggregates and phenomena), we would by now be in Samadhi, consuming Samadhi food. Instead, because we think we inherently exist, we bind ourselves to eating gross food and pampering our bodies which are no more than imminent corpses. It is not worth serving this self which has wrongly apprehended existence.

Verse 69

*So pay this body due remuneration
But then be sure to make it work for you
But do not lavish everthing
On what will not bring perfect benefit.*

Make use of this body in a meaningful way. How? By engaging in the Bodhisattva deeds. However, the Bodhisattva deeds should be done in stages, corresponding to the level of training in bodhicitta – for example – at the present time, most of us unable to undertake the Bodhisattva

acts of extensive generosity, like giving up our limbs for others the way Bodhisattvas do. If one simply does so without training one's minds, there is a danger of encountering obstacles to one's life and one's cultivation.

Verse 70

*Regard your body as a vessel
A simple boat for going here and there
Make of it a wish-fulfilling gem
To bring about the benefit of beings.*

One of the Bodhisattva deeds is to recognise, through wisdom, that the body is impermanent, non-truly existent, in the nature of contamination, is the product of impure substances & impure causes and conditions and is in the nature of pervasive suffering.

With that as the underlying understanding , one then views one's body as being a means to be of service to sentient beings e.g. in the case of Buddha when he was born as Prince Siddhartha with contaminated aggregates, the Buddha used that form to display the great deeds of the Path and used that body as a boat to reach the shore of liberation.

Verse 71

*Thus with free, untrammelled mind
Put on an ever-smiling countenance
Rid yourself of scowling, wrathful frowns
And be a true and honest friend to all.*

This verse advises us how to benefit others through having a very pure mind and free from negative emotions, always having the expression of being joyous, contented, positive, kind, gentle – one should be completely rid of unpleasant expressions.

Verse 72

Do not act inconsiderately

Move furniture and chairs so noisily around

Likewise, do not open doors with violence

Take pleasure in the practice of humility.

Be thoughtful of others at all times. How we act affects the peace of mind of others. Our actions can also bring obstacles to those formless beings who are residing in samadhi, where our noise and movements can bring harm to them. When I was staying with Geshe Lama Konchog in his house – the doors tend to be squeaky – so when the wind caused the door to bang or if I did not close the door quietly enough, he would reprimand me and say “You never had a teacher?” as if I had been careless and inconsiderate. If I tried to explain, the scolding got even more intense. At that time, I would get very irritated at what seemed to be a small matter but from this verse, one can now understand how mindfulness in even small matters is.

When Geshe Lama Konchog came to the Tsum valley after escaping from Tibet and proceeded to lead a solitary life in the cave – after spending 9 years in the cave in meditation, his appearance was understandably scary and ragged. When he emerged from the cave, villagers thought he was a demon or harm giver, so they chased him and threw stones at him.

Bodhisattvas never perform miracles to show off their powers and on this occasion, he had no choice but to use his siddhi to escape and many villagers saw him literally fly over the mountain.

Geshe Wangchuk was an elderly meditator of the Kagyu tradition, who had studied from many great Lamas and was very knowledgeable. He sought out Geshe Lama Konchog for teachings but Geshela never came out from Samadhi for him to raise the request. Finally, after many months of supplication, Geshela accepted and agreed to reveal certain teachings. Geshe Wangchuk felt totally subdued by Geshela as he found the teachings cutting through all non-clarity. The people in the valley had committed much negative karma in relation to Geshela and Geshe Wangchuk knew this, so he wanted to clarify all the misunderstanding about Geshela but Geshela said there was no need.

One day, there was a person in a village about 5 hour walk away from the cave who was very sick. Geshela went to that person to treat him and the person got well and Geshela returned to his cave. One day, Geshela was passing through the village looking very poorly, with long hair and his robes then worn and tattered. There was a wealthy family who heard that Geshela was passing by their house. Being disdainful of such a ragged looking person in their midst, when they saw Geshela approaching, they took a carpet filled with dust and purposely beat the carpet to release the dust onto Geshela as he passed by their house. As they did so, he raised his hands in prostrations towards this family, which startled them. This incident was witnessed by the other villagers and one of them felt very bad that this happened and later tried to apologise to Geshela on their behalf. Geshela answered sincerely and without distress, that such people

were precious like jewels. This is an example of practising humility.

To complete the story, Geshela's response was heard by the family and they realised their mistake. Later, when Geshela was at Kathmandu, they came down to confess to Geshela and became amongst his most devoted students.

Whenever we encounter problematic people or receive harms from others, we should seize that as an opportunity to transform our mind to think "With such people, my enlightenment will be possible". In this way, we will not be upset nor be angry. At the same time, to be a true practitioner, one should develop qualities such as not being unaffected by external pressures and one's own emotions; one should constantly cultivate mind-training to secure the short and long term benefit for oneself and others; one should always have the mental strength of fearlessness for the sake of Dharma and benefitting beings.

If one's actions are fully motivated by great compassion, one will not have any fear or concern about what others' think. Like Kyabje Lama Zopa Rinpoche - he is totally possessed by compassion. Some of us get very worried when program schedules are not followed but Rinpoche is totally unaffected by such matters. He continues to do whatever is most beneficial because he is fully aware of his actions and the effect of it on others in terms of purification, accumulating merit, training in patience. This is accordance with the Bodhisattva's conduct. Always peaceful, always calm. Sometimes, because we are anxious and impatient, we find ourselves in exactly the type of agitating situations which we were wishing to avoid. Hence, why rush for new things or be distracted by next moment? Fill every present moment with compassion. Outwardly, one should be

friendly and humble to all. Inwardly, one should be wholly guided by compassion. Some attendants of Lamas are not born hunch-backed but due to years of physically lowering themselves in a humble posture, they take on a bent-appearance.

Straightforwardness can be good but it is not always a suitable approach as it could harm others' feelings. The moment we cause harm to others' feelings, no matter how beneficial one's intention, it is still a negative act. Whatever we say or do or think, it should be backed by the inner intention to benefit others, as well as the outer manifestation of the intention to benefit others.

Verse 73

Hérons, cats and burglars

Go silently and carefully

This is how they gain what they intend

And one practices this path behaves likewise.

When offering dakinis make offerings, they are gentle and quiet; when cats want to catch mice, they tread quietly until they achieve their goal; similarly with burglars who move stealthily. Perhaps that is the reason for monasteries disallowing football! Utilise quiet ways. As we are trying to attain enlightenment, we need to progress on the journey steadily, quietly and in disciplined ways.

Verse 74

*When useful admonitions come unasked
To those with skill in counselling their fellows
Let them welcome them with humble gratitude
And always strive to learn from everyone.*

Respecting differences and valuing advice and criticism, are powerful methods to eliminate one's ego. We cannot expect everyone to think or act like oneself. When advice is given or our faults pointed out, analyse to see if something useful can be learned. Or we might think that everyone should be a Mahayanic practitioner and because they are not, we look down on them – this is highly inappropriate. Never have that kind of egoistic mind. If one wishes to correct others, do so with compassion not arrogance.

Verse 75

*Praise all who speak the truth
And say “Your words are excellent”.
And when you notice others acting well
Encourage them in terms of warm approval.*

Praising those who speak the truth should be part of our daily sadhana and practice. However, this is easier said than done because if someone points out one's mistake, one might feel, “Who are you to correct me?” One should think over and if true, one should appreciate the honesty. Conversely, when others have good qualities, one should express appreciation too. When Dharma brothers and sisters offer service, it is

good to acknowledge that. But the person receiving acknowledgement should also guard against one's ego getting inflated. When one secures a high position, one should not be controlled by pride and ego; if people praise oneself, all the more one should practice humility.

In a Dharma society, when there is a new generation of people in Dharma service, it is important for senior members to encourage such persons. This is what is meant by "giving warm approval". Or when Dharma for Kids want to perform an item for a birthday function, one should encourage them, not that one particularly wants the performance for one's own benefit. We should apply Dharma in our lives in this way.

Verse 76

*Extol them even in their absence;
When they're praised by others, do the same.
But when the qualities they praise are yours
Appreciate their skill in knowing qualities.*

We should not only praise people when they are in front of us, then speak badly of them behind their backs. Bodhisattva's behave very differently. I remember the time when I was travelling with Kyabje Lama Zopa Rinpoche – when the student was in front of him, Rinpoche hardly praised that person but when that student left, Rinpoche made extensive praise of that person. For myself, I never heard one single word of praise from Geshe Lama Konchog – not one. But when he was in hospital in Singapore, there was a Taiwanese nun who visited him and had long hours of conversations with him. She reported to me that during their entire conversations,

Geshela had kind words about me. If and when praises are about oneself, be vigilant - instead of admiring one's own qualities, one should instead admire the pure perception of that person, who saw good qualities in oneself. Admire that person's positive mind, rather than become proud of one's own supposed qualities.

Verse 77

*The goal of every act is happiness itself
Though even with great wealth, it is rarely found
So take your pleasure in the qualities of others
Let them be a heartfelt joy to you.*

Rejoice in other's good deeds. This will bring about immense satisfaction and peace in one's life. Being jealous creates negative karma which only brings about misery in this life and all future lifetimes.

Verse 78

*By acting thus, in this life you'll lose nothing
In future lives, great bliss will come to you
The sin of envy brings not joy but pain
And in the future, dreadful suffering.*

This verse elaborates on the advantages of rejoicing. Rejoicing brings merit, positive thinking and peace of mind, which in turn produce the happiness of present and future lifetimes, right up to enlightenment. How wonderful!

Next we need to reflect on the disadvantageous of jealousy – when we see others receiving benefits or opportunities, we have a sour, uneasy feeling, begrudging those others who have better opportunities than ourselves. What suffering. Why be unhappy about others happiness and achievements? If one does not have these happy circumstances and does not possess achievements is because one did not create the karma to experience it. It has nothing to do with others stealing one’s chances. Therefore, keep these 2 thoughts – rejoice for others; never indulge in jealousy. These are fully supported by the teachings on karma.

Verse 79

*Speak with honest words, coherently
With candour in a clear, harmonious voice
Abandon partiality, rejection and attraction
And speak with moderation, gently.*

Speech comes easily to us. However, it is also a door to the lower realms. One should always be honest yet skilful; have an understanding of the facts; apply logic and reason and not simply speak whatever the ego instigates one to speak. “With candour” means not being sarcastic nor cunning. Speaking sweetly to conceal ill-will is a contradiction of the Bodhisattva’s conduct. Sincerity is a must and no harmful intention towards others should find its way into one’s speech – we need full vigilance and mindfulness over this, then the last 2 lines of this verse can be accomplished.

Verse 80

*And catching sight of others, think
That it will be through them
That you will come to Buddhahood
So look on them with open, loving hearts.*

From the moment we wake up, we should resolve that any living being one sees should trigger the thought “Through this being I shall attain Buddhahood” e.g. when waking up next to one’s spouse, one should think that one’s enlightenment will come through my spouse; or when first seeing one’s children, think likewise. One’s parents – one might think how irritating they can be – but remember that parents are potent karmic objects, so one’s accumulation of karma (good or bad) in relation to them will give rise to quick and clear results. Instead of feeling annoyed with our parents, we need to think “My Buddhahood is totally dependent on them”. In our lives, we have all sorts of people whom we dislike and whom we view as trouble-makers – we need to adopt the same view that these persons will be the cause of one’s awakening; of one’s enlightenment. By doing so, we will immediately generate a great amount of merit. Our minds will calm down and our hearts will feel lighter and inner peace and happiness will pervade our being.

The Buddha’s teaching on this is like a giant diamond being offered to us. We travel everywhere to search for happiness and engage in all sorts of activities to find it. Yet, happiness is on the tip of one’s nose. Cherish all living beings and happiness emerges instantly. This cultivation produces immediate result.

Verse 81

*Always fired by the highest aspiration
Laboring to implement the antidotes
You will gather virtues in the fields
Of qualities, of benefits of sorrow.*

Aspiration is a crucial aspect of one's Dharma practice. Without it, no matter how profound and meaningful the teachings may be, the knowledge gained will be dry, producing no nectar for the practitioner; no benefit for living beings.

Without aspiration in our hearts, no progress can happen, no results will blossom. How does one gain aspiration? Frequently recall the qualities of the Buddha; recollect the lives of the great Buddhist masters and mahasiddhas; reflect on the advantageous of bodhicitta and the wondrous 6 Perfections and rejoice in virtues. All these are will foster the flourishing of aspiration within oneself.

Once we have aspiration, we will be charged with positivity and wholehearted about renouncing suffering, about purifying negativities, about doing virtue and benefitting limitless beings. With such a fantastic mind, all the qualities of the Buddha can be achieved.

Verse 82

*Acting thus with faith and understanding
You will always undertake good works
And in whatever actions you perform
You'll not be calculating with your eye on others.*

Verse 83

*The six perfections, giving and the rest
Progress in sequence, growing in importance
The great should never be supplanted by the less
And it is others' good that is the highest goal.*

When engaging in the 6 perfections (generosity, morality, patience, perseverance, concentration and wisdom), one should do so in sequence and not engage in them randomly. If one mixes up the sequence, the stability of the practice and successful outcome in cultivating those qualities may be affected. "Growing in importance" means that each of the Perfections need to be trained in tandem with the other Perfections and not in isolation.

Generosity – of giving possessions, giving protection and giving Dharma. Making a single light offering to a stupa and dedicating it to a sick person, is great generosity. When giving, take care that one's mind is totally and happily parting with the gift and not grasping to the item or with expectations; otherwise, that is not pure giving. Whenever we have to take care of others, we should think that our karma has put us into the situation where we can perfect the practice of giving and do so with a happy heart.

Morality is about maintaining ethics, avoiding the 10 non-virtues and as a minimum, if one cannot help others, at least one should not harm them.

As for patience, it means the tolerance that comes from understanding the faults of anger and the benefits of calm and restraint. This way, even if one receives no appreciation from those whom we have benefitted – like our children – one is able to continue being patient and content. Usually, abuse from children will not be experienced unless there is some heavy past karma.

By knowing the benefits of the practice of the 6 Perfections, perseverance or joyous effort will arise – no matter what task one has to do, no matter how trying it might be, one will have the willing heart to continue doing the task, thinking that one is doing it for larger good, for the liberation of all.

Concentration involves being mindful and vigilant about directing oneself towards virtuous thoughts and actions. In Buddhism, when we talk about “concentration” we are talking about the higher training of concentration, which is superior to normal practice of concentration (e.g. for relaxation or anti-stress purposes) because it refers to mindfulness to guard against non-virtue and commit only virtue.

The cultivation of wisdom requires one to constantly reflect how the sole creator is one’s own mind and that everything is dependently-existing and lacks inherent existence. Combining this view with the other 5 Perfections, will bring the completion of all the 6 Perfections.

Sometimes, people wonder how it is that they became poor. Even when it is explained that it is due to the exhaustion of their good karma, they find it difficult to comprehend how they fell from being millionaires to zero-aires. Without understanding karma and how it functions, people get into shock when they face calamities. For me although I’m not a millionaire, I feel I am the richest man in the world because I know that I must not exhaust the past positive karma I have accumulated and as such I need to continue cultivating virtue. We have accumulated mountain loads of negative karma – if we were to print out our entire negative karma onto mantra strips, it would fill a prayer wheel the size of the whole world. Yet, we do not realise this

and thus, when we turn a small prayer wheel, we wonder why our Dharma practice has no effect. If we think this lop-sided way, we could lose faith in the Dharma, develop the wrong view that Dharma practice offers no help, which in turn is very heavy negative karma. Therefore, it is imperative for us to discover the karma teachings.

Understand causes and conditions and how results come to fruition. External holy objects provide 10% assistance to our spiritual development but the remaining 90% is dependent on our karma; it is about how we use our body, speech and mind on a daily basis and how we transform our minds.

Verse 84

*Therefore, understand this well
And always labor for the benefit of beings
The far-seeing masters of compassion
Permit, to this end, that which is proscribed.*

Verse 85

*Eat only what is needful
Share with those who have embraced the discipline
To those, defenceless, fallen into evil states
Give all except the three robes of religion.*

Live a life benefitting others. Engage in the Bodhisattva deeds. Be a good example - always be generous, share with others. The objects of generosity i.e. the objects to whom one should make offerings to – the highest is one's Guru, then the Buddha, Arya Bodhisattvas, ordinary Bodhisattvas,

Arhats, Shravakas (Hearers) and Pratyeka Buddhas (Solitary Realisers); Arya Hinayana practitioners, fully ordained Sanghas who possess Bodhisattva vows; lay people who possess Bodhisattva vows and engage in the Bodhisattva deeds; novice monks and nuns; pre-ordained monks and nuns who have 3 vows of abandonment; ordinary people who possess 5 lay vows and possess Refuge vows; those who have a positive view towards the Triple Gem; pretas; humans; hell beings, animals, demi-gods, gods. Although hell beings are in lower realm, pretas are more potent objects of offering because of the intensity of their suffering of need. If have to choose, choose those with higher merits. Wealth comes from the practice of generosity.

If we experience failures in work and in the accumulation of wealth, it is due to the lack of generosity in present and past lives. If you look at Tara Puja text itself, it involves so much offering which is the practice of generosity. It's not about ritual but rather, about the extensive 7 limb practice. "Give all except the 3 robes of religion"- this refers to Sangha robes i.e. the Choegu namsum, consisting of the choegu (the yellow robe used during teachings), namjar (the yellow robe used during Sangha confessions), tangur/shemtab (the lower robe). Novice monks allowed to wear the choegu but not namjar (patched shawl – carrying 253 vows).

It should be stated here that it is not necessary that a sangha be only a monk or nun. A lay person can be sangha because it is not about being in monasteries and nunneries. It is the quality of renunciation that determines whether one is sangha or not. Renunciation for a lay person means living a life with contentment. Having no grasping to this worldly life with its temporary interests and samsaric pleasures; appreciating yet

not being attached to love ones; not having animosity towards enemies and indifference towards strangers. However, when one (ordained sangha or lay practitioner) realises emptiness directly, then one becomes an Arya Being, who are the actual Sangha Refuge.

What was the purpose of Buddha revealing ordination vows and giving permission to form Sangha communities? It was to create the environment for practitioners to practice Dharma full time. Lay life tends to be filled by activities and mundane obligations. However, whether Sangha or lay, to be liberated from samsara, one has to actualise the realisation of the lack of inherent existence.

In modern society which is rife with politics, greed and cunning, we might find it difficult to practice the Bodhisattva's way of life. We should not give up—instead, we should feel fortunate that we have encountered Bodhisattva teachings and that we should try our best to integrate the Bodhisattva deeds into contemporary life and in a gradual manner, according to one's ability until completion. The Bodhisattva deeds are true gifts to the world and all living beings.

In the dedication prayer:

Jangchup semchoe rinpoche – this relates conventional bodhicitta.

Tongnyi dawa rinpoche – relates to ultimate bodhicitta.

With the above two lines, one is able to attain enlightenment within 3 countless aeons. However, 3 countless aeons is a long time which is why the Buddha taught the Highest Yoga tantra (HYT) teachings to those suited to undertake the quick path of the generation and completion stages

of practice. As there is no guarantee that we will gain another precious human rebirth, we need to embark upon the Mahayana path to create the karma to engage in HYT practices to attain enlightenment more quickly and thereby be able to truly help sentient beings.

Rem-nyi dawa rinpoche – this refers to the generation and completion stages of the HYT practice.

Verse 86

*The body, apt to practice scared teaching
Should not be harmed in trivial pursuits
If this advice is kept, the wishes of all beings
Will swiftly and completely be attained.*

One should fully utilise this human rebirth to actualise the most profound teachings of the Buddha (conventional and ultimate bodhicitta) and not waste it in mundane, worldly matters. One of the powerful way to accumulate the 3 countless aeons of merit is the practice of generosity cultivated by the Arya Bodhisattvas i.e. not just dedicating their possessions but also offering their limbs and organs (because unlike us, they have cultivated to the point of being un-attached to their aggregates) with the mind of totally letting go and the compassionate heart to help others. The novice Bodhisattvas who have entered into the Path of Accumulation or Preparation, should not engage into the extreme practice of generosity of giving organs and limbs, as their minds are as yet un-trained. Only Arya Bodhisattvas can do so. If we offer our limbs when we are not trained and ready, would result in the negative karma of harming one's aggregates.

Verse 87

*They should not give up their bodies
Whose compassion is not pure and perfect
But let them, in this world and those to come
Subject their bodies to the service of the supreme goal.*

This is the scriptural explanation on why one cannot engage in the extreme generosity of giving up limbs until one is an Arya Bodhisattva. It is because we have not perfected compassion nor matured in the cultivation of wisdom directly realising emptiness.

Verse 88

*Do not teach to those without respect
To those who like the sick wear cloths around their heads
To those who proudly carry weapons, staffs or parasols
And those who keep their hats upon their heads.*

For the study of Dharma to bear fruit, one needs the proper causes and conditions. Otherwise, Dharma will not enter into one's mindstream nor be an antidote to delusions. Hence, the verse expresses the difficulties in teaching those who bear negative intention, those who readily inflict harm on others, those who have faith only in elements and spirits. One needs to think twice when offering Dharma teachings to such persons because there is the high chance of them generating disrespect, wrong view and misconceptions, which in turn creates the heavy negative karma for them. When this happens, it becomes an obstruction to that person, spiritually pollutes the place and the people in that place will encounter

many hindrances to study and cultivation and delusions will be even harder to subdue. Hence it is very important for students of a teacher to avoid quarrelling and placing the Guru in the middle of a dispute or as the object of the quarrel. It would require much cleansing and restoration of the vows. That is why during initiations, there are many strict rules because to receive profound Dharma teachings including that of tantra, requires pure respect towards the Guru and teachings, harmony between students etc. A Guru's hesitation in giving teachings or initiations is not about miserliness in Dharma but due to the more delicate reason of being careful about giving teachings to suitable vessels.

During the Buddha's time, one of the Buddha's disciple volunteered to give emptiness teachings to the King. The moment the King heard those teachings, he instantly developed wrong view and proceeded to order the monk to be killed, resulting in the King going to the lowest hell. And that monk also had to go to the lower realms because he had not been careful about revealing the emptiness teachings to an inappropriate person.

Although there are 4 schools of philosophy regarding the explanation of emptiness, without which there would be no transcendental wisdom, Buddha had to teach it in stages – starting with the lower schools, before proceeding to the higher schools.

Verse 89

*Do not teach the vast and deep to those
Upon the lower paths nor as a monk
To women unescorted. Teach with equal honour
Low and high according to their path.*

If one realises that a disciple has stronger faith in the Hinayana path, one has to be very skilful in revealing teachings on the higher capability beings to such a person. As an ordained person, a monk is not supposed to give profound teachings to a lone woman nor sit on the same level seat. By understanding the benefit of the generosity of Dharma, it requires the mindfulness and wisdom as to the spiritual level of the listener. Unless the listener is ready to hear certain teachings, it could give rise to wrong view or aversion to the teachings. Hence one needs to master the teachings of the 3 Scopes and those of sutra and tantra, in order to teach beings according to their inclination and needs. Otherwise, one will not fulfil the practice of the generosity of Dharma.

Verse 90

*Those suited to the teachings vast and deep
Should not be introduced to lesser paths
But basic practice you should not forsake
Confused by talk of sutras and mantras.*

If a person seeks to learn about the Bodhisattva's path but one teaches the lower vehicle's path, one becomes the cause to delay that person's higher realisations. This will break one of the Bodhisattva vows. If someone who is striving in the cultivation of bodhicitta gets distracted by oneself to provide this-life's and saying that bodhicitta does not help sentient beings directly – if we do this, we break the Bodhisattva vows. Likewise, when one sees a person living life in pure Vinaya or doing mandala practice and one says that these are useless and should one practice bodhicitta instead, that too will cause a break of the Bodhisattva vows. If oneself is

a Bodhisattvayana practitioner and one then generates the thought that nirvana is useless, that too breaks one of the Bodhisattva vows. Although one should abandon nirvana (in the sense of abandoning liberation for oneself only), one should not criticise it, as it is an important aspect of the path to enlightenment. The view to be abandoned is that which holds that self-liberation is more important than enlightenment.

Whenever we communicate with others Dharma, we should ensure that we do not bring contradiction to other aspects of Dharma. If sutra and mantra become contradictory, then one has failed to understand the Dharma.

Before Lama Tsongkhapa came to Tibet, the vast and profound teachings of the Buddha were in decline. There was only recitation of sutra and mantra chanting and giving of initiations. It came to a stage where the engagement into sutra and tantra was polarised i.e. became they were regarded as opposite, contradictory practices. Such was the sad state of the Buddhadharma at that time. When Lama Tsongkhapa came to Tibet, it was like sunshine had arrived to dispel the darkness that had shrouded the Buddha teachings, including the alleged contradictions between sutra and tantra.

To remedy this, one of Lama Tsongkhapa's landmark teachings is the Lam Rim Chenmo (teachings on sutra) and the Nga Rim Chenmo (teachings on tantra). He himself lived the life of the pure Vinaya of a fully ordained monk and at the same time, his inner practice was totally infused with the generation and completion stages of the Highest Yoga tantra. He showed that the unification of bodhicitta and emptiness did not require the physical aspect of a dakini or yogini-mother. Through the completion

of the accumulations of merit and wisdom and his meditative mastery, Lama Tsongkhapa achieved the unification of great bliss and clear light and attained enlightenment in that lifetime, while wearing the monk's robe of pure Vinaya. This is one of the greatest deeds of Lama Tsongkhapa.

We need to be careful when discussing tantra. If someone shows great interest in tantra, one needs to explain well to such a person, the sutra teachings of the 3 Principal Aspects of the Path. If one is intensely interested in Sutra, one should reveal the profound teachings of tantra. For the comprehensive study of the Buddhadharma, both teachings of sutra and tantra must be learned.

Verse 91

*Your spittle and your toothbrushes
When thrown away should be concealed
And it is wrong to foul with urine
Public thoroughfares and water springs.*

During Shantideva's time, personal items like tooth-cleaners (toothbrushes in the form of a special, yellowish coloured stick, which could also be used to check dreams) would be thrown on the streets. This verse is reminding us that as we require mindfulness in thought, one should be mindful of all our actions and have consideration for other beings.

Verse 92

*When eating do not gobble noisily
Nor stuff and cram your gaping mouth
And do not sit with legs outstretched
Nor rudely rub your hands together.*

My aunt is very old. She purposely makes noises when she eats because she feels that in that way, the food will be more delicious. This verse describes in great detail, how to be physically considerate with others.

Verse 93

*Do not sit upon a horse, on beds or seats
With women of another house, alone
All that you have seen or have been told
To be offensive – this you should avoid.*

As a Bodhisattva practitioner, one should not ride a horse e.g. an ordained monk or nun should not ride horse nor sit on bed with a person of opposite gender, alone. Best if it is with a company of 3 persons. Otherwise, this could give rise to accusations and whomever accuses a Bodhisattva practitioner incurs negative karma, so this should be avoided for everyone concerned.

Verse 94

*Not rudely pointing with your finger
But rather with a reverent gesture showing
With the while right hand outstretched
This is how to indicate the road.*

If someone asks for directions, don't just point with one finger. Instead, use the whole hand outstretched and provide the information with a pleasant facial expression. Mindfulness must prevail at all times.

If during a puja, someone misses a line in the puja text, one needs to use one's entire hand with the palm facing upwards, to show the correct line. When opening a Sutra text, one should cover one's mouth in respect because the text contains the Dharma refuge. I have seen many occasions where the Dharma texts is simply placed on the floor! Dharma texts contain the Buddha's teachings. When Lamas visit, one offers the best that one has. This is not trying to impress the Lama nor the public but rather, it is meritorious to accumulate merits by offering the best. Offering the best is to illustrate the value the teachings one has received from the Lama; it is also indicative of whether one sees the Lama as equal to the Buddha or not. A Lama cannot be measured by the title or quantity of offerings. One should offer the best that we can manage with sincerity and pure view. This way, it will not affect one's realisations. If we limit our offerings due to worry and worldliness , it will affect one's merit and karma.

Verse 95

Do not wave your arms without uncouth gestures

With gentle sounds and finger snaps

Express yourself with modesty

For acting otherwise is impolite excess.

Whatever you do, be gentle and disciplined, as if surrounded by beings in Samadhi. When calling people, do so respectfully and gently. Even

though you maybe the boss, your physical and verbal expression should be respectful to others.

Verse 96

*Lie down to sleep with posture and direction
Of the Buddha when he passed into nirvana
And first, with clear resolve
Decide that you'll be swift to rise again.*

Whenever we go to bed, we should adopt Buddha's manner when he passed away, i.e. the lion's posture, which is to lie on our right side, our head towards north, elbow out, last finger touching the right nostril. Think that one is dissolving into emptiness and from that emptiness, one arises the next morning with the mind of emptiness i.e. that self and phenomena lack inherent existence. For tantric practitioners, go to bed meditating on the death process up to the clear light stage and from there, one's consciousness enters into the intermediate state (dream state), engage in dream yoga – which involves the control of the subconscious mind and transforming thoughts from the negative to the positive in order to actualise sambogakaya; from that dream yoga state to arising/awaking from sleep in the form of nirmanakaya.

Verse 97

*The Bodhisattva's acts
Are boundless as the teachings say
And all these practices that cleanse the mind
Embrace – until success has been attained.*

Although the Buddha has taught the various stages of the path, including the teachings of the 3 capabilities beings, tantra, sutra and Vinaya, all these relate to the conduct needed to gain liberation. However, none of these teachings can compare to teachings of the bodhisattva deeds and those on conventional and ultimate Bodhicitta because they contain solutions to transform the mind from negative to virtuous, transform samsara to nirvana, transform suffering to lasting happiness.

As in the views of the Middle Way, even to actualise freedom from samsara, the direct realisation of emptiness is needed. Ultimate bodhicitta contains the teachings on bodhicitta in conjunction with emptiness, which is the lynch-pin, the critical building block to our attaining omniscience.

Verse 98

Reciting thrice, by day, by night

The Sutra in Three Sections

Relying on the Buddhas and bodhisattvas

Purify the rest of your transgressions.

In order for us to sustain our practice in the Bodhisattva conduct and purification practices, one should adopt the Triskandha Sutra. In essence, the Sutra teaches us to make the Bodhisattva vows as part of one's daily practice, reminds us to live in the Bodhisattva's conduct, not to transgress vows and to purify past karma. One should recite the Bodhisattva vows 3 times daily.

Verse 99

*And therefore, in whatever time or place
For your own good and for the good of others
Be diligent to implement
The teachings given for that situation.*

Verse 100

*There is indeed no virtue
That the Buddhas offspring should not learn
To one with mastery therein
There is no action destitute of merit.*

By familiarising oneself with the Bodhisattva vows, all virtuous actions and their results will come effortlessly. All vows and virtues are important. Not even one quality can be neglected.

Verse 101

*Directly then, or indirectly
All you do must be for others' sake
And solely for their welfare dedicate
Your actions for the gaining of enlightenment.*

There is no contradiction between verse 99 where it says to implement the teachings for oneself and others; and in verse 101 where it says to do so solely for others' sake. Without bodhicitta intention, all actions done are self-centered. With the bodhicitta motivation, actions done will benefit others and naturally benefit oneself too.

Verse 102

*Never at the cost of life or limb
Forsake your virtuous friend, your teacher
Learned in the meaning of the Mahayana
Supreme in practice of the Bodhisattva path.*

One of the key practices of the Bodhisattva is humility. Respect is gained from being humble. Therefore even at cost of life and limb, one should never forsake one's Gurus, teachers and virtuous friends. Our Dharma brothers and sisters who have taken Bodhisattva vows from the same master are also one's virtuous friends. In the Compendium of All Practices composed by Shantideva and another text of a similar title composed by Nagarjuna (Compendium of All Sutras), it is stated that not forsaking the virtuous friend, in particular, one's Guru, is fundamental to the Bodhisattva's conduct, for without the master, one will not be able to obtain pure teachings of Bodhicitta to eliminate samsara and actualise enlightenment

Verse 103

*For thus you must depend upon your guru
As you will find described in Shri Sambhava's life
And elsewhere in the teachings of the Buddha:
These be sure to study, reading in the sutras.*

Sri Shambava had 110 respected Gurus but just the mention of Sudhana his teacher, brought immense positive transformation in his mind. We should explore such life stories on how disciples properly devoted themselves to their teachers.

Lama Atisha had over 150 teachers, received teachings of the entire aspects of sutra and tantra from them but just the name of Lama Serlingpa (who gave him the transmission of the bodhicitta teachings) would bring tears and heartfelt inspiration within him. Likewise, we should supplicate our Gurus to help us sustain the inspiration to remain in the training of the bodhisattva's conduct, especially when obstacles arise.

Verse 104

*The training you will find described
Within the sutras. Therefore read and study them.
The Sutra of the Essence of the sky –
This is the text that should be studied first.*

The verse here is encouraging us to study and adopt the Akashagarbha Sutra into one's life. Akashagarbha is one of the eight great Bodhisattvas, who explained how one should secure one's vows and is thus a profound and essential teaching, in particular, on how to protect oneself from committing the 18 root downfalls i.e. transgressions of the root Bodhisattva vows.

Verse 105

*The Digest of All Disciplines
Contains a detailed and extensive explanation
Of all that must be practiced come what may
So this is something you should read repeatedly.*

Shantideva advises us to read the teachings in the Shikshasamuchaya (Compendium of All Practices). HH Dalai Lama extracts verses from both Bodhicaryavatara and Shikshasamuchchaya when teaching the Bodhicaryavatara (“Guide to the Bodhisattva’s Way of Life”). Teachings on the preservation of vows are more detailed in Shikshasamuchaya. We should read repeatedly these.

Verse 106

*From time to time, for the sake of brevity
Consult the Digest of the Sutras
And those two works peruse with diligence
That noble Nagarjuna has composed.*

The Digest of the Sutra (by Shantideva) refers to the Sutra of Samuchaya, which was composed by Nargajuna and the Shikshasamuchaya to strengthen one’s practice of the Bodhisattva conduct.

Verse 107

*Whatever in these works is not proscribed
Be sure to undertake and implement
And what you see there, perfectly fulfill
And so safeguard the minds of worldly beings.*

Whatever Dharma one studies, one should be clear about the details and integrate them into one’s daily life. All virtues must be adopted and should be wary of taking for granted the vows or neglecting minor transgressions.

Mindfulness is to be applied to every single act of body, speech and mind. Even negative small acts have to be purified and one should resolve to refrain from engaging in them. By abiding in this manner, the immediate benefit is that one gains protection from harm and deception by our karma and delusions. The ultimate benefit is liberation; otherwise we are right back in samsara.

Verse 108

*To keep a guard again and yet again
Upon the state and actions of our thoughts and deeds –
This and only this defines
The nature and the sense of mental watchfulness.*

Mental watchfulness refers to the twin allies of mindfulness and vigilance. One should never let them grow lax if one is to avoid negative influences and uphold virtues and the Bodhisattva conduct.

Verse 109

*But all this must be acted out in truth
For what is to be gained by mouthing syllables?
What invalid was ever helped
By merely reading the doctor's treatises?*

Mere intellectual knowledge will not bring about the transformation of the mind. Receiving profound teachings will not transform suffering into happiness, nor samsara into liberation unless we are clear about what is

to be adopted and what is to be abandoned. Otherwise, it would be like reading the doctor's prescription but refusing to take the medicine. What good can come of that? How can one get healed?

The Buddha is our perfect doctor who has given the unmistakable diagnosis that all sufferings come from self-grasping and self-cherishing; from not following the Bodhisattva's conduct. The failure to integrate the teachings into one's life is precisely akin to not taking the medicine when sick. All of life's circumstances are perfect and conducive conditions for one to apply and develop the bodhisattva practice. If we are able to do this, then we are successful practitioners.

Patience chapter

This chapter is amongst the most celebrated amongst all the chapters in this text.

Anger is the most forceful delusion in terms of destroying merit and hindering the accumulation of new good karma. Patience is a shield against anger.

What is meant by patience? There are 3 types of patience – (1) that which disregards harms done to oneself (2) that which accepts suffering (3) that which is clear about the teachings and maintains conviction and faith in them. Patience is cultivated from understanding the faults of anger, the benefits of restraint, understanding karma and understanding the reality of existence.

There are 3 factors which are incompatible with developing the above 3 types of patience, namely (1) hostility (2) loss of courage (3) disbelief in these teachings. These 3 incompatible factors need to be abandoned.

Verse 1

*Good works gathered in a thousand ages
Such as deed of generosity
Or offerings to the blissful ones –
A single flash of anger shatters them.*

The potency of anger can never be underestimated. All merits, good karma and the creation of causes of happiness, causes of liberation, causes

of enlightenment gathered from aeons and culpas (vast expanses of time) can be destroyed by one flash of anger.

One single moment of hostility towards a sentient being or towards Buddha, Dharma and Sangha drills down deeply into one's consciousness and can cut off all the good that one has done. One moment of losing courage towards cultivating the altruistic mind can also destroy merit. Discouraging oneself from benefitting sentient beings likewise destroys merits.

Anger is not just a matter of wild external behaviour but includes an inner, unstable negative attitude. Since one's mind is a continuum, if one has a patient mind, one's merits will be protected thereby securing the chance for a higher rebirth; otherwise, the many moments of anger will drag one down to the lower realms. Attachment, pride, ignorance are delusions but they do not have the destructive impact on merits as does uncontrolled anger.

Verse 2

No evil is there similar to anger

No austerity to be compared with patience

Steep yourself therefore in patience

In all ways, urgently, with zeal.

There is no greater evil than anger; no greater virtue than patience. If one fails in patience, there can be no attainments in renouncing samsara, bodhicitta and realising emptiness. Anger is the harmful attitude, the hostile mind which can manifest outwardly in an outburst or dwell deep within as resentment. Abandoning anger and practice of patience is paramount. We cannot take our own sweet time to apply this.

Verse 3

*Those tormented by the pain of anger
Will never know tranquillity of mind
Strangers they will be to every pleasure
Sleep departs them, they can never rest.*

When anger arises, one's entire being goes into turbulence. No matter how much we yearn for happiness and attainments, all of it will be beyond our reach; clarity of mind, peace, rest and contentment will remain distant dreams.

Verse 4

*Noble chieftains full of hate
Will be attacked and slain
By even those who look to them
For honours and possession.*

Kings and heads of families who are filled with anger and impatience, will be harmed by dependents and those who rely on them for help and necessities. Instead of gratitude from their citizens or their children, they will receive criticism or be attacked. Children from angry families become angry parents and the tragic cycle goes on. In the workplace, some bosses are harsh towards their staff, thinking that they are entitled to control them as they please, will not be remembered kindly when they leave. If one wants to be a successful chairman of a business, one needs to be kind and gentle.

Verse 5

*From family and friends estranged
And shunned by those attracted by their bounty
Men of anger have no joy
Forsaken by all happiness and peace.*

In any circumstances and in any community, whether in a country, society or family – as long as minds are affected by anger, there will be no stability nor joy. If you wish to secure happiness and peace in the family, community and the world, get rid of anger and hostility through the adoption of patience.

Verse 6

*All these ills are brought about by wrath
Our sorrow bearing enemy
But those who seize and crush their anger down
Will find their joy in this and future lives.*

All the pain experienced in life e.g. the problems in careers, health, relationships, mental torture, financial collapse – are brought about by the exhaustion of merit and good karma. Negative karma depletes merits and anger is the greatest thief of merits. However just as anger can shatter all good karma gained, conversely, all the joys and gains of this life can come to us if one can train to seize the angry mind each time it surfaces. We can choose how to live – we can choose to adopt the first 2 lines or the last 2 lines of this illuminating verse.

As an example, Shantideva himself during his earlier years, was like any

of us, afflicted by negative emotions. When he was composing this, he exposed all the negative things he did during that time and advised the readers and listeners not to repeat his deeds. He succeeded in eliminating his anger and proceeded to compose this text as a guide to us. Of course, not everyone possesses an equal intensity of anger – some have lower levels of it but it is never totally eradicated until one perfects the practice of patience.

Verse 7

*Getting what I do not want
And all that hinders my desire
There my mind finds fuel for misery
Anger springs from it, oppressing me.*

Why is it that whatever we do not want seems to rush towards us, whereas those things which we seek, elude us? Why are there so many obstacles to efforts at success, longevity, even Dharma practice? The answer is that we seek solutions from the external world, never realising it is our inner world that needs to be mastered.

We think that if we move from a smaller house to a bigger house, we will be happier but we soon discover that having a larger house is troublesome as more work is required to upkeep it. So, we get frustrated, another form of anger. We are locked in the un-ending circle of anger, which gives rise to more anger and more loss of merit and good karma.

Verse 8

*Therefore I will utterly destroy
The sustenance of this my enemy
My foe, whose sole intention is
To bring me injury and sorrow.*

By learning about anger and its harmful effects, one must resolve not only to destroy the gross aspects of anger but destroy it at its root. External displays of anger arise from the angry mind. Eliminating the inner mental state of anger requires us to eliminate ignorance because it is that which allows anger to be triggered. Eliminating ignorance referred to here is the blind-mind that is unable to see the disadvantages of anger and the advantages of patience.

When will we know that we are free from anger including its root? The day when all our thoughts and actions are infused with the practice of patience.

Verse 9

*So come what may, I'll never harm
My cheerfulness of mind
Depression never brings me what I want
My virtue will be warped and marred by it.*

Therefore, be honest and kind to oneself. Do not harm oneself, do not cheat oneself, do not destroy one's own happiness through allowing the negative, angry mind to have its way. Feeling depressed at our faults or

having self-loathing is of no benefit to us because it will merely enhance the agitated mind which will ruin us.

Verse 10

If there is a remedy when trouble strikes

What reason is there for worry?

And if there is no help for it

What use is there in being worried?

Infallible logic: This is a famous verse which uses pure logic to prove that worrying is futile. If there is a solution to a problem, one has no reason to worry as the problem can be overcome; and if there is no remedy, worrying about it will not change the situation.

Our Kyabje Lama Zopa Rinpoche is the best example of this teaching. He always acts in a very calm manner. We tend to have loads of concern about today, about tomorrow. We expend so much energy and time about what might happen tomorrow, which may or may not happen. Sometimes, when we are too excited about something, expectation arises and when it does not happen as we expect, disappointment sets in, giving rise to anger. If one has created the proper causes, the results will come. Worrying has no role in this process, so it is of no use to us.

Anger cannot be determined by the outer action alone, as it depends on the mental state that is accompanying the act. If a forceful act is accompanied by hostility, that is anger and negative. On the other hand, if a forceful act is based on compassion, then it is possible for the positive karma from

the compassionate intention to outweigh the negative effect of using forceful means.

Q: Does anger include the milder form of aversion or wanting to be separated from a situation or person?

Ans: Yes. Anger includes aversion and comes under the 2nd category of losing courage to benefit the person whom we regard as harming us; losing patience in being kind to the person we feel is causing harm. Sometimes we feel depressed at oneself or at one's personal situation or one might even have self-hatred. All these are various forms of anger. The heaviest form of anger is hatred towards the Triple Gem.

Q: In Western psychology, people are encouraged to shout out anger as a form of release, what is Buddhist view?

Ans: Buddhism would not favour the reinforcement of the seeds of anger. Instead, it advises the rational approach of analysing the disadvantages of anger and the advantages of patience. Some people who display anger think they are acting powerfully but in truth, they are unstable. An angry mind of a parent greatly and negatively affects the child very much. Even the mind of an unborn baby can be deeply affected by the mind of the parent.

Verse 11

Pain, humiliation, insults or rebukes

We do not want them

Either for ourselves or those we love

For those we do not like, it's quite the opposite!

When is patience most needed? When is anger most likely to attack our peace of mind? Situations of humiliation, being criticised, being scolded, hurtful exchanges, disappointment etc all trigger anger to quickly arise. Those are the times when we need to brace ourselves against our runaway minds.

Any time we wish unpleasant situations to happen to our enemies is a clear sign that we are having angry thoughts. Similarly, if we are having pain, whether physical or mental, and we allow ourselves to get depressed over it, it is a form of anger towards oneself and that too can destroy merits. Frustration towards one's failure in life or being a sickly person or not having enough knowledge or money, are different types of hostility towards oneself, which eats away at one's merits. Wishing our enemies to suffer is also anger and has the great potency to destroy merit because it contradicts the refuge vows of not harming others, not to mention transgressing the higher Bodhisattva vows and the like. It is helpful to think about the condition of sentient beings, how they are sometimes driven crazy by mistaken views and delusions, causing them to act in the manner they do. We too are afflicted in the same way.

Verse 12

The cause of happiness comes rarely

And many are the seeds of suffering!

But if I have no pain, I'll never long for freedom;

Therefore, O my mind, be steadfast!

One of the great causes of happiness is cultivating patience. Understanding

karma, knowing the disadvantages of anger and the benefits of patience are the tools of mind transformation. Pain and suffering are useful as they can be used to help oneself gain renunciation of samsara with its 3 sufferings of – the suffering of suffering, the suffering of pain and pervasive suffering. Renunciation is the first step on the road to liberation and it is hardship and sorrow that makes us take that first step. So when suffering comes, accept it intelligently use logic and reason to deal with it.

Verse 13

*The Karna folk, devoted to the Goddess
Endure the meaningless austerities
Of being cut and burned
Why am I so timid on the path of freedom?*

Religious followers of some faiths adopt austere, extreme practices such as piercing their bodies. If such ordinary beings do this for the sake of seeking some happiness, let alone liberation, why can't we bear the hardships of training on the path, which will definitely lead us to total freedom from samsaric existence? When we practice Dharma, we should not expect things to be always smooth and success to be instant.

Verse 14

*There is nothing that does not grow light
Through habit and familiarity
Putting up with little cares
I'll train myself to bear with great adversity.*

Familiarity is a great trainer. By being familiar with small harms, one becomes better equipped to handle larger problems. At the core of the practice of patience is the transformation of suffering into one's spiritual path. Through coping with difficulties with a clear mind that remembers Dharma advice, there will come a time where pain and heavy problems will no longer be felt. More than that, one will develop an outlook that views all new experiences, even those seemingly adverse situations, as joyful because one knows that one can manage it and able to help others to deal with the problems.

Like my late master Geshe Lama Konchog, who was diagnosed as having cancer and had his entire stomach removed. A few hours after that major operation, instead of expressing pain, he expressed joy and contentment as he had made many prayers to deepen his practice and he regarded the cancer and the entire experience related to it, as enabling him to do just that. He became even more generous, more kind, more gentle in his manner and gave away gifts that he received and if there were not enough, he would ask us to buy more. The nurses, the doctor, the person who offered light massage, were all remembered with gratitude by Geshela. By being able to endure small harms through the practice of patience, one gains the strength to face greater harms.

Verse 15

*And do I not already bear with common irritations
Bites and stings of snakes and flies
Experiences of hunger and thirst
And painful rashes on my skin?*

Verse 16

*Heat and cold, the wind and rain
Sickness, prison, beatings –
I'll not fret about such things.
To do so only aggravates my trouble.*

The common irritations of insect bites, sickness, hunger and thirst and elemental discomforts affect different people in varying ways. Without the patience of accepting hardship, if one focuses on the discomfort being experienced, the suffering will become more intense. Check it out and see if this is true.

Verse 17

*There are some who bravery increases
At the sight of their own blood
While some lose all their strength and faint
When it's another's blood they see!*

Verse 18

*This results from how the mind is set
In steadfastness or cowardice
And so I'll scorn all injury
And hardships I will disregard!*

In order to serve living beings who due to karma and delusions, are overwhelmed by emotions, one needs to be able to overcome one's own

unease with suffering. One of the best ways is to be brave about facing adversity with calmness and understanding of the situation. That is what patience is.

Patience is the armour against the delusions of oneself and of others. Possession of this armour comes through reflecting on karma. The example of hospice service – one might fear that the sickness will be transmitted to us if we serve sick people but by understanding karma, one will realise that one has to have the karma to get a particular illness – if one does not have such a karma, even living 24 hours with a sick person will not bring about the sickness in oneself; on the other hand, if one has the karma to get that sickness, even if we never step into a hospital, we will still get struck down by illness.

Free your mind from being like a dry twig i.e. totally unable to withstand any form of force or adversity. A small problem arises and you have to advertise it to the world. A small disappointment is like the end of the world. Allow one's negative mind to stir up impatience and upset affects one's physical and mental well-being. When true practitioners are sent to austere places or to the King's palace, their minds remains stable and content, whatever the external circumstances may be. For such persons, everywhere is a pureland.

Your experience of an entire day can be strongly influenced by the motivation you set up in the morning. Set the bodhicitta motivation to bring happiness to everyone.

Verse 19

*When sorrows fall upon the wise
Their minds remain serene and undisturbed
For in their war against defiled emotion
Many are the hardships, as in every battle.*

The way we set our minds will determine the outcome of all that we do. For the wise, difficulties do not disturb the clarity and peace in their minds; for most of us, every little interference creates much suffering. It is because we do not practice patience.

Verse 20

*Thinking scorn of every pain
And vanquishing such foes as hatred
These are exploits of a conquering hero
The rest is slaying what is dead already!*

Since the disturbed mind comes from anger, through conquering that, the mind becomes steady and other delusions are easily extinguished.

Verse 21

*Suffering also has its worth
Through sorrow pride is driven out
And pity felt for those who wander in samsara
Evil is avoided, goodness seems delightful.*

Suffering has a value. It spurs you on to actualise renunciation; dispel arrogance and the self-egoistic mind which are the source of animosity and

upset; eliminate negativities through purification; generate compassion for suffering beings; cultivate virtue and Dharma. With these, liberation and enlightenment are within sight. Hence, suffering and adversity are like the kindest Gurus.

Verse 22

*I am not angry with my bile and other humors
Fertile source of pain and suffering!
So why should I resent my fellow creatures
Victims too, of like conditions.*

Training one's mind in patience: One method of training is to reflect on how karma works because through reason and logic, one understands how one's problems came about. Another method of training in patience is to understanding the reality of existence.

The question here is – “Is there a truly, independently existing object of anger i.e. the enemy, out there or not?” One needs to identify who the real enemy is. Through analysis and investigation, one will discover that one's own perceptions which invoke painful emotions give rise to “the harm giver”. The cause for this perception is one's own karma and delusions which has dwelled within us since beginningless time. Next, we try to search for this thing called “one's own karma” and likewise, we will realise that this does not exist solidly on its own but comes about through causes and conditions and more mental perceptions. Therefore, the concept of “harm-giver” is nothing independently existing but is a by-product of past karma committed and one's mental imputation. It is a mental construction!

If a person hits you with a stick, you will get angry at the person, not the stick even though it was the stick which caused the physical bruise. You are not angry with the stick but with the person wielding the stick because you hold the person responsible. But if you think further, you will also see that the person is likewise being controlled by his delusions. So it is the delusions that one should fault and not the person. And if you further analyse further the delusions, you will see that those too are not inherently-existing but are dependently-arising.

Apply this method to checking whether the pain of sickness that one may be experiencing is inherently existing or not. The power of mental perception is enormous.

The conclusion is that there no real object for oneself to direct one's anger towards. If one is not angry at one's own aggregates (form, feeling, consciousness, cognition and karmic imprints), which is a fertile source of suffering, why should we get angry at other living beings who are affected by the same torments?

Verse 23

*For though they are unlooked for, undesired
These ills afflict us all the same
And likewise, though unwanted and unsought
Defilements nonetheless are quick to come.*

Verse 24

*Never thinking, “Now I will be angry”
People are impulsively caught up in anger
Irritation likewise comes
Though never plans to be experienced!*

When we allow delusions to control the mind, one is actually setting up one’s own antennae to receive harm, negative thoughts, angry thoughts. That’s it! Disturbed thoughts and suffering will surely come.

A contemplation on dependent-arising and the emptiness of self and of phenomena, will enable us to see that all sufferings are imputations of mind; the mere interpretations of mind; the TV-channel that was constructed by delusions and that the emotional mind is tuned into. If we do not switch off the negative mind, the negative channel will remain perpetually on and everything we see will be negative and painful.

Verse 25

*Every injury whatever
The whole variety of evil deeds
Is brought about by circumstances
None is independent, none autonomous*

Every injury or evil deed is interconnected with causes & conditions and the mind interpreting people, objects and situations. Adversity comes due to exhaustion of past merits caused by anger, which in turn causes the mind to be troubled and too weak to refrain from further anger and deluded emotions to surface again and again.

Verse 26

*Conditions, once assembled, have no thought
That now they will give rise to some result
And that which is engendered does not think
That it has been produced by such conditions.*

The law of cause and effect is proven and undisputed. However, our limited understanding and ability to see all forms of gross and subtle karma created by oneself and others might lead one to the mistaken thought that “I seem to have more problems after meeting the Buddhadharmā”. Only the Buddha’s omniscient mind can see the gross and subtle karma of every living being. The point is that even if one understands karma, purifying negative karma today does not mean the result will be manifested tomorrow. One needs to accumulate the causes and conditions need to come together for the results to arise. Just as in the case of planting – the seed, the soil, water, sunlight and time are needed for the plant to come about.

Verse 27

*That which is referred to as the Primal Substance
That which has been labelled as the Self
Do not come into being thinking
“That is how I will arise”.*

The fundamental obscuration is one’s inability to see the true nature of existence of the “I “. We do not realise that the “I” is not existing from its own side, independent of mental imputation. This conceptual label of an

independently existing I has been mistakenly held in our mental continuum for countless lifetimes. We constantly misinterpret the self and phenomena as truly existing, as things that are to be protected and when that (concept of) “I” is challenged, anger arises. By discovering the emptiness nature of self, all problems can be overcome.

Verse 28

*That which is not manifest is not yet there
So what could want to come to be?
And permanently drawn towards its object
It can never cease from being so.*

There are some non-Buddhist schools e.g. the Samkya school which state that whatever exists now is produced from a prior cause but has a permanent nature i.e. they say that delusions are permanent; samsara is permanent. This means that negative causes will create negative results but those results will never cease! Buddhism totally refutes this and holds that anything that comes about from a cause can never be permanent and can be eliminated.

Verse 29

*Indeed! This self, if permanent,
Is certainly impassable like space itself
And should it meet with other factors
How should they affect it, since it is unchanging?*

Shantideva now debates with the non-Buddhist assertions stated in the verse above (the Samkya school and Nayayiga school) – he says that if the self is permanent, there should be no momentary changes which is easily disproved by one’s observation that one’s life is constantly in flux – aging, sometimes feeling high, sometimes feeling low etc. Contaminated aggregates are not permanent and can be changed and samsara eliminated.

Verse 30

*If, when things occur it stays unchanged and as before
What influence has action had on it?
They say that this affects the self
But what connection could there be between them?*

Verse 31

*All things, ten depend on something else
On this depends the fact that none are independent
Knowing this, we will not be annoyed at objects
That resemble magical appearances.*

Shantideva continues his debate against the permanence of the self. He argues that it is contradictory to assert that self is influenced by the past and yet remains unchanged. If indeed the self is unchanged, what then is the impact of the past? All things arise dependently. Therefore, we should think that our experiences & perceptions are like a mirage because as causes, conditions and mind shifts, so do experiences and perceptions.

Verse 32

*Resistance, you may say is out of place
For what will be opposed by whom?
The stream of suffering is cut through patience
There is nothing inappropriate in wanting that!*

Since change is possible, freedom from delusions and samsara is possible and liberation is possible and enlightenment definitely possible. Through patience, the stubborn knot of suffering can be cut.

Verse 33

*Thus when enemies or friends
Are seen to act improperly
Be calm and call to mind
That everything arises from conditions.*

Whenever friends or enemies irritate oneself, immediately reflect how everything arises from conditions such as allowing one's negative mind to take control and impute all sorts of confusing labels onto situations. Tell yourself to be calm and think over this fact.

Q: Anger at the conventional level, is a product of the mind. Does the Cittamatra school state that since mind is inherently existing, therefore anger inherently exists.

Ans: *Cittamatra says the imprint of mind inherently exists i.e. the subject (mind) inherently exists but the object that is perceived is mere mental*

imputation. The Madhyamika Prasangika school, the highest school asserts that even mind does not inherently exist; positive and negative also has no inherent existence but comes about dependently upon a valid base and the mental imputation upon that base.

Sharavaka vehicle (Vaibashika school) - substantial existence on both object and subject level

Pratyeka Buddha vehicle (Sautrantika school) - asserts substantial existence of objects but not of the subject (mind).

Verse 34

*If things occurred to living beings
Following their wishes and intentions
How could sorrow ever come to them
For there is no one who desires to suffer?*

The problems in one's life are many. Without seeking them, health problems, business complications, relationship problems happen to us. Whatever action we commit ought to produce the result we intended and yet this is not always the case. Why? It is because we live our lives without knowing that the true nature of self and of phenomena is one that lacks inherent existence.

The conceptual mind of an ordinary being mistakenly apprehends everything as truly and independently existing on its own, without any involvement of mental imputation nor causes and conditions. We do not see the dependently-arising nature of everything.

As long as we do not realise dependent arising, realise emptiness, all actions including virtuous actions that we carry out, become causes for samsara. We make light offerings and offer prayers but with a strong sense of self and of self-interests. When this happens, our prayers may still be a form of virtue but are not pure Dharma virtue, hence they will bring some form of samsaric pleasure which carries the suffering of change. The moment we receive a big diamond ring, we feel joy but when that diamond is misplaced, we suffer.

How does one end the suffering of change? Give up self grasping; practice satisfaction. The moment we cling to the diamond we have received, the suffering of change has already begun. The more we grasp at it, the suffering of change intensifies. Either the diamond will leave you through theft or you will leave the diamond at death. Thus, there is no point in pursuing samsaric pleasure. Be contented. The samsaric mind knows no true happiness because it apprehends everything as truly existing which is a mistaken view and one that will produce unwholesome results.

Verse 35

*Yet careless, all unaware
They tear themselves on thorns and briars
And ardent in pursuit of wives and goods
They starve themselves of nourishment.*

If we fail to eliminate the self cherishing mind, we will constantly accumulate negative karma for suffering; as long as we do not realise emptiness, we will continue to accumulate causes for samsara.

Verse 36

*Some hang themselves or leap into the void
Or eat bad food or swallow deadly poison
Or by their evil conduct
Bring destruction on themselves.*

This verse is like a mirror reflecting back to us the exact image of who we are. We get depressed, feel fed up with life, regard life as having no answer to our problems, we commit harm on ourselves; we are careless about the state of our mind – this roller coaster existence is because we do not learn about karma and how it operates; we are simply not convinced of karma. Some people resort to drugs to numb their mind despite being rich and famous. They consume drugs and extreme activities to escape into a hallucinatory world. All this is due to past negative karma. If such a person understood karma, that person could engage in purification and change one's lifestyle instead of adopting extreme thrills like jumping off cliffs. By having patience whilst being mindful of karma, one can then purify all negativities by applying the 4 Opponent Powers. Even patience towards one's suffering is a form of purification.

Verse 37

*For when affliction seizes them,
They kill themselves, the selves they love so much
So how could they not be the cause
Of pain and suffering for others?*

When one is completely dominated by afflictive emotions which conjure up

enemies and one is unable to let go of desirous objects, every imaginable suffering rushes in.

You are like a slave to this body and yet due to the influence of afflictions, you are willing to torture it and make it harm others. Therefore, we ultimately have to eliminate birth, sickness, aging and death and to achieve this, we need to eliminate karma.

Verse 38

*And when as victims of defilement
Beings even cause their own destruction
Even if compassion does not arise in us
We can at least refrain from being angry.*

By knowing that when one's mind is afflicted by negative emotions, it is virtually impossible to generate compassion, one should at least set up the motivation to engage in patience in order to spare others of our rage and because of its severe karmic consequences of anger.

Verse 39

*If those who are like wanton children
Are by nature prone to injure others
What point is there in being angry
Like resenting fire for its heat?*

It is pointless to return harm for harm. Those who harm us are affected by

delusions, so to retaliate is merely to indulge in our own delusions! Children can be cruel as they do not understand their destructiveness. Likewise, all sentient beings, so one should apply patience and generate compassion towards them instead. One's restraint avoids further provocation and at the same time, protects one's merit. Patient restraint benefits everyone. If one recognises oneself as having an angry nature, one should guard against self-loathing because it would be like begrudging fire for having the capacity to burn. It is more worthwhile to recognise the disadvantages of anger and cultivate more patience.

Verse 40

*And if their faults are fleeting and contingent
If living beings are by nature wholesome
It's likewise senseless to resent them
As well as be angry at the sky for having clouds!*

Oneself and all living beings, including one's enemies, loved ones, strangers – are in the nature of impermanence and are inter-connected. For instance, why do people want to harm and criticise you? Because you have committed the karma to receive harm and criticism. If you want to put an end to receiving harm from others, purify the karma and treat others with consideration and respect as positive causes. Nothing can be achieved by oneself alone – everything is inter-dependent. Thinking this way trims down one's ego.

The second aspect of this verse is that every living being is fundamentally wholesome. None are born evil and totally negative. The root nature is pure and unstained, no different from the Buddha nature. Delusions are

temporarily interfering with this pure state but delusions can be removed. Once we recognise this, we have all the reasons to refrain from harming them. If we get angry at them, it is like getting angry at the sky for having clouds or during hot weather, blaming the country for being so hot. It is foolish to get angry at the natural state of things.

Similarly, anything that is pleasant that comes into your life is also impermanent and is a mere manifestation of the suffering of change. Thus, it is futile to get overly excited and grasping towards it.

If one has no patience, that person is the biggest-ego person. The most patient person is one who has no ego. When there is patience, there is much happiness.

When contemplating on the ego and its disadvantages, don't look at the person next to you. Look at only yourself. Check one's own mental state throughout one's day.

Verse 41

*Although indeed it is the stick that hurts me
I am angry at the one who wields it, striking me
But he is driven and impelled by anger
So it is his wrath I should resent*

When negative emotions arise, avoid retaliating and analyse the situation quietly. Recollect the analogy of a person hitting you with a stick. In that situation, you are not angry at the stick even though it touched your body

and you are instead angry at the person who controlled the stick. Likewise, there is no reason to get angry towards the person because the person is controlled by anger, so it is anger which should be faulted.

Verse 42

*It was I who in the past
Did harm to beings such as these
And so, when others do me mischief
It is only just that they should injure me.*

The frequent contemplation of karma is a great help. We experience what we have committed upon others in the past. We committed harm, so it is to be expected that we receive harm. Just because we cannot recall details of our actions does not mean we did not do them. So where does the blame begin and end? Through this analysis, we can dismantle the reasons for us to generate anger, stop the cycle of harm.

Verse 43

*Their weapons and my body
Both are causes of my suffering!
They their weapons drew, while I held out my body
Who then is more worthy of my anger?*

For a wound to occur, it requires a weapon and one's body being in the way. Without these two, there would be no wound, not cuts and bruises. This is yet another example of the interconnectedness of things. Instead of solely blaming others, we should also note our own faults and role in any situation.

Verse 44

*This human form is like a running sore
Merely touched it cannot stand the pain!
I'm the one who clings to it with blind attachment
Whom should I resent when pain occurs?*

Having taken rebirth in samsara with contaminated aggregates, even small sufferings become unbearable. We cling to our aggregates. When we go for a medical test and receive unfavourable results, we panic and drown in fear. The suffering of fear comes from the clinging, so we should know how to work with our mind to keep it balanced and positive. Patience enable us to maintain this balance.

Look at the Bodhisattva who chooses rebirth in samsara to liberate beings from samsara. The Bodhisattva could remain in nirvana but returns due to the overwhelming courage and compassion for sentient beings. Just like our Kyabje Lama Zopa Rinpoche – wanting to build 500 foot Maitreya Buddha statue, such courage. It will benefit so many beings on account of it.

We should avoid the inauspicious attitude of everything being “cannot, cannot”. This is nothing more than having no patience with adversities. Let’s say I am overseeing a project with 20 over staff and I say to them, “Come to me with only good news. If there is any bad news, deal with it yourself”. This kind of complaining mind can be found at work as well as in relationships and it is due to there being no patience!

Verse 45

*We who are like senseless children
Shrink from suffering but love its causes
We hurt ourselves; our pain is self-inflicted!
Why should others be the object of our anger?*

This is the paradox of an afflicted mind. We seek to escape from suffering but constantly create causes that will bring about suffering. With this being so, we are our own trouble-makers, so why be angry at others?

Verse 46

*Who indeed should I be angry with?
This pain is all my own contriving
Likewise all the janitors of hell
And all the groves of razor trees!*

The Hell realms are hallucinations but they will seem real to those with the karma for that existence. If one is positive minded, one will see things as pure. Buddha does not experience the sufferings of the 6 realms but the 6 realms exist in the Buddha's perception. This is because the Buddha's perceptions are all positive and hence does not impute any negative experience. Realms exist as projections of beings' (negative) minds.

Verse 47

*Those who harm me come against me
Summoned by my evil karma*

*But they will be the ones who go to hell
And so it is myself who bring their ruin.*

Those who harm us are in fact invoked due to our's own past negative karma. Yet, they will be going to the hell realms on account of their inflicting harm. So due to negativities, one brings harm to oneself and to others too. What greater reason for generating compassion?

Verse 48

*Because of them and through the exercise of patience
My many sins are cleansed and purified
But they will be the ones who, thanks to me
Will have long drawn agonies of hell.*

Verse 49

*Therefore I am their tormentor!
Therefore, it is they who bring me benefit!
Thus with what perversity, pernicious mind
Will you be angry with your enemies?*

Verse 50

*For if a patient quality of mind
Is mind, I shall avoid the pains of hell.
But though indeed I save myself
What of my foes, what fate's in store for them?*

Reflect deeply on this logic: Whilst harm-giver incurs the karma for lower realm rebirths through giving us difficulties, through receiving those harms, our negative karma gets purified. In that way, harm-givers enable us to clear negativities thereby bringing us closer towards enlightenment. Thus, harm-givers are our liberators and we are the creators of their suffering. Think about this.

Verse 51

*If I repay them harm for harm
Indeed they'll not be saved thereby
And all my noble actions will be spoiled
Austerity of patience brought to nothing.*

When faced with receiving harm, guard against retaliation because returning harm marks the total breakdown and failure of the practice of patience.

Verse 52

*The mind is bodiless
By no one can it be destroyed
And yet it grasps the body tightly
Falling victim to the body's pain.*

When others hurt us physically, one gets instantly swept over with negative emotion and although one's mind has no limbs nor holds any weapons, it is ready to return the harm. Even though the mind is not physically hurt, it grasps to the body and feels as if it were directly attacked

and proceeds to retaliate. To overcome this, we need to find the nature of the angry mind to pacify suffering. We need to train in patience.

Verse 53

*Scorn and hostile words
And comments that I do not like to hear
My body is not harmed by them
What reason do you have O mind for your resentment?*

Verse 54

*Contempt and scorn that others show me
Now and in my future lives
Since none of it can bite and swallow me
Why is it that I'm so averse to it?*

If others criticise us and point towards our faults, none of it can ruin our existing aggregates nor our merits, so why get angry and impatient towards such people? Since the aggregates are not independently existing, there is no basis to feel hurt.

Verse 55

*Perhaps I turn for it because
It hinders me from having what I want
But all my property I'll leave behind
While sins will keep me steady company*

It is useful to explore the kinds of situations which give rise to anger. One common situation is when one does not get what one wants. Instead of getting agitated, meditate on how the objects of our desire like possessions, fame, name, even loved ones, cannot be brought along into future lives. Therefore, there is no valid reason for getting angry over desirous objects. The stronger the grasping, the stronger the impatience and stronger the misery.

Verse 56

*Better far for me to die today
Than live a long and evil life
However great may be my length of days
The pain of dying will be all the same*

Verse 57

*One man dreams he lives a hundred years
Of happiness but then he wakes
Another dreams an instant's joy
But then he, likewise awakes.*

Verse 58

*And when they wake, the happiness of both
Is finished, never to return
Likewise, when the hour of death comes round
Our lives are over, whether brief or long*

If one lives a life dominated by negative emotions and grasping to ego, is it worthwhile to have a long life of suffering and commission of negative karma? Death is part of life, so trying to avert it or deny it, is pointless. Instead, place one's efforts into avoiding negativities because when death arrives, one will only have one's past karma as a companion. Hence if one wants a peaceful death, bardo and rebirth, there is no choice but to overcome the negative, impatient mind. Fulfil the precepts taken before the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, namely benefit others and always avoid harming them.

Verse 59

*Though we be rich in worldly goods
Delighting in our wealth for many years
Despoiled and stripped as though by thieves
We must go naked and with empty hands.*

If one is not careful of protecting one's body speech and mind against delusions, no matter how wealthy one may be, at death, one has to lose it all. One strives to acquire possessions, only to separate from them in the end and we leave empty-handed. If one can thoroughly secure one's mind from anger by remembering patience, we will pass beyond this life with the wealth of a peaceful, clear and happy mind.

We meet many high lamas, take initiations, collect mantras, recite sutras and own many holy objects but if we never protect our minds from anger, if we react because our egos were bruised, aeons of merit gets destroyed. At the time of death, when the dissolution of the elements occur, the fear will be very intense. One needs to train one's mind.

As Dharma practitioners, we ought not rely on external aids but focus on inner transformation. Example, when we are in need of wealth, some of us would rush out to buy a Dzambala statue, thinking that wealth will flow in. This is superficial thinking and will disappoint you. Dzambala practice is about the sincere practice of generosity. For this, one needs to have a real understanding about the act of giving i.e. one needs to give unconditionally without any expectation of return or some positive result for oneself. Otherwise it becomes more cause for samsara.

Similarly, commissioning 100 Tara Pujas without any heart of devotion towards Tara and qualities of the Buddha and benefitting sentient beings, weakens the effort.

Verse 60

*Perhaps we'll claim that by our wealth we live
And living, gather merit, dissipating evil
But if we're ruthless for the sake of gain
It's evil we will gather, dissipating merit!*

In one's conventional life, money is required to survive. There is nothing wrong with earning money or getting rich. The problem lies in grasping towards it. Possessing money in a self centred manner with no concern for others' well being or without contentment becomes a cause for suffering and samsara. As long as there is no mind of renunciation or benefitting others, the more one gathers, the creation of negative karma strengthens. Every extra dollar earned should cause us to recite OM AH HUM and feel gratitude to the Buddhas for blessings and to sentient beings in relation to whom ones

survival is dependent upon. Whatever you eat, likewise, think of mentally offering that to one's Gurus and the Triple Gem and then to the countless sentient beings including those living organisms on and in your body.

Contentment or satisfaction does not mean no aspirations and just doing nothing. Rather, it means having enthusiasm or joyfulness in whatever we do, without the grasping mind. With this attitude, striving to earn more money is OK. Even studying the Lam Rim Chenmo – one should feel contentment not in the sense that one feels one already knows a lot and studying can stop but rather, it means feeling fortunate that one has encountered these teachings and is inspired to continue. It is worthwhile to remember that if one does not have enough merit to possess or consume the possessions that one has, there may be more worries than joy in having such possessions!

Verse 61

*What use them will our lives have been
When all is so degenerate and spoiled?
What use is there in living such a life
When evil is the only consequence.*

Verse 62

*If, when others slander us, we claim
Our anger is because they harm ourselves
How is it we do not resent
Their slander when it's aimed at someone else?*

Verse 63

*If we bear with such antipathy
Remarking that it's due to other factors
Why are we impatient when they slander us?
Emotion after all, has been the cause of it.*

If one lives with a hostile attitude, one is wasting one's life. Guard one's mind well and avoid retaliation at all costs, as doing so will bring dire negative consequences. Other living beings are the cause for one's liberation, so instead of being angry at them, one should feel gratitude.

Verse 64

*Even those who vilify and undermine
The sacred Doctrine, images, and stupas
Are not the proper objects of our anger
The Buddhas are themselves untouched thereby.*

Patience is required towards even those who have violent and negative mind towards holy objects. The destruction of statues, stupas and Dharma texts have heavy karmic impact, similar to the heinous crimes. Such persons commit terrible acts due to having wrong view and negative emotions, which will bring intense suffering in the lower realms, so intense that we would shiver in fear just to think of it. Thus, the only appropriate response is to have compassion towards them. We should pray to bless their minds and as a Mahayana practitioner, one should take full responsibility by oneself alone, to bring such tortured persons to total liberation.

One will not see a single line of teaching about defending the Buddhadharma through the destruction of other faiths. The reason is that the Buddhas themselves cannot be harmed. They remain untouched by delusions directed at them. This might cause us to wonder that since the Buddha cannot receive any harm, why would there be anything called negative karma being committed against the Buddhas? The answer is the karma being generated from the do-er's side. Committing violence or negativity against the Triple Gem implants karmic seeds which will bear suffering results. Buddha is one of the greatest objects of offering, yet he is also the most potent object in relation to the creation of negative karma.

Verse 65

*And even if our teachers, relatives and friends
Are now the object of aggression
All derives from factors just explained
This we should perceive and curb our wrath.*

When we notice our most respected Gurus, relatives and friends being the target of any kind of harm or criticism, our anger gets aroused. But here again, one should not generate anger for the reasons explained in verse 31 of this chapter, namely all things are a dependent-arising; causes, conditions and mental labelling give rise to our witnessing harm being inflicted on our Gurus. Think that one's guru, self and criticism are all empty and illusion-like. Think of dependent-arising and the karmic cause and effect; think of emptiness and how things are merely-labelled. Otherwise, there will be wrathful outer experience.

But does that mean we just watch our Gurus get physically or verbally attacked? The point is that whatever protective action one wishes to take, make sure that anger or other delusions are not accompanying that action.

Verse 66

*Beings suffer injury alike
From lifeless things as well as living beings
So why be angry only with the latter?
Rather let us simply bear with harm.*

One characteristic of patience is being tolerant towards suffering due to knowing that greater suffering arises through getting angry. When we receive harm from others, our agitated mind pops up. Think about this – we receive harm from both living beings and inanimate things like elements, yet we only get angry with living beings and has that solved problems? By being tolerant, one has a calm mind that is able to decide on the best course of action. It develops one's spiritual practice; it protects against accumulating the karma to suffer more and avoid oneself becoming the object of others' creation of negative karma.

Verse 67

*Some do evil things because of ignorance
Some respond with anger, being ignorant
Which of them is faultless in his acts?
To whom shall error be attributed?*

Those beings who commit negativities out of ignorance and those who react in anger do so because they are ignorant about karma, about dependent-arising and emptiness. Since that is the case, both are at fault and no blame can be ascribed to one party alone. Anger is always an improper response. Instead, generate compassion because both sides are tortured by delusions and painful results are on their way.

Verse 68

*Rather, why did I do evil in the past
That caused me harm at others' hands?
All that happens is the fruit of karma
Why then should I now be angry?*

When one is facing hardship e.g. harm from others, failures, criticisms, degeneration to health – the tendency is to blame the external circumstances for one's situation. However, one needs to recognise these happen because of one's past negative karma. We are the creators of our situations. Why then be angry at others? We are responsible and thus should guard against the commission of negativity, so that no future hardships will be met. When we think this way, we will immediately feel lighter. Otherwise blaming others and frustration will mount and sometimes leads to suicide.

Verse 69

*This I see and therefore, come what may
I'll hold fast to the virtuous path
And foster in the hearts of all
An attitude of mutual love.*

Progress on the spiritual path can happen when one realises that harms received are all due to one's past negative karma and that should be determined to engage in the path of virtue, such as the Bodhisattva conduct which is the supreme path.

Verse 70

*For when a building is ablaze
And flames leap out from house to house
The wise course is to take and fling away
The straw and anything that spread the fire.*

When a house is on fire, if there are rice-husks and such inflammable objects, one should grab the rice-husks and throw them out rather than rescue the jewel-box. Similarly, when we practice Dharma, we need to know the factors that ignite anger and delusions. Having identified those factors, one should then proceed to eliminate them.

Let's say within a group of people, one person is very irritating – as a beginner practitioner, it may be better to avoid that person – but here, “avoid” refers to physically create some space between oneself and that person but internally, one should strongly generate compassion and

continue to train one's mind, learning to recognise what triggers anger, the cause of delusions and the antidotes to be applied.

Verse 71

In fear that merit might be all consumed

We should at once cast far away

Our mind's attachments

Tinder for the fiery flames of hate.

As one would throw out any flammable material in a fire, one should discard attachments which inflame anger. If one fails to remember impermanence and practice detachment, when anything harms the object of attachment, anger will rapidly emerge. Hence, one should learn to be detached even to loved ones. At this very moment, we have a partial attitude towards loved ones, enemies and strangers – in order for us to be free from anger, we should urgently eliminate attachment towards one's loved ones. Eliminating attachment does not mean not having love and care but rather, giving up the clinging. Contemplation on impermanence will calm one's mind and bring some level of renunciation towards loved ones and gradually one can gain freedom from such clinging. The concept of "enemy" comes in relation to two things: In relation to one's ego not being satisfied and in relation to interference with one's object of attachment.

Another disadvantage of attachment towards loved ones is that quite often, one gets disappointed and angry towards one's loved ones more often than in relation to one's enemy! Mountains of merit are destroyed by anger. Practising detachment to the loved one does not mean not taking

care of them. Buddha is merely saying that great harm will be brought to them and to oneself, if one does not guard against clinging.

Anger includes depression, as that is a form of anger towards oneself and one's situation. This is such a precious teaching. When this verse states "In fear that merit might be all consumed" it is about mindfulness of the destructive nature of anger and not about making oneself anxious and nervous. When we harbour anger, we are constantly accumulating causes of suffering. We may think we are doing a lot of virtue but deep in our heart, most of us have impatient minds, angry minds, so our problems never end.

Verse 72

*Is not a man relieved when, though condemned to death
He is freed, his hand cut off in ransom for his life?
Enduring likewise merely human ills
Am I not happy to avoid the pains of hell?*

A man who has been sentenced to death will be greatly relieved when he only has his hand cut off. Likewise, one should think that if one did not experience the problems we have right now, our accumulated negative karma would make us suffer for aeons in the lower realms. This manner of thinking will ease one's pain.

Better than this, when one is facing hardships, one should practice tong len – think, "May this hardship that I am going through, be sufficient to ripen and eradicate the entire negative karma of living beings". When any discomfort comes to one's body, divert one's mind in this way. The force of the tong

len meditation will cause one's pain to subside. Bodhisattvas have a choice not to return to samsara but they do so in order for them to engage in the intense practice of tong len, which is more beneficial than merely residing in the Arya Path, accumulating the 3 countless aeons of merit.

It is about being efficient - since we are already in samsara facing the heavy consequences of past actions with no immediate way of overcoming sickness aging and death, we might as well use our experience of difficulties in the Path through the practice of tong len. This should be done without delay. When we look into our mental continuum and get even a glimpse of what we have done in the past with body, speech and mind, honestly speaking - we deserve the intense suffering we are facing now. It is through the sheer power of blessings of the Buddha and meeting the Dharma, that we have the opportunity to use this suffering into the path to free ourselves and others.

Verse 73

*If pains of even this, my present life
Are now beyond my strength to hear
Why do I not overthrow my anger
Cause of future sorrows in infernal torment?*

Right now, we find some our problems unbearable. What more the suffering in the lower realms? By knowing that anger is the most forceful cause to bring us to the lower realms, we should avoid anger at all costs.

Verse 74

*For the sake of gaining all that I desired
A thousand times I underwent
The tortures of the realms of hell
Achieving nothing for myself and others.*

Verse 75

*The present aches are nothing to compare with those
And yet great benefits may come from them
These troubles that dispel the pains of wanderers
How could I not rejoice in them?*

Since beginningless time, we have endured tremendous hardships just to gain some tiny, worldly gain. Nothing substantial has been achieved for oneself and others. The Buddhas however, attained everything through cherishing others, so one should learn from this and change our self-cherishing minds towards cherishing others.

It is wise to understand the great benefit of suffering in one's spiritual cultivation – it enables us to practice renunciation; do tong len practice; generate compassion for self and others; inspires us to avoid negative karma and negative emotions; attain liberation from samsara; gain all perfections including enlightenment.

With this view, one is able to face one's life problems and happily work for the benefit of others. Changing one's attitude when facing hardships is the key. One might give excuses that "I'm too old" or "I'm too sick or fragile" or "I'm too new at Dharma practice, so I cannot manage" – all these are

excuses. The Buddhas did it to prove that it can be done. So let us not waste time but begin our cultivation.

It is beneficial to merge Shantideva into one with one's own Guru – the principle advice is to use adversity as one's trainer on the spiritual path. Transforming hardships into the causes of lasting happiness.

Q: When we rejoice at harm happening to harm-givers, does it incur the same negative karma as getting angry?

Ans: It is not 100 % the same negative karma but very close to it. Rejoicing in killing or harm being experienced by any living being is negative.

Q: If we cannot generate compassion but are able to block negative thoughts from arising, is it positive karma or neutral karma?

Ans: It depends – if one just ignores negative thoughts, it does not mean that negative imprints are not there and active. Hence, it is still negative karma. However, if one blocks negative thoughts through seeing the faults of delusions, then it is positive. If one just keeps one's mind totally without a view (which is not easy to do), then it is neutral karma.

Verse 76

*When others take delight
In giving praise to those endowed with talents
Why O mind, do you not find
A joy, likewise in praising them?*

We feel disturbed when others praise our enemies. When this happens,

one feels very sour because we see no good qualities in the enemy, so why should such a person deserve any praise? We project onto our enemies a lack of purity and when one's Guru offers praises to that person in front of you, you also think the Guru as invalid. That is the day one fails in guru devotion practice. One needs to realise that right there, one's ego is being struck and thus one should rejoice at this.

If one gets angry when seeing a gift being offered to someone that you do not like is also a form of anger. By seeing the harms posed by anger, one should instantly eliminate the hostile mind towards any happiness, gains, success, praise and attainments which come to people we dislike. Transform displeasure into delight. Offer praises with sincerity to the best of one's ability.

Verse 77

*The pleasure that you gain therefrom
Itself gives rise to stainless happiness
It's urged on us by all the holy ones
And is the perfect way of winning others.*

The reason behind the advice in verse 76 is stated here in verse 77. The advice to generate patience and delight is so as to achieve all the short and long term happiness, peace of mind, up to the peerless happiness of full enlightenment. This mind training is urged by all the past Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. Rejoicing for good things happening to loved ones should be extended to enemies as well. By being close to our enemies is not only helpful in our own cultivation but by sincerely cherishing them more will enable one to pacify them.

Verse 78

*But they're the ones who'll have the happiness, you say
If this then is a joy to you would resent
Abandon paying wages and returning favors
And you will be the loser – both in thief and the next!*

When we get upset when an enemy receives happiness, it due to one's self-cherishing mind. This proves that self-centredness is the cause of great suffering. When one's own contaminated aggregates are struck with pain and suffering, we lose patience, we cannot accept it and we feel distressed. Think of it as repaying karmic debts and that way one will not create more negative karma. Many people die in frustration, resulting in the passage of death being difficult. Should this occur, not only does one lose peace of mind and virtue, it could even lead to the intense suffering of the lower realms.

Verse 79

*When praise is heaped upon your merits
You're keen that others should rejoice in them
But when the compliment is paid to others
Your joy is oh so slow and grudging.*

When we do little bit of virtue, we expect praise and acknowledgment; when we do a small amount of practice, we visualise great benefits coming from the Buddha. But when a compliment is paid to one's enemies, one is slow to express joy. This is due to the self-egoistic mind.

If we had strong bodhicitta, whatever we achieve, we would hide it and whomever - especially when a harm-giver - gains some happiness, we should announce it with sincere appreciation. Kyabje Lama Zopa Rinpoche has many centres with all sorts of difficult people to deal with. Sometimes, he assigns them to help run centres as a training and when problems arise and news of this gets to Rinpoche's ears, he send beautiful cards to the trouble-makers to encourage them to be kind and in order to create a cause for good qualities to arise in them. That is how Bodhisattvas act. There was once a deity-oracle who in the midst of a big group of Sangha, stood up and declared that if Kyabje Lama Zopa Rinpoche is not a Bodhisattva, who then would be a Bodhisattva?

Verse 80

*You who want the happiness of beings
Have wished t be enlightened for their sake
So why should others irk you when
They find some little pleasures for themselves?*

Verse 81

*If you truly wish that beings be enlightened
Venerated by the Triple World
When petty marks of favour come their way
Why or why are you in torment?*

Verse 82

*When dependents who rely on you
To whom you are obliged to give support*

*Find for themselves the means of livelihood
Will you not be happy, will you once again be angry?*

Your sole intention of going into the Mahayana path is to undertake the Bodhisattva's conduct. If so, one's practice needs to be qualified by 2 causes (1) being inspired eliminate samsara and its causes for all living beings (2) being inspired to attain full enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings . If so, when others do encounter joy and happiness, why should one feel any unease? Instead, one should feel that one's aims are being fulfilled when others receive happiness.

Reflect on the 7-fold cause and effect method of developing bodhicitta to gain conviction that we are obligated to give all living beings happiness. One cannot be the cause for any sentient being to create negative karma.

Verse 83

*If even this you do not want for beings
How could you want Buddhahood for them
And how can anyone have bodhicitta
And resent the good that others have?*

If we neglect even one sentient being, that becomes an obstacle to one's realisations and enlightenment. It will ruin our bodhicitta mind. As a Bodhisattva practitioner, we are cultivating cherishing others, so make one's enemies as our priority in terms of securing their happiness. At the beginning, we may have to start by merely offering prayers for their well-being. Eventually there will be a time when we can do this face to face.

I had a monk-classmate who strongly disliked another monk since childhood days, yet both were classmates. This other monk was all the time trying to find ways to irritate him. For 10 years, he would avoid this mischievous monk. After learning about the Ornament of Clear Realisations which teaches about the Bodhisattva, he was deeply inspired. He managed to obtain a photo of this monk whom he regarded as a trouble-maker and placed the photo next to his altar, such that whenever he prostrated, he would also prostrate to this enemy. This monk used to skewer frogs when he was a child and after learning this text, he became gentle in nature and spent much time meditating – even when he walked, he walked like an Arhat being mindful of all the creatures around him, chanting mantras all the time. Cobwebs and cockroach nests in his room were left unharmed as he felt such compassion for them. This is a true account. So when one is living with or facing difficult people, this is one way of transforming one’s mind.

What is very inspiring here at LDC is that I have observed people who have transformed themselves for the better – one can observe and verify this for oneself. Adopting Shantideva’s teachings is a very effective means of combating self-cherishing and establishing the cherishing of others.

Verse 84

*If someone else receives a gift
Of it that gift stays in the benefactor’s house
In neither case will it be yours
So given or withheld, why is it your concern?*

When an enemy receives gifts or praises, it has nothing to do with oneself, so why feel uneasiness about the enemy receiving such gain?

Verse 85

*Tell me, why don't you resent yourself
You who throw your merit, fait
And all your qualities so far away?
Why do you not cultivate the cause of riches?*

If one still finds it difficult to accept this teaching, one should pursue it further by asking why we do not resent oneself for failing to appreciate the enemy, for being angry at the enemy and dashing all of one's merits. Why not instead, cultivate bodhicitta which will bring happiness and riches to all.

Verse 86

*All the evil you have done
You cheerfully neglect to purify
And do you further wish to match yourself
With others who have earned their merit?*

Not only are we in the dark about how to secure the merit, we are merrily ignorant about purifying past negative karma. We put no effort into engaging in patience and ethics and yet we want to compare ourselves with Bodhisattvas and reap benefits. We get jealous of others who are praised as virtuous but demand recognition for small acts of kindness we do. We simply do not watch our minds.

The key practices of the Bodhisattvas is the accumulation of merit and the purification of negative karma. If we can integrate whatever we do to actualise these objectives, then all our acts will be beneficial and we will

be able to assess how near or far we are from freedom from samsara.

Verse 87

*If unhappiness befalls your enemy
Why should this be a cause for your rejoicing?
The wishes of your mind alone
Will not in fact contrive his injury.*

It is time to get smart: Whatever suffering we face, transform it into the path; whatever suffering befalls your enemy, treat it as an opportunity to practice compassion towards him. When any distraction comes to us, we should capture our minds through mindfulness and introspection and make what is troublesome, a factor that will enhance one's spiritual practice. In this way, one will not experience any problems.

Verse 88

*And if your hostile wishes were to bring them
Again, what cause of joy is that to you?
Why then should I be satisfied – are these your thoughts?
Is anything more ruinous than that?*

If one's anger succeeded in harming one's enemy, the karmic result solely lies with oneself. There is no "sharing" of responsibility for causing harm to others. No matter how much one wishes to ruin others through one's intention, the fact is that it will only ruin oneself. By knowing the fact of karma and the ultimate nature of individual entities (self, others) one should eliminate hostility.

Verse 89

*Caught upon the hook, unbearable and sharp
Cast by the fisherman, my own defilements
I'll be flung into the cauldrons of the pit
And surely parboiled by the janitors of hell!*

One's conceptual, samsaric mind is completely trapped by the cunning jailor of the ignorant mind. We need to train this mind with the wisdom of reality. Then one can eliminate sufferings completely.

Verse 90

*The rigmarole of praise and fame
Serves not to increase merit or one's span of life
Bestowing neither of health nor strength
And nothing for the body's ease*

The mind of the 8 worldly concerns comes from the self-centred mind. When one receives praises, one might feel that something of value has been gained but in reality, praise, fame and wealth can enhance one's self-egoistic mind. They endanger our cultivation. There is no reason to be attached to praise and fame because they do not increase our lifespan nor merits. This verse is advising us to eliminate the 8 worldly concerns. As we regard our loved ones as part of "us, when criticisms come to our loved ones, we should likewise practice patience.

Verse 91

*If I am wise in what is good for me
I'll ask what benefit these bring
For if it's entertainment I desire
I might as well resort to alcohol and cards.*

One has gained the precious human rebirth and has met the Mahayana. One already knows what is to be adopted and what is to be abandoned. If we still live our lives under the control of the 8 worldly concerns, it would be pure foolishness and if one wishes to indulge in foolishness, one might as well entertain oneself playing cards and drinking liquor. The thing to be adopted is to cherish others and the thing to be abandoned is the self-cherishing mind. Regard this as urgent.

Verse 92

*We lose our lives, our wealth we squander
All for reputation's sake
What use are words and whom will they delight
When we are dead and in our graves.*

Verse 93

*Children cant stop crying when
Their sand castles come crumbling down
Our minds are so like them
When praise and reputation start to fail.*

It is tragic that we have not yet realised the self-centred mind that has been active since beginningless lifetimes, has lost us merit, has cost us our lives and peace of mind, have ruined our wealth and loved one and caused us to forgo many meaningful deeds. We should make strong determination to be rid of the self-cherishing mind and adopt Bodhisattva deeds.

Verse 94

*Short-lived sound, devoid of intellect
Can never in itself intend to praise us
"But it's the joy that others take in me" you say
Are these the shoddy causes of your pleasure?*

Let us analyse: Whatever benefit one has received has been gained through the kindness of others, either through their actions or through their restraint. Therefore, it is only right that one should engage in joyous perseverance to benefit others through the practice of the 6 Perfections.

Verse 95

*What is it to me if others should delight
In someone else or even in myself?
Their pleasure's is theirs and their alone
What part of it could be for my enjoyment?*

Verse 96

*If I am happy at the joy of those who take delight
Then everyone should be a source of joy to me
Why when glory goes elsewhere
Am I not happy with this cause of happiness?*

When any criticism or harm comes towards oneself and loved ones, we feel hostility towards the harm-giver rising. And when we witness a harm-giver gaining some benefit, we are displeased, feeling they are undeserving of the benefit.

We should instead reflect that whatever harm we receive, we have created the cause for it; likewise, what benefit harm-givers receive, they had created the cause for it. So their gaining happiness has nothing to do with us and it is not right for us as Mahayanic practitioners to feel jealous or hostile about their good fortune. Similarly, if our family or loved ones resent people whom they dislike getting joy, then if one really cares about our loved ones, it is wise to teach them how to eliminate negative karma, rather than encourage them to continue with angry minds.

Verse 97

*The satisfaction that is mind
From thinking “I am being praised”
Is unacceptable to common sense
And nothing but the silly ways of children.*

The principal practice of a Mahayana cultivator is to eliminate self cherishing

and cherish others. That's it. The attitude of seeking acknowledgment and praise is a childish attitude.

Verse 98

*Praise and compliments disturb me
Sapping my revulsion with samsara
I start to covet others' qualities
And thus all excellence degenerates.*

How often do we see that praise and compliments threaten us through deepening one's delusions? We need to wake up from this blind-pursuit of reputation and move towards renunciation to samsara. To accomplish this, we need to eliminate the self-cherishing mind, cultivate humility and cherish others.

Verse 99

*Those who stay close by me, then
To ruin my good name and cut me down to size
Are surely there protecting me
From falling into ruin in the realms of sorrow.*

We are sometimes confused about who can benefit us in our spiritual practice. We see those who bring trouble to our lives as our enemies. Instead, we as Mahayanic practitioners should regard them as presenting conducive conditions to practice patience, eliminate our self-cherishing mind and cultivate of bodhicitta. Mahayanic practitioners utilise samsaric

suffering to cultivate bodhicitta and cultivate good qualities.

Whether one is a housewife, businessman or parent, one can incorporate the 6 Perfections into one's daily life. This way, one's enlightenment can be very close at hand. As the smallest of benefits derived from doing is will be the complete protection from the lower realms and the ultimate benefit is that of lasting happiness and enlightenment, we should change our attitudes.

Verse 100

*For I am one who strives for freedom-
I must not be caught by wealth and honors.
How could I be angry with the ones
Who work to loose me from my fetters?*

Amongst the greatest distractions in samsara are wealth and fame. Even a veteran practitioner who is not mindful, can succumb to praise or become overly influenced by wealth and comfort and end up having a strong egoistic, self cherishing mind.

To arrest this danger and preserve humility, any respect, fame or wealth gained by oneself should be – at the very instant the respect or fame is received - dedicate with bodhicitta towards others. Avoid allowing such traps to hook one's mind for even one second. Even earning one extra dollar should be dedicated in the same way to be the complete cause for all living beings to attain enlightenment. HH Dalai Lama always says "I am just a simple Buddhist monk", as opposed to "I am His Holiness the Dalai Lama".

Whether one has wealth, friends or reputation, one should hold the view that “As long as I can devote my life to attaining enlightenment, then even if a thief steals my possessions; or friends and family disappoint me or my health fails, I will not get shocked nor angry as these enable me to renounce samsara.” By thinking this way, even when small events occur, like when we misplace our mala, instead of getting upset or agitated, we should think “There is no point grasping at the mala. As long as I still have my bodhicitta, that is the most important. “ One should regard harm givers as precious as one’s Guru.

Verse 101

*They, like Buddha’s blessing
Bar my way, determined as I am
To plunge myself headlong in sorrow:
How could I be angry with them?*

When one encounters those who hinder our happiness, two things should come to mind:

- (i) They are the Buddha’s blessings for us to renounce samsara and all its trappings;
- (ii) One has created the karma to encounter such beings and receive their harm. To be free from such experiences, see the terrible impact of our actions that were done with anger and delusions and hereon, generate compassion towards them.

Verse 102

*We should not be angry, saying,
“They are obstacles to virtue.”
Is not patience the supreme austerity,
And is this not my chosen discipline?*

Harm givers are a supreme conducive condition for our cultivation of patience, a crucial step towards the peerless happiness of enlightenment. The Lam Rim teachings clearly illustrate that whilst in the lower and middle scope practices, one focuses on finding conducive conditions to practice virtue including conditions where one is not disturbed by enemies and such distractions. However, for Mahayanic practitioners, adverse conditions/problems themselves are the conducive conditions which enable practice of the perfections.

Verse 103

*If I fail to practice patience,
Hindered by my own deficiency,
I am myself the obstacle to gaining
Merit, yet so close at hand.*

If we fail to practice patience upon meeting problems, one is an obstacle to oneself gaining merit. Losing one's temper is not due to an external circumstance – we lose our temper due to the lack of mindfulness and introspection, the lack of merit, the lack of conviction in the Buddha's advice. One needs to make daily supplications to actualise the mind of patience. Whenever we meet irritating people, that is the time to fortify

our minds, to be fully mindful of patience and offer one's merit joyfully to the harm giver.

Verse 104

*For nothing comes except through other factors,
And comes to be, those factors being present.
If one thing is the cause of something else,
How could it then be said to hinder it?*

Whatever level of realisations or happiness we have now, is due to the kindness of others, just the way they are. We meet all kinds of sentient beings, so we should take the full advantage of this. It is through living beings that one gains good qualities and all the causes for enlightenment. If we search for causes of enlightenment elsewhere, we have missed the point and wasted his precious human rebirth and meeting the Dharma. With this understanding, when we meet the enemy, we should strengthen our practice of patience; when we meet strangers, we should eliminate our indifference; when we meet close ones, we should eliminate clinging.

Verse 105

*The beggars who arrive at proper times
Are not an obstacle to generosity.
We cannot say that those who give the vows
Are causing hindrances to ordination!*

We wish to actualise the 6 perfections, which begin with generosity and

we yearn for conducive conditions, yet when we meet a beggar in front of us, we think twice about giving!

If one finds giving freely difficult, one can then start the practice by giving to loved-ones and then extend it to all living beings. Give according to living beings' needs for some are materially poor, some spiritually poor by lacking Dharma, some need protection from harm and others need protection from committing negative deeds. Every sentient being should be the object of your generosity. When a partial, biased mind affects your generosity, a hindrance to your cultivation arises right there and must be guarded against.

Another example relates to the giving and receiving of vows. On the subject of giving vows, in the Theravadan path, the person granting the vows is emphasised i.e. the one who grants vows must have complete pure vows. For Mahayanic practitioner, the quality of the vows depends on the receiver. Whilst the pure ethics of the grantor of vows is important, the devotion and conviction of the recipient of the vows is more important – as long as he firmly believes he is receiving pure vows, he does indeed receive pure vows.

Verse 106

*The beggars in this world are many,
Attackers are comparatively few.
For as I do not harm to others,
Those who do me injury are rare.*

There are numberless beings in relation to whom one can practice Dharma. When we consider all the people whom we know, we actually regard very few of them as enemies. And even fewer actually harm us.

Thus, when harm givers enter our lives, hold onto Shantideva's advice – harm givers are as rare and precious like the Buddhas because if we can effectively cultivate patience and bodhicitta in relation to them, we are well on the way to enlightenment. If we seek to stop meeting harm givers, we need to stop planting the karmic seeds for it. We need to avoid a retaliatory attitude and erase the angry mind altogether. How? See the faults of anger and the real damage that anger brings to oneself and others; and instead, see the benefits of patience and compassion towards all, in particular the harm givers. Why? Because this is the only way to stop the circle of harm and negative karma from arising. The only way to stop experiencing recurring harm is to practice patience.

Like a quarrelling husband and wife: Past karma brought them together in marriage, yet they now fight all the time. The way to stop this karma of mutual harm to each other begins with the practice patience and compassion. By doing so, in future lives, this couple will meet again as virtuous, caring friends and not as hostile relations.

Verse 107

*So like a treasure found at home,
Enriching me without fatigue,
All enemies are helpers in my bodhisattva work
And therefore they should be a joy to me.*

All enemies are like a treasure found in one's home. When an enemy wants to hurt you and you respond badly, there could be satisfaction in him seeing you get distressed! But if we can avert anger and respond with calm and kindness, that will make the person re-think and might even lead to the problem being solved. As for oneself, incredible merit. Think of the enemy as your helper in carrying out Bodhisattva's deeds.

Verse 108

*The fruits of patience are for them and me,
For both of us have brought it into being.
And yet to them they must be offered first,
For of my patience they have been the cause.*

The fruit of patience is beneficial to both the giver and receiver of patience. By practising patience, the giver of patience accumulates vast merit and the receiver of patience is prevented from escalating his anger which will destroy all his merits. Merits, emotional strength, spiritual strength and enlightenment come from having to engage with difficult people and situations and therefore, we should give thanks to our enemies.

Verse 109

*Yet if I say my foe should not be praised
Since he did not intend to stimulate my patience,
Why do I revere the sacred Doctrine,
Cause indeed of my attainment?*

Verse 110

*“This enemy conspired to harm me,” I protest,
“And therefore should receive no honors.”
But had he worked to help me, like a doctor,
How could I have brought forth patience?*

Verse 111

*Because of those whose minds are full of anger,
I engender patience in myself.
They are thus the cause of patience,
Fit for veneration, like the Doctrine.*

Right now, one is miserly by feeling unhappy when enemies get praised; one might even think that one's enemy should go to hell or lose their entire businesses. One is a Mahayana practitioner - think how the trouble maker has presented the jewel of opportunity to practice patience and Bodhisattva deeds and is thus, as kind as the Buddha.

Verse 112

*The worlds of beings are a buddhafiield,
Thus the Mighty Lord has taught.
For many who have sought the happiness of others
Have gone beyond, attaining to perfection.*

As stated in the Sutra of Perfection of Pure Aspiration, Buddha stated that

past Buddhas and Bodhisattvas accomplished countless aeons of merits and gained ultimate realisations through the kindness of all sentient beings.

Verses 113

*Thus the state of buddhahood depends
On beings and the buddhas equally.
By what tradition is it then
That buddhas, but not beings, are revered?*

Verse 114

*Their aims are not, of course, the same,
But it is by their fruits that we should know them.
And so we see the excellence of beings-
Beings and the buddhas are indeed the same!*

Enlightenment depends on both Buddhas and sentient beings.

The harmful intentions of an enemy and that of the Buddha may not be the same, yet the result that is produced from practising patience with the enemy and abiding by the Buddha's advice is the same, i.e. realisations that secure enlightenment . Since both enemy and Buddha help one to attain the same fruit of enlightenment, one should respect the enemy and the Buddha equally.

Whilst Buddha and sentient beings have different labels i.e. sentient beings have defilements and Buddhas is fully awakened and free from negative

emotions, as objects of accumulation of merit, sentient beings and the Buddha are equal, hence one should respect them alike. The attainment of all the qualities of the Buddha is obtained only through sentient beings and thus they are equal objects of veneration and cherishing.

Verse 115

*Offerings made to one who loves
Reveals the eminence of living beings.
Merit that accrues from faith in Buddha
Reveals in turn the Buddha's eminence.*

The first 2 lines refer to practitioners at the 4th level of concentration (beings of the Formless Realm) – by making offerings to them results in merit but compared to having faith in the Buddhas who have gone beyond the 3 worlds, it is nothing. By cherishing sentient beings and striving for their liberation is to fulfil the hopes and prayers of the Buddhas.

Verse 116

*Since they are both the means of winning Buddhahood,
We say that beings are the same as Buddhas
Even though they are not equal
In the boundless ocean of a Buddha's merits.*

Verse 117

*Yet if a tiny part of that great merit
Were found to be contained in certain beings' hearts,
The three worlds made in offering to them
Would be a slight, a very little thing.*

Verse 118

*A share in bringing forth the supreme state of buddhahood
Is thus possessed by everyone.
This demonstrate the reason why
They are the proper object of my reverence.*

Sentient beings should be regarded as being as kind as the Buddha and equal to the Buddha, as they are the means by which one gains Buddhahood. The merit that one can obtain by cherishing one sentient being is more precious than having entire 3 worlds' possessions. Taking the responsibility to bring one sentient being to enlightenment is far greater merit.

Those who harm or mistreat us, who bring faults and failure in our lives ought to be cherished as Buddha for the reasons already explained and generating a hostile mind towards them is same as generating hostile mind towards Buddha. In the Mahayana teachings, the heinous crimes committed towards sentient beings is the same as the Hinayana's heinous crimes towards the 5 karmically potent objects (i.e. harming Guru, Buddha, Dharma, Sangha and one's parents). We need to be aware of this.

Let go of the self-cherishing mind. If your mind is not happy, it is already

moving towards anger. One of the best sources of happiness is to cherish others. Same with tong len which thinks, “I am sick for the benefit of others” – although there may be physical discomfort as one is at that time sick, mentally, one will be in a positive state which in turn can one recover.

We talk about being kind to all living beings, yet sometimes, we forget our own children and our own partners. This shows we are only producing the sound of words of Bodhicitta like a CD player but without any feeling in the heart nor resolve in one’s mind.

For the Bodhisattva practitioner, wherever you are, even the most difficult conditions can be conducive conditions for enhancing bodhicitta. We have to start from our own family and our own Dharma centre - be more forgiving, more tolerant. If we do not do this, there is no point to life. One would be living a hypocrite’s life. We display Dharma practice for others to see but within our own family or Centre, we fail to tame our minds. We need to try our best as that will benefit oneself and others too. HH Dalai Lama always advises that a Mahayanic practitioner should hold the Lam Rim teachings in one hand and the Bodhicaryavatara in the other.

Verse 119

*As buddhas are my constant friends,
Boundless in the benefits they bring to me,
How else may I repay their goodness,
But by making living beings happy?*

Verse 120

*By helping beings we repay the ones
Who gave themselves for us and plunged into the hells.
Should beings therefore do great harm to me,
I'll strive to bring them only benefit.*

As one is inspired by the Buddha's teachings, try not to disappoint the Buddhas, Bodhisattvas and Gurus by benefitting sentient beings from now on. We have received the instructions on 6 Perfections, so we should feel totally inspired to live the Bodhisattva's conduct. As the Buddhas have helped us, likewise sentient beings. When we do our best for the happiness of sentient beings, we demonstrate our gratitude to the Buddhas.

Verse 121

*For if the ones who are my lords and teachers,
For beings' sake are careless even of their bodies,
Why should I, a fool, behave with such conceit?
Why should I not become the slave of others?*

Seeing how our Gurus, Buddhas and Bodhisattvas sacrifice themselves for other beings, why do we persist in acting with such self-centredness? Buddhas cherished others and gained enlightenment; we cherish ourselves which is why we remain in the snake-pit of samasar. We should reflect on this differentiation and make a choice about how to conduct oneself.

Verse 122

*Buddhas are made happy by the joy of beings;
They sorrow, they lament when beings suffer.
Bringing joy to beings, then, I please the buddhas also --
Offending them, the buddhas I offend.*

The Buddha's mindstream does not contain any causes for sorrow and is in a state of bliss. However, the Buddha can perceive what sentient beings are going through and rejoices in all our good deeds and feels pity at our wrongdoings.

Buddha has the power to hook us to his blessings but if we do not provide the ring for the hook to latch on, how can we receive those blessings? When we bring suffering to other sentient beings, our minds are obscured and we are too weak to lift up the ring to link to the Buddha's blessing.

Bringing joy to sentient beings is not only joy to others but is the best offering to Buddha. Milarepa said that although he had no possessions with which to make offerings, he offered his practices and bodhicitta to his teacher Marpa. My late master Geshe Lama Kochog said that one does not have to give material gifts to the Guru to please the Guru or Buddhas. Instead, the best offering is the transformation of mind away from negativities. Some students used to bring all sorts of expensive gifts to Geshela offerings to him and upon seeing that, he would say "You never follow my advice, so please take back all these offerings ". In some cases, Geshela would bluntly say "I asked you to change your attitude but you never did, so please leave". In the monastery, we were really scared of him and would try to be on our best behaviour in front of him but he would

always catch our mind. He would somehow know and with a wrathful face, he would tell us to get lost! This was his way of emphasise to us, the great importance of subduing one's mind.

This is what would please the Buddhas - eradicating negativities and delusions within oneself. If one enhances one's negativities, then it would be an "offence" to the Buddhas. Even though one has limited opportunities to study Dharma in depth or be near the Guru or Dharma brothers and sisters all the time, if one can put effort to cherish sentient beings, that would be real Dharma study and truly pleasing the Gurus and Buddhas. How worthwhile.

Verse 123

*Just as when a man who's tortured in a fire,
Remains unmoved by little favors done to him,
There's no way to delight the great compassionate buddhas,
While we ourselves are causes of another's pain.*

As told in Lam Rim, how can a son watch his old, blind-mother who is about to fall off a cliff's edge simply standby and do nothing? Similarly, all living beings have been kind to us, even though they may be presently dominated by ignorance, anger and attachment. If instead of taking compassion action to help them and allow our own delusions to get the better of us, it is a great loss to oneself and a harm to sentient beings.

It is one's experience of suffering and knowing that all sentient beings suffer too, that makes the arousal of compassion possible. Hence, if through

our body, speech or thoughts add to the hardship of sentient beings, what a tragedy.

Through the arousal of compassion, the practice of bodhicitta becomes possible. Bodhicitta or the altruistic intention, is where one takes on the responsibility to save sentient being by oneself alone. Not due to an arrogant sense of self-ability but rather, not wanting to delay nor wait for someone else to start giving help first. The longer we delay our enlightenment, the longer sentient beings who are karmically connected to us, will suffer. The lazier we are at cultivating bodhicitta, the longer they have to remain chained to the burning wheel of samsara.

Verse 124

*The damage I have done to wandering beings
Saddens all the buddhas in their great compassion.
Therefore, all these sins I will confess today
And pray that they will bear with me.*

We have harmed sentient beings since beginningless lives. In past lives, we have been crocodiles harming countless beings and even though in this life, we may not have killed a human, we have caused all sorts of harm to humans and other living beings. We should reflect carefully on this at least once in the morning and again in the evening. We should constantly engage in integrating the 4 Opponent Powers practice in every moment of our lives.

From the moment one starts work in the office until one returns home, resolve to apply the antidotes to purifying negative karma. Have confidence

that Buddha has heard one's confession and is pleased with oneself. Feel a strong sense of satisfaction that one's karma has been purified. If we are able to live our lives in this way, at time of one's inevitable death, there will be no regrets.

Verse 125

*And that I might rejoice the Buddhas' hearts,
I will be master of myself, and be the servant of the world-
And not respond though others trample, wound, or kill me.
Now let the guardians of the world rejoice!*

Acknowledging that one has tried one's best to be compassionate and has thus pleased the Buddhas, one should feel uplifted. One has the potential to be totally subdued and hence, master of one's destiny to be perfectly beneficial to others.

Whether one practises in isolation or interacting with others, if one can do so fully imbued with bodhicitta and dedicate with bodhicitta, one will truly be a Mahayana practitioner and worthy of veneration. Even if someone comes to kill us, one would be able to say, "I am ready, come on" and remain with a bodhicitta mind towards such a harm-giver. When a whole family practices patience and unconditional love, even sharing one simple bowl of rice will bring so much joy. If something at home gets broken, why get upset? The object was temporary in nature anyway. Have patience. One's outer and inner being should be infused with patience and sincerity. So much peace can be attained.

Verse 126

*The great compassionate lords consider as their own
All wanderers - of this there is no doubt.
Beings, then, are Buddha's very self.
Thus how can I not treat them with respect?*

Verse 127

*Venerating them will please the buddhas' hearts,
And perfectly secure the welfare of myself.
This will drive away the sorrows of the world,
And therefore it will be my constant practice.*

All sentient beings are regarded by the Buddhas as their beloved children, so if we hurt any sentient being, we are hurting the Buddha. From hereon, whenever one sees a suffering being, immediately practice tong len by mentally taking on its suffering and offering one's virtues and happiness. That will ensure that one's spiritual path will be actualised.

Verse 128

*Imagine that the steward of a king
Does injury to multitudes of people.
Those among the injured who are wise
Will not respond with violence, even if they can.*

Verse 129

*For stewards, after all, are not alone.
They are supported by the kingly power.
Likewise I should not make light
Of lesser men who do me little injuries.*

Consider an analogy: If in a country, a Minister (the ignorant mind) orders its citizens (the body, speech and mind of a person) to go out and burn its citizen's homes (harm others) just to show power, we should think that such a person is under the control of ignorance. Retaliation (burning the minister's buildings in return) would not solve the problem either but would intensify the violence. One should always avoid returning the harm. The real cause of harm is not the person but the delusion and further, oneself has the karma to receive the harm. The only real safety is achieved if one gains the wisdom realising emptiness which is the ultimate antidote to ignorance.

Verse 130

*For they have guardians of hell for allies
And also the compassionate buddhas.
Therefore I'll respect all living beings.
As though they were the subjects of that wrathful king.*

Verse 131

*And yet, the pains of hell to be endured
Through making living beings suffer --
Could these ever be unleashed on us
By all the fury of an angry king?*

Due to the wisdom and kindness of the Buddhas, we are guided to practice patience; due to the harm giver, we can put those instructions into practice and attainments come from that very practice. For that reason, Buddhas and harm-givers alike are instrumental in our gaining spiritual attainments. Returning harm will only increase the likelihood of the lower realms to come.

Verse 132

*And even if that king were pleased,
Enlightenment he could not give to us,
For this will only be achieved
By bringing happiness to living beings.*

Verse 133

*Granted, then, that future buddhahood
Is forged through bringing happiness to beings;
How can I not see that glory, fame, and pleasure
Even in this life will likewise come?*

Merely making material offerings to the Buddha or doing virtue only in relation to the Buddha, without striving to help and benefit sentient beings, will not result in enlightenment. Even the happiness of this life can only come about through benefitting sentient beings. The self cherishing mind is an unyielding barrier to joy in this life and to enlightenment. We need to get rid of it.

Verse 134

For patience in samsara brings such things
As beauty, health, and good renown.
Its fruit is great longevity,
The vast contentment of a universal king.

The benefits of patience are aplenty: However, it is first helpful to know that there are 3 kinds of patience: (i) The patience of disregarding harm done to you (through understanding karma and the disadvantages of angry retaliation) (ii) the patience of accepting suffering (seeing suffering as helping to clear past negative karma) and (iii) the patience of being certain about the Buddhas' teaching (having the faith and conviction in the teachings guiding one out of suffering forever). The practice of patience will bring beauty, health, long life and all the qualities of a universal king and Buddhahood itself.

Small matters can cause us to fail in our Bodhisattva deeds, so we need to be always mindful. We need to spend some time to reflect and meditate on the points we have covered, particularly the disadvantages of anger and advantages of patience. For some of us, anger arises easily. We all need to familiarise our minds with virtuous thoughts. If we can succeed in overcoming small upsets, we can gradually overcome major problems that we encounter.

Chapter 7: Heroic Perseverance

Verse 1

*Thus with patience I will bravely persevere.
Through zeal it is that I shall reach enlightenment.
If no wind blows, then nothing stirs,
And neither is there merit without perseverance.*

Heroic perseverance or joyous effort is the crucial supporting factor for one to accomplish the rest of the 6 Perfections.

Here, we see the dependent relationship between the 6 Perfections. Through practising generosity, morality and patience, one arrives at a stage where one is firmly convinced of the advantages from being generous, living ethically to benefit others and that no matter what hardships arise, one can rely on the mighty ally of patience. This state of mind is one that joyfully and enthusiastically continues to strive at Dharma and serve sentient beings. This state of mind is called joyful effort or heroic perseverance.

Hence each of the Perfections is dependent on the Perfection before it. But the integration of the all the practices of the 6 Perfections are required because for example, without perseverance, there is no consistency in creating merit.

Verse 2

*Heroic perseverance means delight in virtue.
Its contrary may be defined as laziness:
An inclination for unwholesome ways,
Despondency, and self-contempt.*

Heroic perseverance is the opposite mind of laziness. It is joyful in virtue and rejects all actions that cause harm to others or oneself.

Verse 3

*Complacent pleasure in the joys of idleness,
A craving for repose and sleep,
No qualms about the sorrows of samsara:
These are the source and nurse of laziness.*

In the Dharma context, laziness means being easily swayed towards worldly, non-virtuous objects. A lazy mind is one that is distracted by samsaric excitement and always seeking a rest from Dharma activities; a mind without any sense of renunciation towards samsara due to having no recognition of the destructive nature of samsara; a mind without any aspirations towards liberation; mind which has no warning system with regards to non-virtues and even when suspecting an action is non-virtuous, not looking at it more closely – a kind of self-induced numbness towards non-virtue; a mind that has no interest in reflecting on negative karma and its suffering results; a mind un-inspired by the 6 Perfections; a mind that regards cherishing others as hard-work and too difficult to engage in and prefers the ease of self-cherishing.

All the above states of mind often manifest in Buddha's followers like us due to not having perseverance. We know the Dharma but are too mentally lazy to do something about it or put it into action. In order for us to eliminate the treacherous lazy mind, the sole obstacle to nirvana, we need to generate joyous effort. Without a mind of delight in virtue when making offerings, doing charity, reciting a million mantras, all these acts are in the nature of laziness. The consequence is endless disappointments, dissatisfaction and finally, a long dark journey to the lower realms and their unimaginable sufferings.

The first 3 lines of this verse are the causes of laziness.

Verse 4

*Snared by the trapper of defiled emotion,
Enmeshed and taken in the toils of birth,
How could I not know that thus I've strayed
Into the mouth, the very jaws, of Death.*

From beginningless lifetime until now, one has been constantly trapped by the lord of death due to the force of karma and delusion. We remain locked in cyclic existence and pile on layers and layers of chains through our ignorance and inclination towards unwholesome action. One desperately needs to meditate on impermanence, as our negative karma are rapidly hurling us into the great suffering realms.

Verse 5

*Don't you see how one by one
Death comes to claim your fellow men?
And yet you slumber on so soundly,
Like a buffalo beside its butcher.*

Shantideva is practically begging us to realise how our lives can end at any moment, for we sleep like buffalos beside their butchers. We do not cultivate the remembrance of the impermanence nor that death is certain and time of death is uncertain. Hence, our spiritual path is paralysed and unable to bear good fruit. We gladly indulge in the samsaric distractions of loved ones, the 5 senses, idleness.

When we wake up each morning, we should feel gratitude that we did not die in our sleep the night before and thus have another day to do virtue and progress on the Path. But is that how we are? No – we wake up and straightaway think of the toilet or of the meeting or lunch appointment that will happen during the day. So we can see where our spiritual levels are at this moment. We should motivate well when we wake up and when we go to sleep, we should think “Whatever virtue I’ve accumulated, may it be dedicated it to all beings’ enlightenment, as there is no certainty that we will survive the night”. Many of us go to bed with so much worry about tomorrow, yet there is no guarantee that there is a tomorrow. And even our sleep is not always a deep, peaceful sleep. So much activity and disturbance during one’s sleep. That is why many people wake up feeling exhausted. If we go to bed dedicating virtue towards the welfare of sentient beings, one’s entire sleep becomes virtuous and upon waking up, one will feel joyful and motivated to be positive and virtuous. This in

turn influences one's whole day and when one then goes to bed that night, there will be so many reasons to rejoice.

Meditation by solely keeping one's mind blank is wasteful because there is so much potential to use meditation to cultivate virtue. Whilst focusing on the mind helps in training in concentration, one ought not stop there as it will not enable one to actualise one's full potential i.e. enlightenment.

To overcome laziness, it is vital to meditate on death and impermanence. Without there, one will find little urgency to practice Dharma.

Verse 6

*All paths of flight are blocked,
The Lord of Death now has you in his sights.
How can you take pleasure in your food?
How can you delight to rest and sleep?*

Verse 7

*Death will be so quick to swoop on you;
Gather merit till that moment comes!
Wait till then to banish laziness?
Then there'll be no time, what will you do?*

If you do not meditate on death and impermanence, the result is a suffering death. We use our energy and time for samsaric distractions? Apply perseverance to transform our daily actions into Dharma practice

– for example, when food is served to us, instead of gobbling up the food quickly, first offer it extensively to Triple Gem and sentient beings before consuming the food; when wearing clothes, think “Whoever sees this apparel, may they actualise liberation”. If we do not have perseverance, we will not have the mind to do the above transformations.

If we realise that our virtues are still-born due to doing so-called good deeds with afflicted minds and all that we possess is the negative karma which will bring suffering and lower realm rebirths, do we dare to neglect cultivating joyful effort/perseverance? We should be totally engaged in practice of 6 perfections.

We might think we are young and healthy and have time to enjoy samsara and engage in Dharma later. This is a mistake because when death strikes without warning, we will find we have no time left to accumulate merit and leave this life empty handed. What will we do then?

Verse 8

This I have not done. And this I'm only starting.

And this - I am only halfway through.....”

Then is the sudden coming of the Lord of Death,

And oh, the thought “Alas, I'm finished!”

Excuses, excuses, excuses. This verse brilliantly illustrates exactly how we think and live our samsaric lives. We presently think , “Now is the time to earn money as I'm still young. How can I afford the time to go to the temple or do retreats and Dharma activities?” Or we think “I shouldn't be engaging

in Bodhisattva deeds yet, as I'm only a beginner. " Or, "let me build up my career and relationships first". Or "I'll do Dharma after I retire". Then death comes and the thought "Alas, I'm finished " – pain and regret. For a follower of the Mahayana, what a loss and what a failure. All this is due to laziness.

Verse 9

*Your tear-stained cheeks, your red and swollen eyes,
Such will be the depths of your distress.
You 'll gaze into the faces of your hopeless friends,
And see the coming servants of the Deathly Lord.*

Verse 10

*The memory of former sins will torture you;
The screams and din of hell break on your ears.
With very terror you will foul yourself;
What will you do then, in such extremity of fear?*

Wealth, friends, family, fame cannot help one at the time of death. If one has not engaged in persevering in ethical living and benefitting others with patience, only regret and hardship awaits one at the end of life.

Verse 11

*And if you are so scared while still alive,
Like fishes writhing on the open ground,
What need to speak of pain unbearable
In hells created by past evil deeds?*

Verse 12

*The hells in which the boiling molten bronze
Will burn your body, tender like a baby's flesh -
All is now prepared, your former deeds have done it!
How can you lie back, so free of care?*

Verse 13

*Much harm will come to those with small forbearance,
Who wish to have the fruit without endeavor.
Seized by death, they'll cry out like the gods.
"Alas I fall, by pain and sorrow crushed."*

When we think of the consequences of breaking vows and acting against the teachings and principles of the Triple Gem, the actual results will be unbearable. Whether we remember our past actions or not, the results are gradually ripening as we speak, bringing the frightening sufferings of the lower realm akin to molten metal burning our tender flesh like that of a baby's. There is no time to waste, One needs to engage in merit.

For those who have put very little effort into virtue/Dharma, how can one expect any lasting happiness? Like the long-life gods, who die when the merit to be in that existence gets exhausted and intense suffering follows swiftly, similarly, one will experience tremendous suffering and sorrow if no perseverance at virtue is undertaken now.

Verse 14

*Take advantage of this human boat;
Free yourself from sorrow's mighty stream!
This vessel will be later hard to find.
The time that you have now, you fool, is not for sleep!*

Verse 15

*You turn your back upon the sacred Doctrine,
The supreme joy and boundless source of bliss.
What pleasure can you have in mere amusement
Straying to the causes of your misery?*

This precious human rebirth is to be used to cross the ocean of samsara. Persevere in bodhicitta with whatever time we have. To sustain our effort, meditate frequently on death and impermanence. Cultivating Dharma is the supreme joy and bliss. Samsaric action has no potential to bring happiness and only has potential to bring misery.

Verse 16

*Do not be downcast, but marshal all your strength;
Take heart and be the master of yourself!
Practice the equality of self and other,
Practice the exchange of self and other.*

Feel encouraged, not depressed. Liberation and enlightenment are possible if one perseveres on the 5 points: (1) practising equalising self with others;

(2) reflect on disadvantages of self cherishing (3) reflect on the advantages of cherishing others (4) reflect on equalising oneself with others (5) the actual engaging in the exchanging self with others, tong len.

On equalising oneself with others: First bring one's mind into a neutral state, seeing everyone as being in a similar condition as oneself. Then view all sentient beings as equally attractive as a loved one. Then next one is to reflect on disadvantages of the self cherishing mind which produces failure, unhappiness, problems. Next, contemplate on the advantages of cherishing others, which includes attaining Buddhahood. When one is convinced that one should benefit others, then come to actual practice of tong len i.e. the exchanging of self with others. Regard others' welfare as having priority. Think "Any problems or suffering of beings should ripen upon me". One needs to train to that state of mind where one is wholeheartedly engaged in helping others such that even if one gets harshly criticised, one's heart feels no pain but instead feels undisturbed and regards the scolding as a mantra to dispel all hindrances. Conversely, whenever happiness comes to you, you immediately dedicate it to others.

Kyabje Lama Zopa Rinpoche was once handed USD10,000 in an envelope. The next person seeing Rinpoche was monk who had expressed difficulty in his journey to India. Rinpoche gave him a set of robes and that envelope with its entire contents for bus fee. Roger came back in the afternoon and looked for the money, explaining that it was intended for a project. He asked Rinpoche for that envelope but he already given it away. Rinpoche has no sense of grasping. Then there is the extensive generosity practised by some Bodhisattvas such as giving away their eyes and limbs while they are alive. Note however that such extensive giving can only be done by

actual Bodhisattvas who have trained and accumulated the merit and able to let go without regret. These are some of the methods performed by holy beings when accumulating merit.

The 2 principal methods of cultivating bodhicitta, namely the exchanging of self for others OR the 6 cause & 1 effect methods, both methods have to be integrated. It is just a matter of which is one's primary method.

Verse 17

*“Oh, but how could I become enlightened?”
Don't excuse yourself with such despondency!
The buddhas, who declare the truth,
Have spoken and indeed proclaimed.*

Deprecation or telling oneself that one is not worthy or able to attain realisations is nothing more than laziness towards training in Bodhisattva deeds. This type of laziness is harmful to one in the short term and long term. It is a coward's mind, a discouraged mind that leads to failure and constant disappointment. Of course, while training in the Bodhisattva's conduct, many obstacles will arise – such as negative friends discouraging oneself, allowing one's over-preoccupation with family matters, low self-esteem – these can cause one to give up one's practice and is one of the greatest threats to gaining realisations. As a Bodhisattva practitioner, wherever you are or whatever lifestyle you have, whatever circumstances surround you, it is all conducive conditions to practice. One should not rely on excuses to avoid practising straightaway. The Buddha nature and the potential for perfection lies in all of us.

Verse 18

*That if they bring forth strength of perseverance,
The very bees and flies and stinging gnats
Or grubs will find with ease
Enlightenment so hard to find!*

In the Subahupariccha Sutra, the Buddha stated that all beings will one day be fully awakened in Buddhahood. There is an end to samsara. Although there is no beginning of samsara, there is definitely an end to samsara. With the strength of perseverance, enlightenment is certain.

Verse 19

*Able to distinguish good from ill,
If I, by birth and lineage of human kind,
Devote myself to bodhisattva training,
Why should I not gain the state of buddhahood?*

If one perseveres in virtues and discards that which is to be abandoned, one will extract the full meaning of the precious human rebirth and engage in Bodhisattva's conduct. There is absolutely no reason for us not to obtain Buddhahood.

Verse 20

*“That I must give away my life and limbs
Alarmed and frightens me” - if so you say,
Your terror is misplaced. Confused,
You fail to see what's hard and what is easy.*

The moment you hear the teachings of the Bodhisattva deeds e.g. the extensive generosity of giving up not only all possessions but also your organs and limbs when asked for, instead of feeling inspired you get afraid, this fear is misplaced. Firstly, ordinary practitioners are not advised to engage in this manner of giving of limbs etc until one is a Bodhisattva; secondly, put effort to properly understand the Mahayana teachings and the practices associated with the 6 Perfections and then do one's utmost in engaging in those practices. We tend to be slow in discarding samsara, and quick to discard the golden Dharma.

Verse 21

*For myriads of ages, measureless, uncounted,
Your body has been cut, impaled,
Burned, flayed - for times past numbering!
Yet none of this has brought you buddhahood.*

How sad it is – for countless lives, one has suffered profoundly and gone through all forms of extreme experiences, yet none of it has brought one to Buddhahood. For those who undertook the Bodhisattva deeds with Mahayana motivation also went through similar hardships but they attained full enlightenment.

Verse 22

*The hardships suffered on the path to buddhahood
Are different, for their span is limited,
And likened to the pain of an incision
Made to cure the harm of hidden ailments.*

The experience of hardship incurred for Dharma with bodhicitta motivation compared to the hardship incurred for samsaric gain is totally different. The results are also worlds apart. The duration of hardship incurred for Dharma is limited and are the means to extinguish all stages of suffering, whereas the duration incurred for samsara traverse this life and future lives without end. Creating conditions for other beings to learn Dharma or organising the 1000 Offerings event involves much hard work, but as it is for Dharma and sentient beings, there will be joy in one's life, accumulation of merit, purification of karma, spiritual development with the ultimate result of enlightenment. All the Gurus, Buddhas, Bodhisattvas and Dharma protectors, will rejoice. Serving Dharma centre also requires perseverance. Whether one person or thousands of people attending a Dharma talk, without karmic affinity between the teacher and participants, the benefit will not be as beneficial. So in Dharma work it is not about the quantity of people attending but rather, bringing benefit to even one being, who is as precious as all numberless sentient beings. Though physically, one may be tired, people misunderstand, even mistreat oneself while serving Dharma, if one upholds the altruistic motivation, even such negative experiences will not shake one's faith and enthusiasm in serving. In this way, incurring difficulties during Dharma work can purify an immense karma and eliminate the cause for sufferings; whereas when working for samsaric goals, the more pain you incur, it will enhance negative emotions and negativities.

As a parent, one incurs much hardship in raising one's children. However, if one does this with bodhicitta motivation and do one's best in guiding them in Dharma whilst trying one's best to apply the 6 Perfections, seeing your children as precious as your Guru, you will succeed in subduing your child. Without such bodhicitta motivation, no matter what Dharma works

we do, it will merely end in the accumulation of agitation, negativities and will be a wasted effort.

If one does not know how to manage one's mind and merely practice Dharma at a superficial level e.g. doing "religious" actions but not assimilating the Buddha's teachings to really modify one's behaviour, then Dharma practice will indeed become very difficult. It is just a matter of your mind. It can be very easy or very difficult. It is entirely up to us.

Verse 23

*The doctors and those skilled in healing arts,
Use bitter remedies to cure our ills.
Likewise we, to uproot dreadful sorrow,
Should bear what are indeed but little pains.*

Let's say one has cancer – in order to prolong life, an operation may be needed. We make such decisions and are prepared to bear the hardship of sacrifice parts of our body in order to gain some benefit over the short term. So why not bear hardship and forgo the temporary contaminated happiness of samsara for ultimate benefit of enlightenment?

Verse 24

*And yet the Supreme Healer does not use,
Like them, these common remedies.
With antidotes of extreme tenderness
He soothes away intense and boundless suffering.*

Buddha did not say that one must bear hardship in Dharma. He taught about having the right attitude, right purpose, altruistic motivation, right action whilst applying perseverance. Samsaric effort necessarily involves painful hardship; Dharma effort involved bodhicitta tenderness.

Verse 25

*Our guide instructs us to begin
By giving food or other little charities,
That later, step by step, the habit once acquired,
We may be able to donate our very flesh.*

Buddhist practice is one of gradual engagement. It is a realistic and sensible approach to take. Buddha never dictated that we should immediately engage in the extreme austerities of giving up flesh but rather, begin with simple giving such as the sharing of food and small generousities like that. After one has habituated in giving, then one will be able to engage in intensive giving in the manner of the Bodhisattvas. Some wealthy people are prepared to spend millions on themselves but find it very difficult to part with anything to benefit others. Miserliness will result in preta rebirth.

Some people misunderstand the practice of charity – there is a profound meaning to giving. During the Buddha’s time, he had entire ability to support his monks (after all, his father was a king) but instead, he remained in the renounced life and led his monks in requesting for alms. The purpose of this was to enable the lay community to gain merits which would benefit them and their families. Therefore, even if you meet monks who may or may not be real monks but for your own merit, view that monk as Shakyamuni

Buddha and even if you make no offerings to him, feel fortunate to see a person in the Buddha's saffron robe. In the future Era of Signs, even the sight of a saffron robe will be rare, let alone see monks wearing robes. There is no way for us to judge whether a monk is a pure Sangha or not. Whatever generosity you perform towards a monk, whether in terms of food or money, even if a person tells you that that is a fake monk but you offered it with sincere faith towards the Triple Gem, you have gained merits equal to offering to the actual Buddha, Dharma and Sangha.

Be generous with kind words and your help. If we hesitate to help because of inconvenience to oneself or of what people would think, then the self centred mind is already strongly present. The motivation and hence the benefit from making light offerings here at the Centre and light offerings in Chinatown to attract tourists is totally different!(Laughter). Another easy and worthwhile practice is to rejoice e.g. rejoice at seeing light offerings and holy objects. Consistency in practice requires joyous perseverance.

Verse 26

*For when one has the view that sees
Equality between one's body and the food one gives,
Why then! What hardship can there be
In giving up, relinquishing, one's very flesh?*

When one has the emptiness view towards not only self but also phenomena and sees the merely-labelled nature of one's body and the food that one gives, then there will be no hardship of letting go of the food and indeed one's body in the service of sentient beings. One will be able to

be generous in all respects including one's body. When one is able to see all things as like a mirage, perfect generosity is achievable.

Verse 27

Sin has been abandoned, thus there is no pain.

Mind is skilled, and thus there is no sorrow.

*For so it is that mind and body both
Are injured by false views and sinfulness.*

“Sin has been abandoned” means that one is free from the stain of wrong conceptions, i.e. belief in inherent existence. Once this happens, there will be no negative karma and thus no suffering and pain to come. “Mind is skilled” refers to the mind that realises emptiness or selflessness. Whatever suffering we encounter is all due to having the false view of believing in independent, inherent existence and which gives rise to heavy negative karma.

Verse 28

*Merit is the true cause of the body's ease,
While happiness of mind is brought about by training.
What can sadden those who have compassion,
Who linger in samsara for the sake of beings?*

Merit comes from virtuous actions based on renunciation, bodhicitta, emptiness and results in the happiness of body; the happiness of mind is brought about by training in abandoning self-cherishing. Therefore there

is no reason to be sad or sceptical towards Bodhisattvas who return to samsara for the sake of sentient beings.

Verse 29

*For through their power of bodhichitta,
Former sins are totally consumed,
And merit, ocean-vast, is gathered in;
Therefore we say they're higher than the shravakas.*

Verse 30

*For, mounted on the horse of bodhichitta,
That puts to flight all mournful weariness,
Who could ever be dejected,
Riding such a steed from joy to joy?*

It is stated that ordinary Bodhisattvas are greater than Shravakas solely because they cultivate bodhicitta which has the potency of eradicating sin and actualising merit. Like a strong horse that rides from place to place, there is no tiredness and the vast expanse of samsara is crossed over for benefit of self and sentient beings.

Verse 31

*The forces that secure the good of beings
Are aspiration, firmness, joy, and moderation.
Aspiring grows through fear of suffering
And contemplation of the benefits to be attained.*

There are 4 forces that secure our ability to secure the happiness of all beings, namely aspiration, firmness, joy and moderation. Aspiration comes through reflecting on the sufferings of samsara, practising the renunciation of samsara and contemplating on the drawbacks of samsara and benefits of nirvana.

Verse 32

*Therefore leaving everything that is adverse to it,
I'll labour to increase my perseverance -
Through cheerful effort, keenness, self-control,
Through aspiration, firmness, joy, and moderation.*

We face many challenges in our Dharma practice – the self cherishing mind, distractions, sufferings, anger, attachment, indifference – all interfere with the development of the good heart. Rather than allow them to become obstacles, use them in cultivation of perseverance. How to do this? Through a positive outlook, enthusiasm, self-control (of delusions) and the preservation of vows (these help us in self-control). We have never had true freedom due to be dominated by the self cherishing mind. By striving in cherishing others, one regains self control and experiences real freedom .

The ease in which one can attain these depends on how one upholds vows – refuge vows, lay vows, Bodhisattva vows, tantric vows, ordination vows. For the lay community, upholding the vow against sexual misconduct is highly relevant because in present times, there is so much suffering from conflicted relationships and failed ones. Upholding the vow against sexual misconduct brings so much virtue, peace and happiness.

“Moderation” is about discarding the 3 kinds of laziness and also has the power to enhance perseverance such as through the 4 forces stated here. These 4 forces in turn must be supplemented by the 2 strengths of earnest practice and controlling one’s body, speech and mind, and engaging in vows.

Verse 33

*Thus the boundless evils of myself and others ---
I alone must bring them all to nothing,
Even though a single of these ills
May take unnumbered ages to exhaust!*

We all know very well the distress that comes when one has no control over one’s mind. Understanding this, put consistent effort in studying the Dharma and applying it to transform our faults and adversities into path to enlightenment, even though it might take a long time.

Verse 34

*And yet for this great enterprise I do not see
Within myself the slightest aptitude -
I whose destiny is boundless suffering,
Why does not my heart now burst asunder?*

Through reviewing the earlier verses, one is able to assess the level of one’s spiritual practice. For most of us, we will discover that we are empty of merit, good karma and ethics. We have no self control and one is almost hopeless,

without any means to liberate oneself, let alone liberate sentient beings.

How have we got to this sorry state? We stubbornly hold on to same self-centred attitude, we do not cherish others, we have no perseverance in the Bodhisattva's conduct, we make no effort at purification – if we continue in this kind of lifestyle, one's destiny is endless suffering. If we were to truly look at our condition now, we could cause our own hearts to burst in sorrow. We can get a heart attack (laughter).

Verse 35

*All virtues for my own and others' sake,
Though they be many, I must now accomplish,
Even if for each I must
Endeavor for unnumbered ages.*

When one looks at one's effort in Dharma, one can find many reasons to rejoice in one's virtue. Whilst being objective about our faults, we also need to rejoice in our goodness or we might give up the Path completely. Whatever the circumstances, we must give up the bodhicitta mind.

Verse 36

*Acquaintance I have never gained
With even part of such great qualities.
So strange to waste in trivial pursuits
This life that chance has brought to me!*

Most of us do not have the realisations of a Bodhisattva. However, do we at least have the warm and moist mind of compassion? Probably not. Even if one cares for many people, we should question ourselves on whether our giving care is based on true selfless love or is it for some other reason or worse, with an expectation that they will care for us? If so, this is conditional love.

When we asked about reality, we tend to fall into 2 extremes – we either fall into believing everything exists inherently or we think that all existence is mere imagination. We do not have a clear understanding of dependent-existence or lack of inherent existence. We chant about enlightenment but we do not understand even liberation. We hardly contemplate or ask ourselves – does enlightenment exist or not? When we have doubts, we are too lazy to find out; too lazy to meditate. Hence, we have no realisations on this.

Check further, do we have any realisations about Refuge, the most basic of Buddhist practices? We do not engage in proper study and thus have no defence when our faith is challenged. The moment we see some our Guru displaying action that we do not understand, we criticise.

For me, after looking into myself, I know I have not gained acquaintance with any of the great qualities but I do not allow myself to get discouraged by reflecting on the teachings of the human rebirth.

Verse 37

*Offerings to the buddhas I have never made;
No feasts were ever held thought my donations;
No works have I accomplished for the Teachings;
The wishes of the poor, alas, I left unsatisfied.*

The way to accomplish the Bodhisattva conduct is through accumulation of merit through the practices of method (bodhicitta) & wisdom (realising emptiness) including those in relation to generosity like sharing a bowl of rice to others, giving protection from fear and giving Dharma; in relation to eradicating self cherishing and cherishing others. We have failed alleviate the unhappiness of sentient beings who seek peerless happiness. Therefore, one should not indulge in laziness but enhance one's aspirations.

Verse 38

*The frightened I have not encouraged,
And to the weary I have given no rest.
My mother's birth pangs and her womb's discomfort,
These alone are my accomplishments!*

I have not obtained any of the qualities of the Buddha nor effectively helped sentient beings. The reason for engaging in heroic perseverance is to repay the kindness of mother sentient beings. I must accomplish the welfare of all beings through my attaining full enlightenment.

Verse 39

*Thus my poverty, my lack of fortune,
Come from failure to aspire to Dharma
In the past and likewise in the present!
Whoever would reject this aspiration?*

From past till now, one has never had the aspiration to adopt Dharma and accumulate merit. Hence, now is the moment to bind oneself to heroic perseverance in engaging in virtue through taking vows.

Verse 40

*Aspiration is the root of every virtue,
Thus the Mighty One has said.
And aspiration's root in turn
Is constant meditation on the fruits of action.*

Aspiration is the root of every virtue. Therefore, to actualise the Path requires the force of aspiration. In the sutra called the Appearance of Manjushri Buddha's Field explains how everything is dependent upon conditions and lies in the root of eager aspiration. Nourishing the root of pure aspiration fulfils the prayers one person.

Verse 41

*The body's pains, anxieties of mind,
Our every fear and trepidation,
Separation from the objects of our wanting:
Such is the harvest of our sinful deeds.*

Our present sufferings – mental and physical – are the result of negative karma made worse through the lack of aspiration and laziness and non application of the 4 forces (i.e. aspiration, firmness, joy and relinquishing).

Verse 42

*If my acts are wholesome, mirroring my mind,
Then no matter where I turn my steps,
Respect and honor will be paid to me,
The fruit and recompense of merit.*

When one's acts are motivated by wholesome attitudes like bodhicitta, the result is happiness and honour, whether we seek those or not.

Merit can be accumulated through force of a positive intention, even if the act itself may have the appearance of non-virtue. The earlier mentioned story of the Bodhisattva shipman who through clairvoyance could see the harmful intentions of a murderer on a ship and made the decision to take the life of this intended murderer instead. There, the Bodhisattva accumulated extensive merit due to his motivation, although negative karma from the act of killing was incurred.

In life we have choices. When we come to the crossroads of deciding between positive or negative actions, we need to reflect properly on karma and samsara and make our decision. Even if both choices involve the creation of some negative karma, make the decision based on positive motivation.

Verse 43

*But if, in search of happiness, my works are evil,
Then no matter where I turn my steps,
The knives of misery will cut me down -
The wage and retribution of a sinful life.*

Taking any action without a virtuous motivation simply creates a cause for samsara. Needless to say, if one acts with negative intention, suffering results are unavoidable.

Hence, one can see the potency of motivation. Offering a bowl of rice to a hungry person and without your knowing, there was poison in the rice, even though the act harmed that person (and hence negative karma arising), there is still merit being generated.

Verse 44

*I will arise, through virtue,
in the cool heart of a fragrant, spreading lotus,
Its petals opened in the Buddha's light,
With glory nourished by the sweet words of the Conqueror,
And live, the buddhas' heir, within the presence of Victorious Ones.*

Here is a daily practice being given by Shantideva: First thing upon waking, one's mind should be pure, filled with delight and altruistic intention. With such mind, one should nourish one's body and speech with kindness. In short, one should live the life of Bodhisattvas.

Verse 45

*Or else as wages for my sins, I'll be struck down,
my skin flayed off by creatures
Of the Lord of Death, who on my body pour the liquid
bronze that's melted in the dreadful blaze.
And pierced by burning sword and knives, my flesh
Dismembered in a hundred parts, will fall upon the white-hot
iron ground.*

If we live our lives with negative motivation, the rest of our lives will be consumed with negative actions, bringing anguish and suffering at death and rebirth in the lower realms.

Verse 46

*And so I will aspire and tend to virtue,
And steep myself in it with great devotion.
And with the method stated in the Vajradhvaja,
I will train in confident assurance.*

Having gained conviction in the teachings, one should aspire to engage in virtue from morning to night, be thoroughly mindful and be of benefit to living beings.

Presently, the strength of one's compassionate mind varies according to whether one is dealing with loved ones or enemies. This should not be the case. In the 6th chapter of the Avatamsaka Sutra is a detailed description of the Bodhisattva attitude, which totally and equally cherishes all

sentient beings. We need to cultivate such attitude whether faced with enemies, loved ones or strangers. This is the basis of success in the Bodhisattva's conduct.

Verse 47

*Let me first consider my resources -
To start or not to start accordingly.
For it is better not to start at all,
Than to begin and then retrace my steps.*

To accomplish the Bodhisattva conduct, one requires the help of the 4 forces to overcome obstacles and intense sufferings of samsara. The previous verse was on the force of aspiration.

This verse covers the force of firmness or steadfastness. There are 2 interpretations to this verse –

(i) that in order to train in Bodhisattva conduct it is necessary for us to have the conditions such as constant supplication to the Buddhas for guidance, understanding the unmistakable practice of the bodhicitta, upholding vows, having the determination to cultivate the 6 Perfections, having Dharma brothers and sisters to support one's efforts and most of all, the objects of compassion i.e. sentient beings, to enable one to carry out one's cultivation. If we are not gathered these conditions, it may be better not to commit to the Bodhisattva vows nor the responsibility to liberate all sentient beings by oneself alone, as we would not have the reliable means of guiding sentient beings and may mislead them to wrong path.

(ii) The second interpretation is that we should not wait to train in the Bodhisattva's conduct. We should not look for excuses not to study, not to practice compassion and discouraging oneself from the Bodhisattva conduct on the shallow reason of one being incapable of benefitting others. This is quite a common situation – many people say that they will cultivate Dharma later and in the meantime, focus on getting money and gathering friends.

Whatever circumstance we are in, we should be steadfast in utilising those conditions as the basis to engage in Bodhisattva conduct immediately, right now. As long as one admires compassion, there is nothing to stop us from starting on its cultivation.

Verse 48

*For, acting thus, the pattern will return
In later lives, and sin and pain will grow.
And other actions will be left undone
Or else will bear a meager fruit.*

Making excuses for not practising merely enhances the grip of the negative mind over us. From this we can see how difficult it is not to experience unhappiness and suffering. We always do things that delay virtue and increase negativity.

Verse 49

Action, the afflictions, and ability:

Three things to which my pride should be applied.

“I will do this, I myself, alone!”

These words define my pride of action.

The pride mentioned here is not delusional pride. It is referring to confidence and self respect.

This requires 3 kinds of mindset – (1) knowing what kind of proper action is to be engaged in; (2) inspire oneself that one can do it; (3) reassure oneself of one’s own ability by referring to the inspirational advice of the Buddha and our Gurus.

If our Gurus and practitioners like Milarepa are able to accomplish the Bodhisattva conduct why not oneself? These 3 factors are the causes to bring about the confidence needed to engage in Bodhisattva conduct. Without this, one negative emotion will attacks us. These 3 causes enable us to fulfil the pledges of the Bodhisattva conduct of liberating all beings to enlightenment, by oneself alone. Without such a courageous mind that perseveres, bodhicitta will not arise.

Verse 50

Enfeebled by their minds’ afflictions,

Worldly folk are helpless to secure their happiness.

Compared to those who wander, I am able -

This indeed shall be my chosen task.

Here, Shantideva expresses his self confidence. Numberless sentient beings wish for happiness and do not wish for suffering, yet due to ignorance and a lack of mindfulness, every method used to gain happiness, has failed.

Due to the blessings of past Buddha, gurus and Bodhisattvas, Shantideva humbly and honestly declares that he has gained the great courageous mind to liberate all beings from suffering. One should follow Shantideva's example.

Verse 51

*When others give themselves to base activities,
How can I connive as their companion?
But I shall not refrain through pride or arrogance;
My best way is to give up such conceit.*

When others engage in pride, grasp at loved ones and offend enemies, one should guard against adopting their ways. If one does so, one has completely forgotten one's responsibility of liberating sentient beings. We shouldn't waste our precious human life on trivial pursuits. Even though living beings may act negatively, they are the objects of our cultivation of compassion and can never be abandoned. One should equally benefit them as one would a loved one.

Verse 52

*When they find a dying serpent,
Even crows behave like soaring eagles.
Therefore if I'm weak and feeble-hearted,
Even little faults will strike and injure me.*

The analogy is of a dying snake causing much excitement amongst the crows awaiting its carcass. If one's mind is weakened by negative emotion, even small negative acts affect us intensively. We need to avoid weakening our resolve to engage in Bodhisattva conduct.

Verse 53

*How will those who basely flee the conflict,
Ever free themselves from their debility?
But those who stand their ground with proud resolve
Are hard to vanquish even by the mighty.*

Verse 54

*Therefore with a steadfast heart
I'll get the better of my weaknesses.
But if my failings get the upper hand,
My wish to overcome the world is laughable indeed.*

How are those who are excited by samsaric distractions, ever going to be able to liberate themselves and attain enlightenment? For those who are proud due to ego, even the Buddhas will find it hard to tame them. Without subduing delusions, there is no hope for happiness.

With a mind of perseverance towards sustaining the Bodhisattva conduct, one will be able to overcome weakness and fulfil the prayers of one's Gurus and Buddhas.

Verse 55

*I will be the victor over all
Nothing shall prevail ad bring me down
The lion-offspring of the Conquerors
Should constantly abide in this proud confidence*

One should cultivate self confidence in the manner of the past Buddhas. The Conqueror (Buddha) never gave up the aspiration to liberate all sentient beings and overcame the 4 maras at the time of his attaining enlightenment – the mara of aggregates, delusion, death and the lust of the son-of-god – and they actualised all the perfected qualities.

Verse 56

*Those whom arrogance and pride destroy
Are thus defiled; they lack proud confidence.
They fall into the power of an evil pride,
But those with true pride will escape the enemy.*

First line refers to the negative pride which must be abandoned; 2nd line refers to self worth and positive potential that is to be cultivated. Negative pride will destroy merit, enhance negativities and bring more suffering. Those with self confidence in Bodhisattva conduct will be able to escape from grip of negative emotions and thus avoid committing negative karma.

Verse 57

*When arrogance inflates the mind,
It draws it down to states of misery,
Or else it ruins human birth, should this be gained.
Thus one is born a slave, dependent for one's food*

When one cultivate worldly pride and arrogance, misery will be one's fate and one's entire precious human rebirth wasted.

Verse 58

*Or feeble-minded, ugly, without strength,
The butt and laughingstock of everyone.
Hapless creatures puffed up with conceit!
If these you call the proud, then tell me who are wretched?*

Persevere against the egoistic mind or the resultant karma in its physical aspects, is to be born looking like a pig; and even if born human, one will be born ugly i.e. not necessary unattractive but having the appearance that will attract abuse and danger.

If one practices humility, one gains the karma of beauty in the future e.g. males will look like Manjushri; females will look like Tara. Pride fills up the mind quickly leaving no room for virtue nor strength to reside there. Thus, can one afford to be arrogant?

Verse 59

*Those who uphold pride to vanquish pride, the enemy,
Are truly proud, the victors in the war.*

*Those who overwhelm the progress of that evil pride,
Perfect the fruit of buddhahood and satisfy the longing of the world.*

Those who persevere in overcoming arrogance are the victors in the war over negative emotions and attain the perfection of Buddhahood and satisfy all the longings of sentient beings.

Verse 60

*When you are beleaguered by defilements,
Fight them in a thousand ways.*

*Do not surrender to the host of the afflictions;
Be like a lion in a crowd of foxes.*

Whenever the afflictive emotions attack oneself, use that as the condition to strengthen one's mindfulness and steadfastness in engaging in the Bodhisattva conduct.

Utilise the negative emotion as the means to apply the general antidotes and the specific antidotes to eliminate that state of mind. This is real training. Recognising the object of negation is as important as knowing the antidote. The immediate application of antidotes is a must. Never surrender to the negative emotions. "Be like a lion in a crowd of foxes" means let persevering mindfulness be ever ready to overcome the busy, negative mind.

Verse 61

*However great may be their peril,
People will by reflex guard their eyes.
And likewise I, regardless of all hardship,
Must not fall beneath defilement's power.*

Verse 62

*Even though I may be burned to death,
And though I may be killed, my head cut off,
At no time will I bow and scrape
Before that foe of mine, defiled emotion.*

Verse 62A

*Thus in every time and place
I will not wander from the wholesome path.*

Our eyes are very precious to us and we tend to instinctively protect our eyes. In like manner, one should always guard one's body, speech and mind from negative emotions. We need to have a steadfast mind never to allow negative emotions to affect us for even a moment.

Verse 63

*Like those who take great pleasure in their games,
The bodhisattvas in their every deed
Will feel the greatest joy, exhilaration,
Pleasure that will never fade or pass.*

Through perseverance supported by the 4 forces (i.e. aspiration, firmness, joy and relinquishing), one will come to the stage where whatever one has to do or endure for the sake of others' well-being, one will experience continuous and increasing joy. This is the force of joy. Hence, when a Dharma event at the Centre comes up – there ought to be a sense of so much joy that one cannot sleep and when the event comes to a close, a feeling of sadness that it is finishing! One can observe whether we are applying what we have learned. The realisation of heroic perseverance is the heightened joy that is felt through benefitting sentient beings.

Verse 64

*People labor hard to gain contentment
Though success is very far from sure;
But how can they be happy if they do not labor,
Those whose joy in the work itself?*

In samsara, one puts in hours of hard work each day to gain some small happiness, investing our energy to gain status, money, relationships. Inexhaustible happiness comes through the Bodhisattva conduct and thus, it is worth the effort. There are even some people who employ others and do their best not to close their business to enable their staff to earn a living – this is the Bodhisattva attitude.

Verse 65

*And since I never have enough of pleasure,
Honey on the razor's edge,
How could I have enough of merit,
Fruits of which are happiness and peace?*

Samsaric pleasure can never be satisfying and inevitably declines. If we focus only on samsaric pleasure and never persevere at virtue, how can we obtain everlasting happiness?

Verse 66

*The elephant, tormented by the noonday sun,
Will dive into the waters of a lake,
And likewise I must plunge into this work
That I might bring it to completion.*

Elephants which feel the noon heat, throw themselves into the water to cool themselves. Similarly, one should enter into the task of liberating sentient beings – which is the task of Bodhisattva – to cool the pains of samsara. If we had perseverance, the task of bodhicitta would not require any second thought, one should engage in it to completion.

Verse 67

*If impaired by weakness or fatigue,
I'll lay the work aside, the better to resume.
And I will leave tasks completed,
Anticipating thus the work to come.*

This relates to the force of relinquishing: If one is sick or exhausted, one should weigh one's condition as against what is to be done for sentient beings. It is possible to take a break to recover and regain one's strength to resume the Bodhisattva conduct. The force of relinquishing means not grasping at circumstances. One assess situations calmly. In one's spiritual pursuit, whatever stage of accomplishment one may reach, one should not cultivate the sense of "I have done enough" – e.g. I've done enough good, I've cultivated enough concentration.

Until we attain enlightenment, we should not be complacent. However, at same time, cultivate mind of non grasping.

Verse 68

*As seasoned fighters face the swords
Of enemies upon the battle line,
Lightly dodge the weapons of defilement,
And overcome the foe with nimble skill!*

The 4 forces are accompanied by the 2 strengths , namely (i) the earnest practice of mindfulness and (ii) the strength of controlling one's body, speech and mind. There may be the occasions when we are distracted by negative emotion. When this happens, we should not ignore our emotional mind. We need the help of introspection to regroup, to reinstate one's mindfulness.

Verse 69

*If, in the fray, the soldier drops his sword,
In fright, he swiftly takes it up again.
So likewise, if the arm of mindfulness is lost,
In fear of hell be quick to get it back.*

There is a method of recovering one's mindfulness. The analogy used is that of a soldier in battle fearing for his life, upon dropping his sword will immediately pick up the sword again to protect himself; similarly, when mindfulness is lost, a recollection of hell and suffering will help us to regain mindfulness.

Verse 70

*Just as seeping venom fills the body,
Carried on the current of the blood,
An evil thought that finds its chance,
Will spread and permeate the mind.*

The analogy of poison spreading throughout the body through one's blood is raised here. Negative emotion is like poison, it will fill one's entire being which will bring about more suffering.

Verse 71

*Be like a frightened man, a brimming oil jar in his hand,
And menaced by a swordsman saying:
"Spill one drop and you shall die."
This is how the disciplined should hold themselves.*

Another useful analogy: A frightened man carrying a full jar of oil on his head is suddenly threatened by a person with a sword not to spill any. The fear for his life will cause that man to ensure no spillage occurs. This method can be used to cultivate the disciplined mind through recalling the suffering consequences which come about from deluded actions.

Verse 72

*As such a man would leap in fright
To find a snake coiled in his lap,
If sleep and sluggishness beset me,
I will instantly dispel them.*

One has to engage in mindfulness and introspection at all times, even during one's dream state. The great translator, Lotsawa Rinchen Zangpo always practiced the 3 boundaries, namely (1) the outer boundary of guarding body, speech and mind from negativities (2) the inner boundary which is guarding against the self-centred attitude (3) the intermediate boundary, which guards against the dualistic mind, which arises from not understanding that the nature of existence is that it is empty of inherent existence. As a reminder and mark these boundaries, physical objects like a stone, thread or drawing is set up in the retreat compound, to help one remain in that boundary. The meaning here is to cultivate 3 boundaries which combat negative emotions.

Verse 73

*Every time, then, that I fail,
I will reprove and vilify myself,
Thinking long that by whatever means
Such faults in future shall no more occur.*

When negative emotions affect us, we should recognise it but not be discouraged. We should bring the mind back to mindfulness, back to the Bodhisattva conduct.

Verse 74

*At all times and in any situation,
Mindfulness will be my constant habit.
This will be the cause whereby I aim
To meet with teachers and fulfill the proper tasks.*

With practice of mindfulness, one will see and communicate with Buddha directly and oneself will become the Buddha and fulfil the task of liberating all SB.

Verse 75

*By all means, then, before I start this work,
That I might have the strength sufficient to the task,
I will reflect upon these words on mindfulness
And lightly rise to what is to be done.*

Whatever the situation, I will engage in Bodhisattva conduct, in compassion. With this, one will always have a lively inspirational mind to benefit others. One needs to remind oneself again and again to actualise the benefitting of others in swiftest way and with joy.

Verse 76

*The lichen hanging in the trees wafts to and fro,
Stirred by every breath of wind;
Likewise, all I do will be achieved,
Enlivened by the movements of a joyful heart.*

Like the ripened apple hanging on the tree, any moment able to drop, may our inspiration to engaging in Bodhisattva conduct be like a fully ripened heart, filled with joyous effort.

Chapter 8: Meditation

This chapter on Meditation is not about the technique of concentration. It is to urge cultivation on mindfulness, in particular, the mindfulness of the need to abandon self-cherishing and cherish others as per the Bodhisattva practice because upon achieving this, concentration will naturally arise. One trains and attains concentration through training in bodhicitta.

For meditation to bear fruit, it requires training in preliminary practices. We need to engage in ethical living and renouncing samsara, starting with objects of desire. To even actualise common concentration, one needs to give up clinging to objects of desirous attachment.

Why do we need to be successful in concentration? Without it, we can never eradicate defilements. We need a clear and stable mind to realise emptiness, the absence of inherent existence. Desirous attachment is one of the greatest obstacles to being able to establish concentration. The verses in this chapter are very direct in their advice. Although much of it will appear difficult to carry out, it is worthwhile making a start on them.

Verse 1

After cultivating diligence,

Set your mind to concentrate.

For those whose minds are slack and wandering

Are caught between the fangs of the afflictions.

After undertaking the preliminaries, one can begin on concentration

practice, which in this context refers to focusing one's mind towards virtue and subsequently meditate on emptiness, which is the lack of inherent existence. In other words, emptiness means that whatever we perceive is non-existent from its own side and appears to us as dualistic, due to the interaction between mind and the base (aspects of the whatever object is being perceived).

Our minds are weak and easily distracted. We need to tame our minds and concentration is the rope by which to do so.

Verse 2

*In solitude, the mind and body
Are not troubled by distraction.
Therefore, leave this worldly life
And totally abandon mental wandering.*

Shantideva reveals the conducive conditions which help us actualise concentration and bodhicitta. One should yearn for solitude to practice, to turn away from the worldly life which is exhausting and drags the mind towards purposeless wandering. This is another way of saying "Leave behind a life of negative emotions" and generate compassion.

Verse 3

*Because of loved ones and desire for gain,
Disgust with worldly life does not arise.
These, then, are the first things to renounce.
Such are the reflections of a prudent man.*

We say we wish to escape samsara but in truth, many of us enjoy samsara and want more of it! The inability to develop weariness towards samsara is because of the attachment to temporary pleasures and loved ones. We hardly think of dedicating even one month to meditate on bodhicitta because of considerations of family, career, appointments etc. If we seek happiness, we need to know what the obstacles to achieving it are. Hence, we should learn from Shantideva and those realised ones who renounced their palaces, to enter into lives of cultivation of Dharma.

Verse 4

Penetrative insight joined with calm abiding

Utterly eradicates afflicted states.

Knowing this, first search for calm abiding,

Found by those who joyfully renounce the world.

The reason for us to abandon delusions and afflicted existence is because without doing so, we will remain stuck, not to mention successfully practising the unification of calm abiding and special insight on emptiness, to eradicate all defilements and thereby seize ultimate happiness. One has to therefore start by controlling our minds and directing it towards virtue, through concentration meditation.

Verse 5

Beings, brief, ephemeral,

Who fiercely cling to what is also passing,

Will catch no glimpse of happiness

For many thousands of their future lives.

“Beings” here refer to objects of desirous attachment whose nature is one of impermanence. Even the love that is expressed in ordinary life, is not true happiness but a form of suffering (suffering of change) because it has to end in separation e.g. at death. Ordinary love need not be a problem but we cling and grasp at it with no recollection of its temporariness. In this way, there is no peace in the heart, not a moment of real happiness. When such attachment arises, it starts the chain of intense suffering.

Verse 6

*And thus their minds will have no joy
And therefore will not rest in equanimity.
But even if they taste it, they are not content -
An as before, the pain of longing stays.*

Once the attached mind is activated, it is impossible to have equanimity, thereby making bodhicitta impossible as that requires a level state of mind.

Verse 7

*If I long and crave for other beings,
A veil is cast upon the perfect truth.
Wholesome disillusion melts away,
And finally there comes the sting of pain.*

Craving for others due to attachment happens when we fail to analyse the basis of our attraction and the superficiality of the object of attraction. We do not see the truth i.e. the true contaminated nature of that object of

attachment. If we did, we would be able to see that there is no reason to be attached and thus, gain renunciation of samsara. If we do not make that discovery, we are headed towards pain.

Verse 8

*My thoughts are all for them
And by degrees my life is frittered by.
My family and friends all fade and pass, for whom
The Doctrine is destroyed that leads to indestructibility.*

Living life with a partial mind and in a worldly manner is a complete waste of one's precious human rebirth. There is no reason to feel so strongly about friend, enemy or stranger. Each type of persons is temporary. If we forget this, we have discarded the Dharma.

Verse 9

*For if I act like those who are like children,
Sure it is that I shall fall to lower states.
So why keep company with infants
And go with them in ways so far from virtue?*

We have lived countless lives and suffered a great deal. Why is that we still encounter so much trouble? Because we have been selfish, childish, ignorant of Dharma and indulging in afflictions and temporary pleasures, accumulated very few causes of virtue. All are causes for trouble.

Why then keep company with the childish and non-virtuous friends? From childhood till to old age, we have struggled in samsara but perpetuate the causes for it by making childish friends our constant companions. Instead, have virtuous friends and those who not distract one from virtue.

We might think, “How can I give up my social life? Maybe Shantideva can but I cannot!” Or “If I get sick and I don’t have friends around me, then how?” (Laughter). As previously advised, having friends is not the issue but rather, whether there is clinging. And when we are with friends, does one remember bodhicitta, remember impermanence, recall the lack of inherent existence of friends? One can continue attending one’s ordinary activities but one needs to modify one’s mental outlook – instead of jumping into attachment with the desirous attitude, apply Dharma instead, e.g. generate equanimity, compassion, offer virtue to living beings.

Verse 10

One moment friends,

The next, they’re bitter enemies.

Even pleasant things arouse their discontent;

Worldly people - hard it is to please them!

Don’t be two-headed. You inner self and outer self should be consistent. There is no need to put on a mask. Be considerate but be natural. If one acts with the 8 worldly concerns towards others, one will never have a successful relationship with them. Interact with others with honesty and kindness and never with the 8 worldly concerns (wishing oneself to only have gain and not loss; wishing praise and not criticism; wishing comfort

and to discomfort and wanting good reputation and not bad reputation).

Verse 11

*A beneficial word and they resent it,
While all they do is turn me from the good.
And if to what they say I close my ears,
Their anger burns, the cause of lower states.*

Instead of wearing a mask to please everyone for the sake of let's say one's reputation, we should concentrate on solitude practice and develop the bodhicitta heart as soon as possible. Why solitary practice? Because it is not easy to please ordinary beings - when we give good advice, they often feel hurt; and if one does not do what they wish, they get angry and create the causes for their lower realm rebirths. Hence, better for oneself to cultivate Dharma and if possible, in solitude.

Verse 12

*Jealous of superiors, they vie with equals,
Proud to those below, they strut when praised.
Say something untowards, they seethe with rage;
What good was ever had from childish folk?*

This is the appearance of childish ordinary beings: Jealous of those who have more qualities, compete with even friends, are arrogant and with others. There is little to be gained from mixing with such childish beings.

Verse 13

*Keep company with them and what will follow?
Self-aggrandizement and scorn for others,
Talk about the “good things” of samsara -
Every kind of vice is sure to come.*

Having negative friends as regular company, will only result in praising samsara, increasing one’s self-centred mind, engaging in negative conduct and accumulating more karma for suffering.

Try to infuse your mind with Dharma – whatever you see in your house, see it as the Buddha; when searching for something to read, choose a Dharma book. The more positive imprints you have, the more likely you will remain in virtue.

Verse 14

*Only ruin can result
From links like these, between yourself and others.
For they will bring no benefit to you,
And you in turn can bring them nothing good.*

If we keep spending our life in endless social gatherings, it will be a total waste of time. There will be no benefit to them nor to you.

Verse 15

Therefore flee the company of childish people.

Greet them, when you meet, with smiles

That keep on terms of pleasant courtesy,

While not inviting close familiarity.

Run away from childish people. If they invite you out, politely say you have something else to do (find something to do, read Bodhicaryavatara!) When meeting childish people, be pleasant but don't closely associate with them. First, delete their phone contact; then delete their email contact; then stop communication with them altogether BUT NEVER abandon them from your heart – pray for them, dedicate to them all your virtues that they too eventually lead virtuous lives and have happiness.

Verse 16

Therefore flee the company of childish people.

Greet them, when you meet, with smiles

That keep on terms of pleasant courtesy,

While not inviting close familiarity.

When meeting new people, treat everyone equally. Go along with that which accords with Dharma; and walk away from that which contradicts Dharma, without judging the anyone because we appearances are deceptive.

Verse 17

*“Oh, I am rich, surrounded by attention,
I have so much, and life is wonderful!”
Nourish such complacency and later,
After death, your fears will start!*

This verse advises us on how to think about our worldly possessions. We need to develop contentment towards our wealth, gains, name, fame. Never be aggressive about acquiring these. As a Dharma practitioner, obsessing over possessions and samsaric gains undermines one’s spiritual development.

Verse 18

*Indeed, O foolish and afflicted mind,
You want, you crave for everything,
This “everything” will grow and turn
To suffering increased a thousandfold.*

If we do not awaken from the ignorant, egoistic, self grasping I that craves for samsaric gain, everything one does is creating negative karma, as it would be supporting the mistaken “I “.

Verse 19

*Indeed, O foolish and afflicted mind,
You want, you crave for everything,
This “everything” will grow and turn
To suffering increased a thousandfold.*

It is crucial to gain the wisdom of not being controlled by the clinging, self-centred mind. Frequently remind oneself of the negative impact of ignorance and self grasping. We are seeking liberation from suffering.

Verse 20

*For people may have gained a wealth of riches,
Enjoying reputation, sweet renown.
But who can say where they have gone to now,
With all the baggage of their gold and fame?*

Very sarcastic! Yet realistic. Kings and rich people who were famous and had many people around them, yet for those who had wealth but no mind of compassion, where are they now? I have wondered about people like Colonel Saunders of Kentucky Fried Chicken, his picture and fame is everywhere but I wonder where he is now? From the karmic point of view, his business caused the deaths of so many chickens. The karma is heavy.

Verse 21

*Why should I be pleased when people praise me?
Others there will be who scorn and criticize.
And why despondent when I'm blamed,
Since there'll be others who think well of me?*

This verse cautions against the 8 worldly concerns (wishing oneself to only have gain and not loss; wishing praise and not criticism; wishing comfort and to discomfort and wanting good reputation and not bad reputation).

Verse 22

*So many are the wants and tendencies of beings,
Even Buddha could not please them all -
Of such an evil man as me no need to speak!
Better to give up such worldly thoughts.*

Shantideva is lamenting about how difficult it is to tame afflicted sentient beings. Even the Buddha could not please and subdue all, what more to say of himself (Shantideva is being humble).

There is no point in seeking worldly praise and gains. All worldly concerns should be renounced. Cultivate the pure, bodhicitta heart. As long as you have that, you are benefitting numberless beings. Not all beings will appreciate one's practice of the good heart. For instance, Devadatta, Goshali and those 6 non-Buddhist scholars who challenged the Buddha, were all displeased with the Buddha but it did not discourage the Buddha who proceeded to benefit the world. So it's no point trying to think that everyone can be pleased by oneself. Thinking so is merely a worldly concern.

Verse 23

*People scorn the poor who have no wealth,
They also criticize the rich who have it.
What pleasure can derive from keeping company
With people such as these, so difficult to please?*

This verse explains the nature of worldly-minded people who are difficult to please and the futility of associating with them. Rather, put

effort in cultivating bodhicitta and when you attain that, you can benefit them thoroughly.

Q&A

Q: Lamas in monasteries train themselves to concentrate and are strict about what they read and think. But to do concentration meditation effectively, doesn't one need to first see the "outside" life and its faults in order to have the motivation to engage in concentration?

Ans: Many sangha in monasteries are there out of their own choice. They want to live that life, train in that way and even enjoy that life. It is difficult to compare monastic life and worldly life through mere observation. Samsaric life has been experienced numberless times to the point of one being numb from it. That is why there is the (monastic) view that there is no way to be liberated in samsara and the pursuit for freedom from it, arises.

Those who enter monastery as young monks play like any other young kids but as they grow up, there is an increasing awareness that the problems of family life and worldly life are heavy and thus monastic life much better. I agree that one cannot force people to do anything. Even our Gurus and the Buddha gave us the choice.

Buddha said to be open-minded and to explore the Dharma and if found to be suitable, then there is no compulsion to adopt any of it. No forcing. It is true that some monks give up the monastic life and an Abbot would always persuade monks to remain as monk but will not force the monk to remain in the Sangha life. Like our late Khensur Rinpoche (ex-Abbot of Kopan Monastery), he cared for the monks like a mother and a father rolled

into one. Some monks wanted to disrobe. He would try to persuade them to stay but if they were determined to go, he would never be an obstacle to their leaving. In fact, after they left, he would continue to help them – he would call ex-monks in that place to help the newly disrobed monks through offering food and shelter wherever possible. Khensur Rinpoche did this for a long time.

There are some monks who live a lay life but do not disrobe. There are specific procedures and circumstances in the Vinaya which permit the returning of the vows, so under those circumstances, disrobing doesn't arise. There is some karmic consequence from this but it is not as heavy as breaking the vows. Also, disrobing is not always due to being pressured by monastic life. Not all Sangha are fully realised beings. Some are Arya beings and Buddhas but some are merely ordinary practitioners struggling to practice. Some Sangha were very wild before but lived the monastic life for 10 years and then disrobed. That may seem a waste to you but the point is that everyone who knew them before and after, could see the benefit those 10 years as a Sangha had on that person.

Q: How do we reconcile love and detachment in lay life?

Ans: *Based on Shantideva's teaching, we have to renounce in order to develop unconditional love towards all. Another way is that when one already has a family, one can outwardly express love to bring stability to the family-relationship but inwardly, one should recollect the transient nature of life, let go self-centredness ; interact with one's partner in a kind and virtuous way. For example, a wife may have been waiting for a nice gift during an anniversary. Waiting for 11 months in a calm way. But the anniversary day comes and no gift is offered, anger then arises. This upset*

mind must be abandoned. And if a gift is given e.g. when the husband gives his wife a diamond, offer it not merely to please the worldly wishes of the wife but give it with good motivation and a prayer for it to be a cause to be more loving and beneficial to others.

If both husband and wife are Buddhist practitioners and the goal is to ensure the happiness of all living beings, then even if one's partner does something that annoys you, you should not be disturbed because each of you are working for the benefit of others and to make others' happy. Make love unconditional i.e. without expectation.

Q: How can there be detachment in a mother's love for her child and family?

Ans: *According to Shantideva, the same reasoning applies. Having anything, including ordinary love, is not the problem. The big problem lies in the clinging and non-recollection of impermanence, the partial love, the forgetting of the nature of reality i.e. that all lack inherent existence. These are all worldly and contaminated and should be renounced.*

Verse 24

*Unless they have their way in everything,
These children are bereft of happiness.
And so, shun friendship with the childish,
Thus the Tathagata has declared.*

Verse 25

*In woodlands, haunt of stag and bird,
Among the trees where no dissension jars,
It's there I would keep pleasant company!
When might I be off to make my swelling there?*

After renouncing the company of worldly beings (remember that not associating with childish people does not mean abandoning them from our heart and prayers), one should:

- rely on a qualified teacher
- learn the unmistakable technique of meditation
- go to a conducive place for meditation like the forest or cave (especially blessed places where holy beings have been) surrounded by innocence (like mild animals) and not be distracted by the discrimination of others towards you,

so that you can cultivate with a peaceful mind. If one is not able to go to cave, one's own house can also be used as a meditation place. Where possible, invite relics to one's altar. Avoid mixing with childish friends so as not to influence your mind towards worldly activities. If space permits, have a room in your house which only you use for prayers and meditation. For the concentration practitioner, one should be more disciplined about the number of people one interacts with. One may be busy with ordinary life now but pray that there will come a time where one has the conditions to do perfect practice.

Verse 26

*When shall I depart to make my home
In cave or empty shrine or under spreading tree,
With, in my breast, a free, unfettered heart,
Which never turns to cast a backward glance?*

The verse here expresses the longing for the place for meditation where one can settle one's heart and practice un-disturbed. Geshe Lama Konchog once said that when he was aged 6, he asked where he could go to practice. He was told, "The monastery". Later in his life, when Geshela had to flee Lhasa in 1959, he went into retreat in a cave in Tibet called Takatagtso (where Milarepa displayed the sign of the highest concentration by being able to fly from one mountain to another). He spent a few years in retreat in this cave.

As one of the practitioner's habits is not to be attached to one place, he then went to Cave of Doves in Nepal where he stayed 26 years in meditation. Lama Yeshe then instructed Kyabje Lama Zopa Rinpoche to invite Geshe Lama Konchog to Kopan. Rinpoche did not know where Lama Konchog was, so he did Protector Puja everyday and one day, Geshe Lama Konchog appeared and said, " I didn't come down to remain here; I came for a purpose ". Geshe Lama Konchog used to say that doing his retreat in the cave was challenging but he did it on the basis of devotion to his teacher and the Dharma.

If one practices with pure devotion to Guru and Dharma, one will never starve. As proof of this point, Buddha had once asked a disciple to search for the bones of a meditator who died of starvation and the disciple despite

searching far and wide, could not find nor hear of any account where a genuine meditator died from starvation. Instead, he found a high pile of bones of rich men who died from starvation.

Verse 27

*When shall I depart to make my home
In cave or empty shrine or under spreading tree,
With, in my breast, a free, unfettered heart,
Which never turns to cast a backward glance?*

This is the kind of place to practice meditation. One that is free from distraction. Humans are the greatest distraction. More so than ghosts.

Verse 28

*When might I be free of fear,
Without the need to hide from anyone,
With just a begging bowl and few belongings,
Dressed in garments coveted by none?*

Have no worry about possessions and appearances. The late Geshe Lama Konchog used the robe he was wearing on the day he left the monastery to do retreat in the cave and never had another robe for 26 years. Physically, he looked terrible and poorly at the end of the retreat but his mind was completely free from unease, fear or shame. Totally free from attachment.

Verse 29

*And going to the charnel ground,
When shall I compare
My body with the dry bones there,
So soon to fall to nothing, all alike?*

Externally, we have intense attachment to possessions and our physical bodies. We spend a lot of water, soap, creams just to wash ourselves; we eat excessively; for garments, we use silk which means taking so many lives of silkworms, to cover ourselves. We should think that the fate of our body is decay and death, like the bones on the charnel ground, why then be attached to this body? In short, meditate on impermanence.

Verse 30

*This form of mine, this very flesh,
Is soon to give out such a stench
That even jackals won't come close -
For that indeed is all its destiny.*

We should meditate how this very flesh that we slave over, is in its nature is filthy and smelly at death, such that even animals would not want to come close. Our body is headed towards destruction, so there is no point in clinging to it.

Verse 31

*This body, now so whole and integral,
This flesh and bones that life has knit together,
Will drift apart, disintegrate.
And how much more will friend depart from friend!*

In the olden days of sky-burial, the burial assistants would bring a big hammer to break the skull of the deceased, with blood and body fluids spurting out and innards getting dragged out to feed the birds. When viewing this, would you still say “I love you and please come to me “?

Verse 32

*Alone we're born, alone we come into the world,
And when we die, alone we pass away.
For no one shares our fate, and none our suffering.
So what are they to me, such “friends” and all their hindrances?*

Why have a partial mind towards friends and enemies? When we die, we go alone; everyone goes into decay, therefore waste no energy on being discriminatory.

Verse 33

*Like those who journey on the road,
Who halt and make a pause along the way,
Beings on the pathways of the world,
All halt, and pause, and take their birth.*

When we go on a journey, we occasionally stop at a hotel, get a room,

mess it up and give little thought about the condition of the room when we leave. Likewise our existence in samsara - i.e. we enter samsara again and again, make a mess, leave, and into the next hotel and repeat the habit. We learn nothing and re-experience suffering over and over.

Verse 34

*Until the time comes round
When four men carry me away,
Amid the tears and sighs of worldly folk -
Till then, I will away and go into the forest.*

Why worry about who will attend to our dead body at our death? There is no need to worry. One should long for a place where one does not have to associate with friends and family and just concentrate on cultivation and when death comes, let one's body be consumed by animals or by nature.

Verse 35

*There, with no befriending or begrudging,
I will stay alone in solitude,
Considered from the outset as already dead,
Thus, when I die, a source of pain to none.*

Our current existence is quite complicated, isn't it? Families and friends surround us, all having suffering yet busying themselves with arrangements for us. We should prepare to remain in a place where one can be free from all this and spare everyone from inconvenience.

Verse 36

*And likewise, staying all alone,
The sound of mourning will be hinder me.
And no one will be there distracting me
From thinking of the Buddha and the practice.*

The benefit of dying alone is that one will not be distracted by loved ones in mourning and be free from distraction when thinking of the Buddha.

After death, the person gains some level of clairvoyance i.e. one is able to have some level of perception of others' thoughts. If one's mind at that time is not well infused with Dharma, upon observing the events going on around one's death could trigger a negative state of mind, propelling one to be reborn in the lower realms. Dying in solitude does not pose this problem. Unless one has the understanding that all the Buddhas are of one taste, during the death process, one could be confused as to which Buddha image to follow. Confusion itself is a negative state of mind. To help a dying person, it is helpful for first know what practice the dying person is most familiar with. That practice is one to perform in order to reinforce a virtuous mind. Many Lamas have attendants who will not only take care of funeral arrangements but is the one who knows which practice his Lama did most often.

Q: For a beginner who has taken Highest Yoga Tantra initiations but is more familiar with non-HYT practices, which practice is best?

Ans: *Best is to understand that all Buddhas are of one taste, then whichever practice is fine. When Geshe Lama Konchog was passing away, he had a*

medical drip. He pulled it out. We were busy with bringing holy objects to him but he advised, “Don’t move around. Remain quiet and calm”. This was because he already knew what to practice. For 7 days, total silence. When it was decided that he should be requested him to end his clear-light meditation, the special sutra was recited and a bell rung. Then he passed away and his body slumped and a small bit of blood came through his nose (sign of consciousness departing)

Q: Organ donation – what state of mind would the body be if one has donated one’s organs.

Ans: *If one was fully content and ready to donate the organ with good motivation, no negative mind will arise.*

Verse 37

*Therefore in these lovely gleaming woods,
With joy that’s marred by few afflictions,
I shall pacify all mental wandering,
And there remain in blissful solitude.*

Living in solitude is not enough. One should renounce all objects and places of attachment. Dwell with a mind of blissful cultivation. Doing retreat in a luxurious place and with rich food can become samsaric distraction!

Verse 38

*Relinquishing all other aspirations,
Focusing myself on one intent alone,
I'll strive to still my mind,
And, calming it, to bring it to subjection.*

One should renounce all samsara – comfort, happiness, respect, status etc and focus on only one goal, to actualise enlightenment. For only when one is a Buddha can one be of extensive benefit to all sentient beings. To attain this goal, one then resolves to do it through solitary retreat.

Verse 39

*In this and every other world,
Desire's the fertile parent of all conflict.
Here in this world, bonds and wounds and death,
And in the next, a hell is all prepared.*

Verse 40

*You send your go-betweens, both boy and maid,
With many invitations for the prize,
Avoiding, in the quest, no sin,
No deed that brings an ill renown,*

“Desire is the fertile parent of all conflict”– attachment is a cause of all conflict and suffering. If we fail to free ourselves from its chains, destruction, hardship, suffering and a hell rebirth are the only things that await us. Abandon desirous attachments and negative karma can then end.

Verse 41

*Nor acts of frightful risk,
Nor loss and ruin of both goods and wealth -
And all for pleasure and the perfect bliss,
That utmost penetrating kiss*

Verse 42

*Of what in truth is nothing but a heap of bones,
Devoid of self, without its own existence!
Is this the only object of desire and lust?
Sooner pass beyond all suffering and grief!*

Seeking to fulfil desires and sensual pleasures, will ruin past merits and exhaust life, health and wealth. Look at some of the stories in Hindi love stories – so much destruction of virtues due to giving into desire! (Laughter). The body is merely a heap of bones, blood and pus and ultimately, empty of inherent existence.

Verse 43

*Oh what pains you went through just to draw the veil,
And lift the face that modestly looked down.
That face which, looked upon or not,
Was always carefully concealed.*

This is a reflection on the unclean nature of the human body. We have created so many causes for samsara due to attachment towards desirous objects. At the end of the day, one is grasping towards only the outer skin,

a mask which covers a disgusting inner body of contamination. Desire creates confusion so one does not see the contamination.

Verse 44

*That face for which you languished so....
Well, here it is, now nakedly exposed.
The crows have done their work for you to see.
What's this? You run away so soon?*

If the person whom one is attached to, had his/her skin removed or that person becomes a corpse filled with maggots or the body is smashed into a bloody heap for the birds to consume, would you still be desire it? No.

Verse 45

*That body that you guarded jealously
And shielded from the eyes of other men,
What, miser that you are, you don't protect it,
Now that it's the food of graveyard birds?*

Here, one is asked to meditate on one's jealous mind over an object of attachment. A huge amount of negative karma comes from jealousy. One carefully guards against others looking at one's object of attachment, one has much insecurity due to lack of Dharma; one is totally devoid of understanding of the nature of the samsaric body of one's lover, leading to one living life with so much grasping. In the end, the body of the object of attachment decays and becomes the food of graveyard birds. All that anxiety and effort for nothing.

Verse 46

*Look, this mass of human flesh,
Soon to be the fare of carrion beasts,
You deck with flowers, sandalwood, and jewels,
And yet it is the provender of others!*

The body and face is like a mask that is decorated with ornaments. When the body becomes a corpse, you would not longer want to stay together with that corpse. One's body can be viewed as a ghost which breathes and is temporarily covered with the mask of a loved one's face. Meditate this way.

Verse 47

*Look again, these heaps of bones --
Inert and dead. Why, what are you so scared of?
Why did you not fear them when they walked around
And moved with ease, like deadly revenants?*

The person whom one has strong sensual desire towards should be regarded as no more than a ghostly form because the real nature of a person is one that will degenerate into a heap of bones.

We often deny that we have samsaric attachment to our loved ones. Let us test this: If one's wish to be near a loved one was not samsaric, one's feeling towards the loved one - whether in the appearance as he/she is now or in the appearance of a corpse that your loved one will be some day - should remain the same. Yet this is not the case. We only want our loved ones as they are but would wish not to be near their corpse.

The reason for Shantideva's directness in these verses is to compel us to take an honest look at our so-called love and care for others. They are mostly based on afflicted emotions, on attachment and hence can bring no real benefit to our loved ones nor to ourselves.

Verse 48

*You loved them once, when clothed and draped they were.
Well, now they're naked, why do you not want them?
Ah, you say, your lust is no more there,
But why did you embrace them, all bedecked and covered?*

Why do we not have physical attraction to the corpse of a loved one? The answer is that we are only attracted to superficial aspects like smooth skin, external appearance, clothes they wear etc.

Verse 49

*From food, a single source, come equally
Their bodies' filth, the honey -nectar of their mouths.
So why are you delighted by saliva,
And yet revolted by their excrement?*

This human body is basically contaminated. Clean food that is consumed comes out as excrement. Yet when one is afflicted by desire, our perceptions get distorted and biased. One might even feel that the person's saliva is like nectar. If so, why not treat that person's excrement the same way, after

all both are from the same source of food? This is how our mind can play tricks on us.

Verse 50

*Taking no delight in pillows,
Soft though they may be to touch and stroke,
You claim the human form emits no evil stench;
You don't know what is clean, befooled by lust!*

Verse 51

*Lustful ones, befuddled by desire,
Because you cannot copulate with them,
You angrily find fault with pillows,
Even though they're smooth and soft to touch!*

Why do we take human beings as partners or husbands and wives? You may answer that humans are comforting and soft to touch. Then why not take a pillow as a partner? You respond that one cannot copulate with a pillow. Copulation is from desire which only brings exhaustion of strength and merits.

The arguments in favour of desire fall flat in the face of logic. All are confused thinking. There is nothing wrong in having family life but one needs to guard against clinging. There are many practitioners who have families and live meaningful lives without contradicting Dharma. We need to know how to extract the essence of life.

Verse 52

*And if you have no love for filth,
How can you coddle on your lap
A cage of bones tied fast with sinews
Plastered over with the mud of flesh?*

Sometimes we stroke our own skin and admire its smoothness. That too is an aspect of desire; a mistaken attraction towards the object of faults i.e. one's body, which is merely bones tied with sinews and flesh and destined for decay. Our loved ones are likewise.

Verse 53

*The reason is you're full of filth yourself,
And wallow in it constantly.
It is indeed just dirt that you desire,
And therefore long for other sacks of filth!*

Our body which is made of 36 unclean substances like mucus, excrement, urine, pus, blood, substances of parents, delusions, negative karma etc. The causes of this body are unclean, so the result will definitely be unclean. Yet we are totally attached to this "sack of filth"! We need shake ourselves off of desirous objects, which includes worldly existence/samsara because that too has causes that are impure. This can be achieved through reflection on the faults of samsara.

Verse 54

*“But it’s the skin and flesh I love
To touch and look upon.”
Then why do you not wish for flesh alone,
Inanimate and in its natural state?*

The debate continues. One may justify one’s samsaric attraction to another by saying that one enjoys skin and flesh. But if that is the case, then why is one not attracted to a slab of meat on the table? This shows that being attracted is not due to external factors but the mind consumed by desire.

Verse 55

*The mind of the beloved you so much desire
Eludes your touch; this mind you cannot see.
Nothing that the sense perceives is mind,
So why indulge in pointless copulation?*

If one then says that one loves the mind of the other, let us analyse: One cannot touch another person’s mind nor see it, so what is the source of this attraction? Further, if one is attracted to the other person’s mind, why the need to indulge in physical sexual relations?

Verse 56

*To fail to understand the unclean nature
Of another's flesh is not perhaps so strange.
But not to see the filthy nature
Of oneself is very strange indeed!*

As long as we can be free desirous attachment to one's own body, it will be possible to do likewise in relation to others' bodies. To gain this freedom, one should start by meditating on discovering the unappealing nature of one's body.

Verse 57

*Why does the mind, intent on filthiness,
Neglect the fresh young lotus blossom,
Opened in the sunlight of a cloudless sky,
To take joy rather in a sack of dirt?*

We are superficially attracted to a person's beauty giving rise to attachment, without discovering the actual degenerating nature of the body. Instead of cultivating renunciation, like a lotus blossom freeing itself from the muddy pond, one continues to remain stuck in the filth of samsara.

Verse 58

*And since you're disinclined to touch
A place or object grimed with excrement,
Why wish to touch the body
Whence such excrement has come?*

Verse 59

*And f you have no craving for impurity,
Why will you now embrace and kiss
What comes from such an unclean place,
Engendered likewise from an unclean seed?*

Since one is disgusted to touch an object which has been touched with excrement, why are we so attached to a body from which excrement is produced? If we say we have no interest in impurity or un-cleanliness, why then engage in desirous activities since the partner has a body of contamination and has been produced by the unclean place of a mother's womb filled with blood and pus?

Verse 60

*The fetid worms that live filth -
You have no love for them, not even little ones.
And yet you're lusting for a human form,
From filth arisen and replete with it!*

Verse 61

*Toward your won impurity
Disgust you do not feel; but what is more,
Attracted to the ordure of an unclean sack,
You long to touch the body of another!*

Verse 62

*Pleasant substances like camphor,
Rice, and fresh green herbs -
Put them in your mouth and spit them out:
The ground itself is rendered foul with it!*

The worms that feed on garbage and waste hold no appeal to us. Yet we crave for the human form upon which maggots and germs feed on. No matter how clean or wholesome the food we consume, once processed by our body, comes out dirty. This is the nature of our body.

Verse 63

*If still you doubt such filthiness,
Though it is very plain for all to see,
Go off into the charnel grounds, observe
The fetid bodies there abandoned.*

Verse 64

*If when their skins are peeled away,
They make you feel great horror and revulsion,
How, having seen this, later on,
Can you desire and crave for such an object?*

If we cannot subdue our minds in respect of the objects of desire e.g. house, car jewellery and loved ones still appear so attractive and worthwhile, go to the cemetery and there, reflect on the rotting bodies in the graves. Ask oneself whether one is still attracted to the (dead) body or not?

In Chod practice – Eliminating the Vital Point of Self Grasping – practitioners are encouraged to do meditation practice in cemeteries in order to gain genuine renunciation of samsara and realisations on bodhicitta and emptiness. Many masters have gained enlightenment on account of this practice.

Verse 65

*The scent that now perfumes the skin
Is sandalwood and nothing else.
Yet how is that one thing's fragrance
Causes you to long for something else?*

If one says that one's desire for a person is due to the perfumed skin, Shantideva questions how is it that the fragrance from an inanimate object like sandalwood, can bring about craving for physical sexual relations? It is purely due to the desirous mind, not the object itself. So it is the mind that needs to be analysed and trained.

Those who are doing deity yoga, when putting on perfume, should visualise offering the perfume or Gande to the deity. This motivation which is not based on desire but on the Dharma practice of making respectful offerings to the Buddhas. In this way, when others encounter your scent, will not have their attachment aroused but their virtuous mind activated.

There was a monk in Solo Khumbu who due to past karmic imprints, had a strong urge for facial powder and as he could not source it in that remote

place, he would go to the kitchen to put flour on his face. Such is the karma which comes from actions and habits from past lives. When Kyabje Lama Zopa Rinpoche washes his face, he chants and offers that as the bath offering to cleanse his conventional form and the environment and emerge in nirmanakaya form.

Verse 66

*Surely it is best to cease to long
For what by nature gives off evil smells.
Yet worldly people's lusts are all confused -
To what end do they daub the flesh with perfumes?*

Verse 67

*For if this scent in fact is sandalwood,
How will we now describe the body's odors?
And how is it that one thing's fragrance
Causes you to long for something else?*

No matter how much perfume we put on, it does not alter the fact that the body is in the nature of foul smells. When Shantideva was teaching this text, there were many lay people in the audience, which is why these verses are aimed at the ordinary, lay person's life. As you already know, although Shantideva was seen to outwardly do only the three things of eating, sleeping and defecating but in truth, we would be composing these Dharma verses, hidden from view.

Verse 68

*With lanky hair, with long nails overgrown,
With dirty teeth, and reeking with the stink of slime,
This body, naked, as it is, untended,
Is indeed a nightmare to behold!*

We are attracted to external appearances. If left unattended our hair would grow long, our teeth dirty and smelly – a fearful sight indeed, so why should we be so attached.

Verse 69

*Why go to such excess to clean and polish
What is but a weapon that will injure us?
The cares that people squander on themselves in ignorance
Convulse the universe with madness.*

Verse 70

*Did you see the heaps of human bones
And feel revulsion in the charnel ground?
Then why such pleasure in your cities of the dead,
Frequented by such skeletons that live and move?*

No need to put so much effort on external beauty, as such activities are nothing more than a mind of attachment in motion. Acting purely on delusions creates immense negative karma, hence we need to be mindful and do away with such behaviour. By reflecting in this way, the conclusion that will arise is that attachment towards objects of desire i.e. those of the

5 senses and of the mind, only brings sorrow and suffering.

Verse 71

*What's more, possession of another's filth
Is not be acquired free of charge.
All is at a price: exhaustion in this life,
And in the next, the suffering of hell!*

The result of indulging in attachment is exhaustion of good karma and lower realms rebirths.

Attachment not only requires effort but comes at a high price i.e. the loss of peace of mind and merits. In a documentary India recently, it was found that the female population has declined to the point that in one State, men seeking wives would bring beds, TVs to villages which had many women, in order to entice them to become their wives.

Everywhere in the world, weddings cost a lot of money. Karmically, marriages are not free of charge either as the couples have to surrender their entire freedom to fulfil samsaric needs. So much negative karma is created and in the next life, a hell rebirth. What a tragedy.

Verse 72

*To pay the bride-price young men are unable.
So while they're young, what joy is there for them?
Their lives are spent to gain sufficient wealth,
By hem they're old - too old to satisfy their lust!*

In many places like India, when men are young, they have no money to pay dowry for their brides. So they then spend their lives gathering wealth. And when they do get married, they continue spending their remaining days accumulating possessions. Then old age comes and dissatisfaction still prevails.

Verse 73

*Some are miserable as well as lustful.
For worn out by their day - long work,
They go home broken with fatigue,
To sleep the slumbers of a corpse!*

Many people endure great hardships to earn a livelihood but add to their sufferings by being desirous as well. Some even have multiple partners! I once met a man who had a wife in each country where he had business in. Due to exhaustion, one then sleeps like a corpse.

Verse 74

*Some, obliged to travel far abroad,
Must suffer separation from their wives,
From children separation whom they love and long to see.
They do not meet with them for years on end.*

Attachment leading to obligations e.g. spouses, family, close-friends, results in separation bringing much suffering and possible misunderstandings as well. In one life, a partner may be close and loving; in another life, the partner may be unfaithful. Hence, relationships based on attachment simply cannot be relied upon and instead, one needs to have virtuous relationships.

Q: How to prepare to be able to renounce?

Ans: *Renunciation in a lay person's life means to let go of the clinging and grasping attitude. Reflect of impermanence and death; cultivate equanimity; generate great compassion and deeply contemplate on how all persons and things lack inherent existence. Externally interact as normal with family members and others. Internally, separate from worldliness. If financially one is stable, reduce meaningless business meetings and social gatherings & spend more time in practice (but if cannot avoid these, then take care of one's motivation for attending the functions and guard against anger and attachment etc from arising. After all, having lots of friends for entertainment is not necessary as there are many Dharma things to do (time is not enough!). If there is a concern for one's health when living alone, have someone who is virtuous minded or at least not against your Dharma practice, to look in on you from time to time.*

Renunciation in terms of ordination – Cultivate have very few wants and constantly meditate on the topics mentioned earlier. Join a proper monastery with good teachers.

Q: We are supposed to treat everyone the same but what about one's mother who sacrificed everything for us? Shouldn't we adjust and this means not always treating everyone the same?

Ans: *We have been adjusting for limitless lives and we are still in samsara, unable to help anyone fully. Of course, we should cherish one's mother but we need to cherish the neighbour's mother and the neighbour in exactly same way and towards all living beings.*

Q: What about gays and lesbians – do the verses advising against desire apply?

Ans: *Yes they do. It is all about the attachment to body and sensual pleasures and the problems and sufferings that brings.*

Verse 75

*Some, ambitious for advancement,
Not knowing how to get it, sell themselves.
Happiness eludes their grasp, and pointlessly
They live, in bondage to their masters.*

Verse 76

*Some completely sell themselves,
No longer free, in slavery to others.
And, destitute, their wives give birth
With only trees for shelter, in the wilderness.*

Due to ignorance and desire, sell their families to get what they want; some parents in poor communities sell their children for money or sell oneself as a slave to others by working in terrible conditions, indulge in samsaric activities and incur worldly obligations which lock them into suffering even further. Hence, ignorance and desire make it almost impossible to do solitary practice.

Verse 77

*Fools ensnared by craving for a livelihood
Decide that they will make their fortune
In the wars, though fearful for their lives.
And seeking gain, it's slavery they get.*

Any samsaric purpose will only result in meaningless lives, negative karma and indescribably suffering.

Verse 78

*Some, as fruits of their ambition,
Have their bodies slashed, impaled on pointed stakes.
Some are wounded, run through by the lance,
While some are put to death by fire.*

Even those engaged in spiritual practice, get trapped into craving for liberation within samsara, which is impossible or crave for rebirth in desire realms gods or engage in abusing their bodies through piercings, lying on fire etc.

Verse 79

*The trouble guarding what we have, the pain of losing all!
See the endless hardships brought on us by wealth!
Those distracted by their love of riches
Never have a moment's rest from sorrows of existence.*

We mistakenly think that wealth will bring happiness, that the more things we have, the happier we will be. We never feel we have enough. Truth is, all these are sources of suffering. The more possessions we have, the more craving we have; the more anxiety we have. Take the example of a new mobile phone – initially, there may be some excitement over the new gadget but soon trouble comes – have to re-install data, have to keep it safely! (Laughter).

Helping others with the motivation of getting rich is worldly thinking. Although generosity is the cause for wealth, being rich should never be the motivation for giving to others. That would not be Dharma; it would be merely wishing for more samsara. Best to strive for liberation and enlightenment. Although that may take time, having such a motivation will bring about conducive conditions to continue to practice. I know of a family where the husband and wife were a loving pair but the husband had no peace of mind in his business, pursuing wealth. One day his business

failed but he was able to understand karma and was able to renounce the difficulty of business-failure. With the full support of his wife, he gained a sense of peace. There is also a case of an elderly American who had been extremely wealthy but had no sense of contentment – finally he renounced, gave away his wealth and now leads a happy and peaceful life.

Verse 80

*They indeed, possessed of many wants,
Will suffer many troubles, all for very little:
Mouthfuls of the hay the oxen get
As recompense for having pulled the cart!*

People who indulge in desire suffer a great deal. One has to undergo a lot just to get a small amount of temporary pleasure, like the ox who only gets some hay in exchange for the hard work of pulling the cart.

Verse 81

*The cattle's fodder! - not so very rare-
And for the sake of such a petty thing,
Tormented by their karma they destroy
This precious human life so hard to find.*

We are ready to ruin our precious human rebirth for the sake of very little worldly pleasure. Some of the shepherds who have no knowledge of the precious human rebirth, spend their whole life looking after 3 sheep. In our case, we have met the Dharma, met Dharma teachers and seen

live examples of the great fruits of cultivation e.g. the realised ones like Kyabje Lama Zopa Rinpoche. If having all these conditions, we do not engage in Dharma and focus our lives on attachment to people, wealth and samsaric goals, we would have destroyed the value of our precious human rebirth.

Verse 82

*All that we desire is sure to perish,
And afterwards we fall to hellish torment.
The constant, minor troubles we endure
Are all for what amounts to very little!*

Happiness derived from a desirous mind is totally unstable. Any interference with the object of attachment brings huge upset. Happiness from Dharma however, can never be stolen and is everlasting.

Verse 83

*But with the millionth part of such vexation
Enlightenment itself could be attained!
The pains the lustful take exceed by far the trials
encountered on the path,
And at the end the fruit is very far from Buddhahood!*

If we continue to attach to the deceptive goals of samsara, the peerless happiness of Buddhahood is impossible. One small effort in Dharma practice can bring about the mighty fruit of Buddhahood; whereas monumental

effort in samsara brings only poisoned fruit. Think about this.

Verse 84

*Reflect upon the horrors of the states of sorrow!
Weapons, poisons, fires, and yawning chasm,
Hostile foes - these worldly pains are slight
Compare with what we get as fruit of our desire!*

The sufferings of war are nothing compared to the sufferings caused by desire. One can only see this with the calm mind of meditation. The ordinary waking mind is too distracted to be able to see this.

Verse 85

*And so, revolted by our lust and wanting,
Let us now rejoice in solitude,
In places where all strife and conflict cease,
The peace and stillness of the greenwood.*

Let us rejoice in solitude in the forest and conducive place for meditation as there will be no object of desire to distract oneself. Using the technique of Vinaya practices on concentrated meditation, one can be free from all forms of desire.

When we Kopan monks walk from monastery to Boudha, local Nepalis sometimes stop us to ask how we can survive without marriage and relations with women. We tell them in all honesty, how good and happy

our lives are. Through living in proper Vinaya practice, there is no sexual desire – it is as if one has plucked out one’s desirous heart and thrown it away. How peaceful.

Although there is a view that it would be better for a person to first experience ordinary life and only later become a monk, NO. After all, we have been born as lay people many times in the past, so there is no need to enhance lay-life imprint further! It is best to become a monk or nun around 7 years of age.

If one trains in concentration, one can totally overcome desire. Some people try to distract the monks away from Vinaya but the point is that the bliss from training one’s mind is unbelievable. In solitude, there is no social strife and conflict. Why are monastic rules strict? Because of the potential influence and distraction that comes from dwelling with lay people. Most of the Tibetan Kadampa masters lived their lives according to this text.

Verse 86

*In pleasant dwellings formed of massive stone,
And cooled by sandal trees beneath the moon,
In woodlands wafted by the gentle breeze,
Our minds intent on bringing good to others.*

Verse 87

*In caves, beneath the trees, in houses left abandoned
May we linger long as we might wish.
Relinquishing the pain of guarding our possessions,
Let us live in freedom, unconfined by cares.*

Once we have found a suitable place of solitude, cultivating the positive mind become easy.

“Nay shing drungpa” means to do solitary retreat in a cave or under a tree etc.. One does not require a companion to do a meditation retreat. Once one has found the suitable place and obtained the proper instructions on concentration meditation from a qualified master, one should go into solitary practice; not necessarily staying in one place only but always in solitude. One could even do meditation under a juniper tree – it is said that some trees have a positive effect on the conditions for practice.

Verse 88

*To have such liberty unmarred by craving,
And loosed from every bond and tie-
A life of such contentment and such bliss,
The gods like Indra would be pressed to find!*

Practising in solitude will free us from being tied to samsaric concerns and we will live in bliss and even the gods who live n the Peak of Samsara will envy us!

Verse 89

*Reflecting un such ways as these,
Upon the excellence of solitude,
Pacify completely all discursiveness
And cultivate the mind of bodhichitta.*

Verse 90

*Strive at first to meditate
Upon the sameness of yourself and others.
In joy and sorrow all are qual.
Thus be guardian of all, as of yourself.*

Verse 91

*The hand and other limbs are many and distinct,
But all are one-one body to be kept and guarded.
Likewise, different beings in their joys and sorrows,
Are, like me, all one in wanting happiness.*

Having found a retreat place, avoid distracting activities and cultivate bodhicitta.

Although living beings appear to be separate from you, they are all like you, in wanting happiness and not wanting suffering. All sentient beings are ultimately of one taste. Thus, the responsibility for all beings lies in oneself alone.

Verse 92

*My pain does not in fact afflict
Or cause discomfort to another's body.
Thought clinging to my "I", this suffering is mine.
And being mine, is very hard to bear.*

Cherishing oneself invokes all the delusions and the turmoil they brings. Cherishing others, will eliminate self grasping, so through this, benefit is derived by both oneself and others.

Verse 93

*And other beings' pain
I do not feel, and yet
Because I take them for my own
Their suffering is likewise hard to bear.*

Here is the reminder to engage in the bodhicitta practice of tong len i.e. meditating on taking on the sufferings of others and giving them all of one's happiness.

Verse 94

*And therefore I'll dispel the pain of others,
For it is simply pain, just like my own.
And others I will aid and benefit,
For they are living beings, just like me.*

Through the practice of taking and giving, whatever merit one accumulates, whatever strength of realisations one gains, one should dedicate them to relieve the suffering and causes of suffering of all living beings.

Verse 95

*Since I and other beings both,
In wanting happiness, are equal and alike,
What difference is there to distinguish us,
That I should strive to have my bliss alone?*

Verse 96

*Since I and other beings both,
In feeling suffering, are equal and alike,
What difference is there to distinguish us,
That I should save myself and not the other?*

When we enter into retreat, we may encounter mental obstacle of self-gain. When this happens, we should question ourselves, what is difference between others and myself, that I should be selfish and liberate myself and myself alone live in bliss?

Verse 97

*Since pains of others do no harm to me,
What reason do I have to shield myself?
But why to guard against “my” future pain which
Does no harm to this, my present “me”?*

Verse 98

*To think that “I will have to suffer it”
In fact is but a false conception-
In the present moment, “I” will perish;
At a later time, another will be born.*

Verse 99

*It’s for the sufferer himself, you’ll say,
To shield himself from injuries that come!
The pain felt in my foot is no my hand’s,
So why, in fact, does one protect the other?*

We might have many reasons to give up bodhicitta; give up meditating in solitude to achieve bodhicitta realisations. If this situation arises, we should advise ourselves: When we have a pain in the right foot, the rest of the body tries to find a way to soothe the pain. Why does this happen? Because parts of the body are interconnected. It is the same with living beings. They too are connected to us and thus, when they are in pain, it makes no sense to ignore them just because of our self-cherishing mind tells us not to bother. The egoistic mind tells us that others have nothing to do with one’s well-being. In truth, one’s ultimate happiness is dependent on wisdom and bodhicitta and bodhicitta can only be accomplished through sentient beings. The role of sentient beings in our enlightenment is paramount.

Verse 100

*“This may be irrational,” you’ll say.
“It happens simply through the force of ego-clinging.”
But that which is illogical for both of us
Should be refuted and dispensed with utterly!*

Our meditation should lead us to the point where we thoroughly establish the fact that the self cherishing mind is not a valid mind; that is is purely based on ego grasping and must therefore be eradicated. If we meditate carefully, we will find that self cherishing is a fault and cherishing others is the path to liberation for all. Our meditation should strongly refute and reject the self cherishing mind.

Verse 101

*Labeled continuities and aggregates,
Like strings of beads and armies, are like mirages.
Likewise, there is no one hurt by suffering,
For who is there to be oppressed by it?*

When we feel overwhelmed by suffering, we should meditate on emptiness of self and the emptiness of phenomena by reflecting on how self and phenomena are like mirages – they appear yet lack inherent existence.

Verse 102

*And if there is no subject suffering,
Mine and other's pain-how are they different?
Simply, then, since pain is pain, will dispel it.
What grounds have you for all your strong distinctions?*

A powerful meditation which incorporates both bodhicitta and emptiness is the combination of tong len with the understanding of emptiness. How? See the giver of merits, the receiver and the merits as being dependently arising and do not exist independently. In this way, the entire act of giving and related to it is dissolved into the emptiness of solid, inherent existence.

Verse 103

*Thus the suffering of everyone
Should be dispelled, and here there's no debate.
To free myself from pain means freeing all;
Contrariwise, I suffer with the pain of beings.*

One should resolve to dispel the suffering of all and thereby actualise the two bodhicittas of conventional and ultimate bodhicitta.

Verse 104

*"The sorrow felt in pity aggravates," you say,
"The pain already felt, so why engender it?"
But can the string of pity be compared
With all that other beings have to suffer?*

This verse is a response to the critics of the practice of exchanging of self with others. The critics assert that this practice cannot be of any benefit. After all, the intense suffering of living beings is already great enough, why bring about more suffering through exchanging of self with others? The answer is that the exchange of self with others, helps us generate merits from this practice of great compassion and at the same time, the positive energy of one's virtuous thoughts has a positive impact on sentient beings. Both sides gain benefit.

Verse 105

*And if through such a single pain
A multitude of sorrows can be remedied,
Such pain as this a loving being
Strives to foster in himself and others.*

A single thought of compassion can become the remedy to the suffering, hence, we should cultivate compassion and great compassion, bodhicitta. One should not be afraid to forgo comfort to help living beings.

Verse 106

*Even thus, Supushpachandra
Knowing how the king would cause him harm
Did nothing to escape from tribulation,
That the pains of many should be overthrown.*

We should act like Bodhisattva Supushpachandra was willing to sacrifice

his life in order to avert the suffering of many. He knew that by conducting a Dharma discourse at the jewelled palace of the King Virudaka, he would be put to death by the King and yet hundreds of practitioners would be liberated by his doing. He was willing to forgo his life for this.

Bodhisattvas never hesitate for a moment, even at the cost of their lives, including committing negative karma which will bring them great suffering in lower realms because they have the clairvoyance to see the benefits of their act. Hence, the power of compassion and cultivation of Dharma is so powerful that it can liberate other beings. This is not something new but cultivated by Buddhas of the past.

Verse 107

*Those whose minds are practiced in this way,
Whose happiness it is to soothe the pain others,
Will venture in the hell of soothe the pain of others,
As swans sweep down upon a lotus lake.*

When one actualises equanimity and perfects the exchange of self with others, one will be able to bring the cessation of pain for numberless beings.

Verse 108

*The oceanlike immensity of joys
Arising when all being will be freed,
Will this not be enough? Will this not satisfy?
The wish for my won freedom, what is that to me?*

Compared to the lasting joy and happiness for every living being that comes from practising bodhicitta, what is the joy of one's own liberation? One should abandon such limited joy and instead practice exchange of self for others.

Verse 109

*The work of bringing benefit to beings
Will not, then, make me proud and self-admiring.
I do not expect another recompense.*

All Dharma practice should be cultivated without any expectation of return from sentient beings. No stain of self-interest should be present in any practice we do. Making others happy in a way that frees them from samsara and leads them to enlightenment is the our purpose for engaging into the Bodhisattva path. The Hinayana practitioners are those goal is self-liberation; for the Mahayanic practitioners, the goal of all practices is in order to benefit others.

Verse 110

*Just as I defend myself
From all unpleasant happenings, however small,
Likewise I shall act for others' sake
To guard and shield them with compassion.*

From beginningless lifetimes, we have been protective of ourselves and of our own happiness. We lie, steal and make all sorts of mistakes just to

secure a little bit of samsaric happiness. This attitude should be transformed towards having a like attitude towards protecting others' happiness.

Verse 111

*Although the drop of sperm and blood
Is alien and in itself devoid of entity,
Yet, because of strong habituation,
I recognize and claim it as my "I".*

Due to strong habituation of self grasping, a strong sense of "I" as being something solid and independently-existing, arises. From there, the sense of "mine" comes about in relation to body, possessions, family etc as belonging to the "I". When in cold weather, we crave for warmth and thus willingly slaughter animals for their skin. Our five senses likewise, came from others but ignorant of this, we give in to mistaken views of "I" and "mine" and proceed to commit all forms of negative actions for the sake of the "I", the body, everything perceived as mine, when in truth, all are devoid of true existence.

Verse 112

*Why, then, not identify
Another's body, calling it my "I"?
And vice versa, why should it be hard,
To think of this my body as another's?*

If we are adamant that this body is "mine" (when it is not from oneself

but others) and take such great care of it, why not treat others' body in the same way i.e. as precious as one's own?

If we cherish this body, we should remember that we have been in countless bodies since beginningless time, so why not cherish the bodies of others? We should respect every single sentient being's existence. Either we discover the truth of the absence of inherent existence and practice bodhicitta or we will continue misleading ourselves in the way we perceive life and make endless mistakes.

Verse 113

*Seeing then the faults that come from cherishing myself,
The oceanic qualities that come from loving others,
I shall lay aside all love of self
And gain the habit of adopting others.*

The conclusion is to see the faults of cherishing oneself and the benefit of cherishing others.

Verse 114

*Hands and other limbs
Are thought of as the members of a body,
Shall we not consider others likewise-
Limbs and members of a living whole?*

Whenever one of our hands gets injured, our other hand immediately

comes to its aid. We would not react with a partial mind like “I will help my left hand but will not help y right hand”. This simply will not happen. This is how one should look towards all sentient beings. They are one with us and helping them should spring forth without hesitation, the way a left hand would rush to help an injured right hand.

Verse 115

*Just as in this form, devoid of “I”,
The thought of self arose through long habituation,
Why, upon the aggregate of living beings,
Should not the thought of “I”, through habit, be imputed?*

The self, the “I”, the “me” which is empty of its own nature but through habituation, we hold oto as “I “, why not apply the same habituation towards others and threat them as precious as oneself, since the “I” is merely labelled and likewise, “others” is also merely labelled?

Verse 116

*Thus when I work for others’ sake,
No reason can there be for boasting or amazement,
For it is just as when I feed myself-
I don’t expect to be rewarded.*

There is no reason to expect praise when we help others because we would not expect praise when we feed ourselves. When interacting with family members or with office staff, treat them with compassion because

they are the cause of our liberation. We do not mind spending a lot of money for a holiday but to give that money to the needy, requires great deliberation. We meditate on the advantage of doing good deeds to encourage ourselves .

Verse 117

*Just as I defend myself, therefore,
From all unpleasant happenings however small,
Likewise I shall act for others' sake
To guard and to protect them with compassion.*

Just as we defend ourselves, likewise we should protect others. Shantideva is asking us to practice two things – give up self-cherishing and cultivate cherishing others. Actualise renunciation within oneself and actualise great compassion towards others.

Verse 118

*This is why the Lord Avalokita
Out of great compassion blessed his name,
That those caught in the midst of multitudes
Might be released and freed from every fear.*

As an example, Chenresig helped multitudes not only through direct help being offered but also blessed his own name through prayers, so that anyone hearing his name even once, would not be reborn in the lower realms. Why do we need to go yogis for blessing? Because their bodhicitta motivation

brings blessings of compassion – for example - they chant millions so mantra such that their breath becomes blessed and merely blowing on us, brings. They provide inexhaustible benefit with their presence because of their entire existence is imbued with great compassion.

Verse 119

*And so we should be undeterred by hardships,
For by influence of use and habit,
People even come to grieve for one
Whose very name strikes terror in their hearts!*

The practice of renunciation, generating compassion, cultivating bodhicitta e.g. through the exchange of self with others are not easy, cultivating wisdom realising emptiness will not be accomplished quickly. It requires great effort.

The basic nature of the primordial mind or one's Buddha nature, is free of afflictions. All delusions of ignorance, attachment, anger etc are part of the secondary mind, in relation to the primary mind. The primordial mind is clean.

The primordial mind or the Buddha nature is pure and clear. Delusions temporarily obscure the purity of this primordial mind. It is possible to remove the delusions to discover the Buddha nature. If we do not put effort to achieve this, we will become increasingly negative and people will avoid us. Merely hearing one's name will cause terror in them!

Verse 120

*Those desiring speedily to be
A refuge for themselves and other beings.
Should interchange the terms of “I” and “other”,
And thus embrace a sacred mystery.*

One should actualise oneself as Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, to become the saviour of self and others. This can be achieved by perfecting the Bodhisattva practice of exchanging self for others. Thereafter, one can then go into the practice of unification of bodhicitta and wisdom and be subsumed in that.

Verse 121

*Because of our attachment to our bodies,
We’re terrified by even little things.
This body, then, this source of so much fear-
Who would not revile it as the worst of enemies?*

This verse illustrates how our bodies are the source of trouble. The Vinaya Sutra describes how men and women have many different nerves in their bodies which have desirous functions that are like poisonous snakes living inside our veins. In lay life, sexual misconduct happens and one knows how the torment and suffering which arises due to that. The initial pleasure rapidly turns into the nightmare of this life or at death or in next rebirth.

This body takes the life of numberless beings – for example, eating rice. For rice to get into one’s bowl, many beings have to suffer and die. Having

consumed the rice, if the body transformed it into gold, that would be great but instead, it becomes kaka (excrement). Even dogs know how to kick dust onto their kaka. Even if one consumed a holy relic, the same kind of output will occur. This is how contaminated one's body is.

Hence, this chapter on meditation is to highlight the urgency of going into concentration meditation. Milarepa and yogis of more recent times, like the late Geshe Lama Konchog through chulen practice (extracting the essence from natural elements for sustenance) did not waste time on elaborate, gross food. They spent their time in concentration.

Whenever we do daily activities, e.g. shopping, we can transform those activities to benefit sentient beings – e.g. mentally transform everything in the store into whatever is needed by sentient beings for their lasting happiness.

This body is the source of fear – fear of the heat, of cold, of being killed. Shantideva is not asking us to neglect this body but not to cling to this body nor aspire to be reborn with this contaminated state. We can gain and live in a rainbow body through practice.

Verse 122

*Wishing to relieve our bodies' ills,
Our hungry mouths, the dryness of our throats,
We lie in wait along the road
And steal the lives of fishes, birds, and deer.*

In order to fulfil the needs of this contaminated body like food or drink, we sacrifice so many sentient beings life.

Verse 123

*And for the body's service and advantage,
There are some who even kill their parents,
Or steal what has been offered to the Triple Gem,
Because of which, they'll burn in deepest hell.*

Out of a desire for worldly happiness and convenience, one neglects mindfulness, leading to non-virtuous acts including heavy negative karmic acts like harming parents.

Offerings to Triple Gem have karmic significance and the recipient must know how to consume it or else the person can receive harm. Whatever money offerings were given to my late master, he would never use it for his own purpose but would always offer it to stupas and those offerings given by sick people, would be used for printing Dharma books or he would make general Sangha offerings and not consume it personally. So it is very dangerous for me. When you make offering with devotion and I use it, it is like consuming molten iron. One has to be very careful. In Sera Je Monastery, when bread is offered to Sangha by devotees and the monks out of compassion give remnant bread to the stray dogs, those dogs develop skin problem. When monks feed dogs with food purchased by the monks' own savings, the effect on the dogs is different. There was once a much loved dog at the monastery – we fed him with remnant bread but dog developed skin problems. We tried to help the dog and send him for

an operation but it did not help him and in the end, the dog died. The main monk of this “dog medical team” was called Dr Failure. (Laughter).

It is worthwhile to meditate to gain renunciation of contaminated existence. Milarepa composed songs which spoke of his great fear of samsara while cultivating in caves. He perfected purification and accumulation of merit and as he approached death, he no longer had any more fear and looked forward to death as if a friend.

Verse 124

*Where then is the prudent man
Who wants to pamper and protect his body?
Who will not ignore and treat with scorn
What is for him a dangerous enemy?*

Verse 125

*“If I give this, what will be left for me?”
Thinking of oneself-the way of evil ghosts.
“If I keep this, what will be left to give?”
Concern for others is the way of heaven.*

Ignorance makes one hold mistaken views towards this body and existence itself. Though life is not permanent, we apprehend it as lasting, as-if it is permanent; we see the body that is impure, as pure; we see samsara as happiness. This explains why we destroy our chances for real happiness and protect this body even though it is the basis of endless suffering.

As stated in the Guru Puja text, we have cherished self since beginning less time, thus we suffer; those who cherish others find their way to enlightenment.

Verse 126

*If to serve myself I harm another,
I'll suffer later in the realms of hell.
If for others' sake I harm myself,
Every excellence will be my heritage.*

Whatever effort one puts towards self-centredness can only end in failure and disappointing. If effort is instead exerted for the welfare of others, every good quality will be ours.

Verse 127

*Wanting what is best for me-
Stupidity and lower realms result!
Let this be changed, applied to others-
Honors and the realms of bliss will come!*

The mind can be very tricky. Without concentration, self-interest can creep into one's Dharma activities. Or due to lack of study, one does not know what is to be practiced and what is to be discarded e.g. engaging in generosity for the purpose of gain wealth, is the conduct of the foolish ones. Wealth is the by-product of pure and unconditional generosity; it should never be the purpose for being generous! The purpose of generosity is to eliminate the suffering of sentient beings.

Verse 128

*Enslaving others, forcing them to serve me,
I will come to know the state of servitude.
But if I labor for the good of others,
Mastery and leadership will come to me.*

If we are arrogant, bossy in this life and treat others as lowly servants, the karmic consequence will be for us to be ill-treated slaves in future lives. Similarly, if you are a fisherman today, in the next life, you will be the fish who gets caught. Or if you have a maid, treat that person kindly or else, in a future life, one will be a maid in a cruel family.

Verse 129

*All the joy the world contains
Has come through wishing happiness for others.
All the misery the world contains
Has come through wanting pleasure for oneself.*

Verse 130

*Is there need for lengthy explanation?
Childish beings look out for themselves,
While Buddhas labor for the good of others:
See the difference that divides them!*

Samsara comes from self cherishing; enlightenment comes through cherishing others. Childish beings look out for themselves; Buddhas labour for the good of others.

Verse 131

*If I do not give away
My happiness for others' pain,
Enlightenment will never be attained,
And even in samsara, joy will fly from me.*

Verse 132

*Leaving future lives outside the reckoning,
Even this life's needs are not fulfilled-
When servants do not do their work,
And masters do not pay the wages earned.*

If one does not dedicate one's life to cease the pain of others, enlightenment will be impossible; even short-term samsaric happiness cannot be secured. We are here to practice Dharma and not worldly Dharma. Hence, social work without bodhicitta or as a minimum, renunciation of samsara, will not be a cause for liberation. It may relieve some aspect of pain but will not deliver the long term benefit of liberation, let alone enlightenment.

Verse 133

*Casting far away abundant joys
That may be gained in this or future lives,
Because of bringing harm to other beings,
I ignorantly bring myself intolerable pain.*

Failing to discriminate between what is to be adopted and what is to be abandoned, one will continue the cycle of committing negative actions

resulting in suffering, then getting angry at suffering and incurring more negative karma and more suffering.

One may go into retreat, shut all doors and close all windows. However, if one's mind is constantly scolding others, negative karma is being accumulated for both the person who is the object of one's anger (and hence a cause of one's negative action), as well as oneself (arising from one's anger). We have taken vows against negative speech and mental scolding offends the vows in relation to speech.

Karma is complicated because even though one might be careful with one's own action, if those around oneself commit negative karma and one is unable to stop it or if one's practice is not strong enough, one will likewise be affected by the collective negative karma.

Verse 134

*All the harm with which this world is rife,
All fear and suffering that there is,
Clinging to the "I" has caused it!
What am I to do with this great demon?*

Verse 135

*If this "I" is not relinquish wholly,
Sorrow likewise cannot be avoided.
For if he does not keep away from fire,
A man cannot escape from being burned.*

All harms in the world come about due to self-cherishing. If we do not give up the “I “ and self cherishing, trouble cannot be avoided. It is just like if a person who does not keep away from fire cannot escape being burned.

Verse 136

*To free myself from harm
And others from their sufferings,
Let me give myself away,
And cherish others as I love myself.*

To be in a position to offer protection from harm to all beings, one must become a Buddha. For this, cherishing others, the basis of bodhicitta, is compulsory. Without it, though one may wish to help others, in reality, one needs to be rescued. Best is to renounce and go into solitary retreat.

Verse 137

*“For I am now beneath the rule of others,”
Of this you must be certain, O my mind.
And now no longer shall you have a thought
That does not wish the benefit of beings.*

Verse 138

*My sight and other senses, now the property of others-
To use them for myself would be illicit.
How much more so is it disallowed to use
My faculties against their rightful owners?*

Constantly remind oneself that one is at the service of sentient beings and not under the command of the self-cherishing mind. One's 5 senses, 6 faculties and aggregates, mind being under the service of other beings, should therefore not be used only for one's own gain.

Verse 139

*Thus others will be now my chief concern.
And everything I see my body has
Will all be seized and given
For the use and service of all other beings.*

We should regard all other beings to be equal to the Buddha and as such, we offer service, possessions and even one's body (this is possible when we have attained stable bodhicitta) to sentient beings, we would the Buddha.

Verse 140

*Take others-lower, higher, equal-as yourself,
Identify yourself as "other."
Then, without another thought,
Experience envy, pride, and rivalry.*

Training in exchanging of self for others, give all others priority and place yourself into their shoes; experience what they experience which is envy, pride and rivalry from others and from that understand the hardships that such emotions generate.

From the following Verse 141 until Verse 154 illustrate the tormented minds and conditions of sentient beings. Through this, one begins to understand how limitless suffering is and in this way, the door to compassion is opened and the practice of exchanging self with others can enhance compassion, into bodhicitta.

Verse 141

*He's the center of attention; I am nothing,
And unlike him, I'm poor without possessions.
Everyone looks up to him, despising me;
All goes well for him, for me there's only bitterness!*

Verse 142

*All I have is sweat and drudgery,
While he's there, sitting at his ease.
He's great, respected in the world,
While I'm the underdog, a well-known nobody.*

Verse 143

*What! A nobody without distinctions?
Not true! I do have some good qualities.
He's not the best, he's lower down than some;
While, when compared with some, I do excel!*

Verse 144

*My discipline, my understanding have declined,
But I am helpless, ruled by my defilements.
As much as he is able, he should cure me,
And I should be submissive even to his punishments.*

Verse 145

*The fact is he does noting of the sort!
By what right, then, does he despise me?
What use, then, are his qualities to me,
Those qualities of which he's so possessed!*

Verse 146

*Indifferent to the plight of the living beings,
Who tread the brink of evil destinies,
He makes an outward show of virtues,
Even sets himself among the perfect!*

Verse 147

*That I might excel, outstripping him,
Him, regardless as my peer and equal!
In contests, I will certainly secure
My fame and fortune, public renown.*

Verse 148

*By every means I'll advertise
My gifts to all the world,
Ensuring that his qualities
Remain unknown, ignored by everyone.*

Verse 149

*My faults I will conceal, dissimulate.
For I, not he, will be the object of devotion;
I, not he, will gain possessions and renown;
I will be the center of attention.*

Verse 150

*I will take such satisfaction
In his shame and degradation.
I will render him despicable,
The butt and laughingstock of everyone.*

Verse 151

*People say this pitiful nonentity
Is trying to compete with me!
But how can he resemble me, they ask,
In learning, beauty, wealth, or pedigree?*

Verse 152

*Lust to hear them talk about my qualities,
My reputation on the lips of all,
The thrill of it sends shivers down my spine,
The pleasure that I bask and revel in!*

Verse 153

*Granted, even if he does have something,
I'm the one he's working for!
He can keep enough just to survive,
But with my strength I'll steal away the rest.*

Verse 154

*I will wear his happiness away;
I will always hurt and injure him.
He's the one who in samsara
Did me mischiefs by the hundreds!*

Verse 155

*O my mind, what countless ages
Have you spent in working for yourself?
And what great weariness it was,
While your reward was only misery!*

Verse 156

*The truth, therefore, is this.
That you must wholly give yourself and take the other's place.
The Buddha did not lie in what he said-
You'll see the benefits that come from it.*

Having established conviction in rebirth and past lives, one analyses one's experiences of hardship and concludes that habitual self-cherishing has only brought suffering. One is reminded here to strengthen cherishing others. This is the Buddha's own advice.

Verse 157

*If, indeed, you had in former times
Embraced this work and undertaken it,
You could not still be lacking
In the perfect bliss of Buddhahood.*

Undertake this practice of bodhicitta. Don't just give it up. If you had done so in the past, you would be free from suffering by now.

Verse 158

*Just as you identify
A drop of other's blood and sperm,
And cling to it as though it were yourself,
Now take sentient beings - others - as your self.*

Verse 159

*Now be covetous for other's sake,
Of everything you see that you possess.
Steal it, take it all away,
And use it for the benefit of others.*

Verse 160

*I indeed am happy, others sad;
I am high and mighty, others low;
I am helped while others are abandoned:
Why am I not jealous of myself?*

Verse 161

*Happiness, fulfillment: these I leave aside.
The pain of others: this I will embrace.
Inquiring of myself repeatedly,
I will become aware of all my faults.*

Regard all beings as though they were oneself. We have spent all our time and energy grasping to self and one's possessions and committed much negative karma on account of it. Hereon, focus on others.

Verse 162

*When others are at fault, I'll take
And turn the blame upon myself.
And all my sins, however slight,
Confess, and make them known to many.*

When others are at fault, take the blame; acknowledge others qualities but hide one's qualities and be unafraid to expose one's own faults and confess. My late master said that 3 things are important in spiritual practice – be secretive about ones qualities', be secretive about others' faults and keep one's spiritual plans to oneself.

Verse 163

*The fame of others I will magnify
That it might thus outshine my own.
Among them I will be as one who serves,
My lowly labor for their benefit.*

Verse 164

*This ego is by nature rife with defects,
Its accidental talents I should hide, not praise.
Wherever qualities it has I will conceal,
That they remain unknown to everyone.*

When praising others' qualities, be genuine and never sarcastic. Always offer service to sincere practitioners. The Nalanda Pandits and our Gurus,

they are exactly this way. We are different, we are attached to titles and high-sounding names. Wherever there are high names at an event, we will attend; whenever it is just Kadampa teachings which tell us to give up the ego being given, very few are interested. The mind is fragile and constantly seeking praise and comfort. Even some Buddhist practitioners feel such teachings are not relevant at all. But think about it how marvellous the teaching on caring for others.

Verse 165

*All the harm, in short, my ego does
To its advantage and to others' cost,
May all of it descend upon itself,
To its own hurt - to others' benefit.*

This is a prayer of courage which says that may everything that ego does for its own benefit, turn back to destroy the ego and benefit others.

Verse 166

*Do not let it strut about the place,
So arrogant, so overbearing.
But like a newly wedded bride,
Let it be demure and blushing, timorous and shy!*

There is no place at all for pride in a practitioner's life. Instead be shy and humble - like covering one's mouth when speaking to one's master and not look up from feet of one Gurus. Like Kyabje Lama Zopa Rinpoche is with

his Gurus. Diminish the self-grasping mind. See the Guru as Buddha and oneself as lower than others, then enlightenment is possible. Shyness and embarrassment (at one's flaws) should characterise one's conduct and if one breaks samaya, same two qualities are to be applied. In monasteries, you'll see the monks applying these – some even run away from their Gurus as they think themselves too lowly to meet their Guru in person.

Verse 167

*That's how it should be and stay!
And if it lapses, bring it forcibly to heel
With antidotes, and if these fail,
Well then, apply the lash!*

After training one's mind to a certain extent, one may slacken and allow negative emotions to arise again, not caring about the karmic consequences, being too lazy to assert mindfulness and introspection. When this happens, apply the appropriate antidotes, commence purification practices, engage in retreats.

Whenever one's Dharma teacher says to you "Think of karma", you misunderstand, you get offended and refuse to listen further. Your mind is totally messed up – when one comes to this stage, the only way to recover from the fever of ego & delusions is to receive "the lash" i.e. placed under practices or encouraged to take vows which will guide one on how to behave or even be sent to the Monastery! When I was with Geshe Lama Konchog, he was one day talking about impurity of external beauty. On the following day, even though he sat in front of the car and I was at the

back, I was captivated by shops and later confessed to him about it and he indicated he knew. He had clairvoyance, so that was a form of control over me. Even when he passed away, I could not help but feel that I was still being watched.

Verse 168

*And so, O mind, if still you will refuse,
Though you have been so lengthily advised,
Since every evil has its roots in you,
You are indeed now ripe for punishment!*

Verse 169

*The time when you could do me harm
is in the past, and now is here no more.
Now I see you ! Where will you escape?
I'll bring you down, and all your haughty insolence.*

Verse 170

*Every thought of working for myself
Is utterly rejected, cast aside.
“Now that you’ve been sold to others,
Stop your whining, be of service!”*

Verse 171

*For it, through being inattentive,
I do not deliver you to others,
You will hand me over, it is certain,
To the dreadful guardians of hell.*

Verse 172

*For this is how so many times
You have betrayed me, and how long I've suffered!
Now my memory is full of rancor;
I will crush your selfish schemes!*

Verse 173

*And so it is that if I want contentment,
I should never seek to please myself.
And likewise, if I wish to save myself,
I'll always be the guardian of others.*

Verse 174

*To the extent this human form
Is cosseted and saved from hurt,
Just so, just so, to that degree.
It grows so sensitive and peevish.*

Verse 175

*For those who fall to such a state,
The earth itself and all it holds
Are powerless to satisfy.
For who can give them all they crave?*

Verse 176

*Their hopeless craving brings them misery,
And evil policies invade their minds,
While those with free, untrammelled hearts,
Will never know an end of excellence.*

Verse 177

*Therefore, for the increase of my body's wants,
I'll give no space, no opportunity.
And of possessions, those things are the best
That do not captivate by their attractiveness.*

Verse 178

*Dust and ashes are the body's final state,
This body which, inert, is moved by other forces.
This insupportable and unclean form -
Why do I regard it as my "I", my "self"?*

Verse 179

*Alive or dead, what difference does it make?
What good to me is this machinery?
What difference will divide if from a clod of earth?
Oh, why not rid myself of this conceit of "self"?*

Verse 180

*Through lavishing attention on this body,
Such sorrow have I brought myself so senselessly.
What use is all my wanting, all my hating-
For what indeed is like a log of wood?*

Verse 181

*Whether I protect and pamper it,
Or whether it is torn by beaks of carrion birds,
This body feels no pleasure, no aversion-
Why then do I cherish it so much?*

Verse 182

*Resentment when it is reviled,
Or pleasure when it is esteemed,
Neither of these two the body feels-
So why do I exhaust myself?*

Verse 183

*Because of the appreciation, you will say,
That others, all my friends, will have of it.
They all appreciate the bodies that they have,
So why do I not like them as my own?*

Verse 184

*Therefore, free from all attachment,
I will give this body for the benefit of beings;
Thus, though many blemishes afflict it,
I shall take it as my necessary tool.*

Verse 185

*And so, enough of all my childish ways.
I'll follow in the footsteps of the wise,
Recalling their advice on vigilance,
I'll shun all sleep and mental dullness.*

Verse 186

*Like the buddhas' heirs, in their compassion,
I will take the burden, all that should be borne.
For if I do not labor night and day,
When will all my sorrows have an end?*

Verse 187

*Thus to banish all obscuring veils
I'll bend my mind from the mistaken path;
And constantly upon this perfect object
I shall rest my mind in even meditation.*

Chapter 9: Wisdom

In order to study the Buddha's ultimate view on emptiness, which is found in the philosophical school of the Madhyamika Prasangika, the earlier verses of this Wisdom chapter will discuss the viewpoints of the lower Buddhist schools on this subject. The 4 Buddhist schools are the Vaibashika, the Sautrantika, the Cittamatra and the Madhyamika (of which there are 2 sub-schools of the Madhyamika-Svatantrika and the Madhyamika-Prasangika).

The Buddha taught how life as we know it came about through the teachings on the 12 interdependent links, showing how due to ignorance, the cycle of samsara from ignorance to death turns endlessly. This in turn is due to the fundamental wrong view of not knowing the true existence of reality i.e. the lack of inherent existence of self and of phenomena. By viewing self and phenomena as truly and independently existing is the root of all the sufferings of samsara.

Consciousness perceives the "I", aggregates and outer phenomena as inherently existing. The moment we destroy this mistaken conceptual mind, we destroy samsara.

Verse 1

*All these branches of the Doctrine
The Powerful Lord expounded for the sake of wisdom.
Therefore they must generate this wisdom
Who wish to have an end of suffering.*

The opening verse speaks of the importance of studying emptiness - “Branches of the doctrine “ refers to the teachings of the 3 higher trainings of morality, concentration and wisdom; the teachings of 3 baskets – Vinaya, Sutra and Abidhamma – all these were taught as the conditional support for us to understand emptiness. They are the preliminary, preparatory teachings for the wisdom realising emptiness. “Powerful Lord” refers to either Manjushri or the Buddha himself. As long as one wishes to be free from suffering, wisdom is the “mother” which gives birth to the elimination from samsara.

Verse 2

Relative and absolute,

These the two truths are declared to be.

The absolute is not within the reach of intellect,

For intellect is grounded in the relative.

There are 2 Truths: All phenomena - including samsara, nirvana, enlightenment - can be expounded via the 2 Truths i.e. relative truth (the appearing mode) and ultimate truth (the abiding mode) or otherwise called conventional truth and ultimate truth. In order for us to overcome ignorance, we need to actualise the understanding of the 2 Truths. Although students of the Dharma may intellectually understand the explanations on emptiness or ultimate truth, only meditators with higher concentration and Arya beings are able to directly understand ultimate truth.

Verse 3

*Two kinds of people are to be distinguished:
Meditative thinkers and ordinary folk;
The common views of ordinary people
Are superseded by the views of meditators.*

There are different levels of perceivers - This verse says that there are 2 kinds of practitioners – the meditator and ordinary practitioners. The ordinary practitioners' views of the 2 truths are superseded by view of meditators. Likewise, the lower schools' views are superseded by the higher schools' views. In order for us to have a thorough understanding, we need to know the various philosophical views.

For the Madhyamika practitioner, the 2 Truths are neither identical nor distinct. It's like the front and back of the hand. They have different labels but are of one essence. Why do things lack inherent existence? Because of things arise dependently i.e. dependent on factors. Therefore, things exist but not inherently.

Verse 4

*And within the ranks of meditators,
The lower, in degrees of insight, are confuted by the higher.
For all employ the same compassions,
And the goal, if left unanalyzed, they all accept.*

The views asserted by those who do not have realisations on concentration, are superseded by those who have higher concentration as their understanding

is more profound. Those who have concentration are superceded by those who have special insight into emptiness. The ordinary person's view which relies on the conceptual mind, are superceded by those who see reality directly. Similarly, the lower schools views are flawed and regarded as inferior in the view on emptiness to the higher schools. Example, the Shravaka schools regard things as being truly existent; but for Madhyamika-Prasangika, they do not accept inherent existence at all.

Verse 5

*When ordinary folk perceive phenomena,
They look on them as real and not illusory.
This, then, is the subject of debate
Where ordinary and meditators differ.*

The last line means that the view of phenomena of ordinary persons and that of meditators are not the same. Another interpretation is that it refers to those who have realised emptiness and those who have not. Ordinary people believe in true existence/inherent existence; meditators see things as illusory. Thus we have to differentiate and understand the distinction between them. The Shravakas (which follow the view of one of the lower schools) do not accept that all phenomena are empty because they assert that there are inherently-existing forms and things. The Madhyamika-Prasangika's reply to this is that the perception of form or a thing, is merely a mental imputation onto a valid base. The Madhyamikas say that believing that things inherently exist without the involvement of mental imputation, is the worldly mind which has failed to examine the reality of self and phenomena.

Verse 6

*Forms and so forth, which we sense directly,
Exist by general acclaim, though logic disallows them.
They're false, deceiving, like polluted substances
Regarded in the common view as clean.*

The Madhyamika-Prasangika (hereon named Prasangikas) says that if one applies logic and wisdom, one will see that self and phenomena are perceptions that are mistakenly interpreted to be inherently or independently existing. In conventional terms, perceptions are also mistaken e.g. the human form is perceived as clean and yet in truth is unclean; in the same way, the view that self and phenomena exist, is mistaken.

Verse 7

*That he might instruct the worldly,
Buddha spoke of "things", but these in truth
Lack even momentariness.
"It's wrong to claim that this is relative!" -If so you say,*

Although the Buddha referred to "things", the Shravakas interpreting that word to literally mean that things exist as we see them. This is mistaken. Buddha refers to " things " in the manner of being dependently-arising and not truly/inherently existing from their own side. When one analyses, one will see that self and phenomena lack even an atom or moment of true existence.

Verse 8

*Then know that there's no fault. For momentariness
Is relative for meditators, but for the worldly, absolute.
Were it otherwise, the common view
Could fault our certain insight into corporal impurity.*

The Prasangikas say that Shravakas assert permanence and impermanence as relative but the Sharavakas also assert that permanence and impermanence as the ultimate truth. The body which is composed of impure substances and filled with conceptual desire, is perceived as clean and worthy of effort, which is mistaken view. The deceptive conceptual mind wrongly perceives it as pure.

Verse 9

*“Through a buddha, who is but illusion, how does merit spring?”
As if the Buddha were existing truly.
“But,” you ask, “if beings likewise are illusions,
How, when dying, can they take rebirth?”*

Sharavakas challenge the Prasangikas by saying “If everything is a mirage, then Buddha is also an illusion and enlightenment is also an illusion. When you make offering to an object which is illusion, then there should be no merit also”. The Prasangika response to this is that if things exist truly, then merits should exist forever, so why the need to live in vows? If things truly exist, why the need for more effort? The Prasangikas say that one is offering to an illusion-like Buddha, achieving an illusion-like merit and attain illusory-like omniscience. Shravakas go on to challenge that if beings

are illusions, when they die why should they take rebirth? Prasangikas answer that beings are not illusion but illusion-like; the Prasangikas say that the Sharavaka view that all things inherently exist means things are fixed and as such, no cessation, no actualisation would be possible, which is not so.

Verse 10

*As long as the conditions are assembled,
Illusions, likewise, will persist and manifest.
Why, through simply being more protracted,
Should sentient beings be regarded as more real?*

The Prasangikas assert that for existence to manifest, factors have to gather and in this way, all existence is a dependent-arising. The Shravakas state that sentient beings exist solidly, truly and they exist momentarily as well as ultimately. The Prasangika retort that the Shravakas assert true existence merely because there a life in front of oneself and some movement. Rebirth happens and sentient beings come about due to the karma and delusions as factors.

Verse 11

*If thus I were to slay or harm a mere mirage,
Because there is no mind, no sin occurs.
But beings are possessed of mirage-like minds;
Sin and merit will, in consequence, arise.*

Prasangikas say to the Shravakas that they should not analyse the 2 Truths only on basis of relative existence; that there is the need to establish an understanding of dependent arising. Why there is rebirth is because there is continuation of mind; for the Shravakas, when they attain the Sharavaka nirvana, the mind does not continue. The Prasangikas say there is a continuation of mind because of the gathering of causes and conditions and karma. Due to that, when you create negative cause there is the result of suffering.

Things are like illusions. Rainbow and dreamers exist dependently and not independently.

Verse 12

*Spells and incantations cannot, it is true,
Give minds to mirages, and so no mind arises.
But illusions spring from various causes;
The kinds of mirage, then, are likewise various-*

In a magic show, a piece of wood is placed on the table and the magician conjures up an illusion. A person in the audience who understands the trick will see the illusion for what it is and see the actual situation. Through analysis, this viewer understands the illusion that has been produced. Why we say things exist like an illusion is because of the various different factors giving rise to different appearances. So when we look into ourselves, we grasp at the “I”. We see the I as truly existent. For Shravaka, the “I” is the ultimate truth; for Prasangika, the “I” is only a relative truth and is a fault/mistaken view.

Verse 13

*A single cause for everything there never was!
“If, ultimately,” you will now enquire,
“Everything is said to be nirvana,
Samsara, which is relative, must be the same.*

Ultimately, one needs to realise that things appear from an assembly of causes. If things were only one cause for all phenomena, there would be no difference between samsara and nirvana.

Verse 14

*“Therefore even buddhahood reverts to the samsaric state.
So why,” you ask, “pursue the bodhisattva path?”
As long as there’s no cutting of the causal stream,
There is no routing of illusory appearance.*

Verse 15

*But when the causal stream is interrupted,
All illusions, even relative, will cease.
“If that which is deceived does not exist,
What is it,” you ask, “that sees illusion?”*

The Prasangikas point out to the lower schools that ultimate truth is based on relative truth; whereas relative truth is based on causes and conditions. This concludes the debate between M-P and Shravaka schools.

Verse 16

*But if, for you, these same illusions have no being,
What, indeed, remains to be perceived?
If objects have another mode of being,
That very mode is but the mind itself.*

Cittamatra have 2 subdivisions – the True Aspectarians and the False Aspectarians. The True Aspectarian says that when the Prasangikas establish relative truth, they establish illusion-like subject and object; whereas for the Cittamatra, the 2 truths (of relative and ultimate truth) are relevant but need to be established on the basis of mind. There is no truly existing external object because objects come about from mental imprints. The Cittamatra assert that all outer objects exist on the basis of mind. The cup exists on the basis of mind. Due to mental imprints of trees, when one goes outdoors and sees trees, it is because one had previously experienced the appearance of trees. Otherwise, one would not perceive trees now.

Verse 17

*But if mirage is the mind itself,
What, then, is perceived by what?
The Guardian of the World himself has said
That mind cannot be seen by mind.*

Verse 18

*In just the same way, he has said,
The sword's edge cannot cut the sword.
“But,” you say, “it's like the flame
That perfectly illuminates itself.”*

The Prasangikas challenge the Cittamatra by saying that a sword's edge cannot cut itself, as it would be the same as saying that the flame can light itself. The blueness of a blue-coloured object would not exist until the mind which has previously been acquainted with blue, arises . In order to establish an external object, one has to wait for the mind to arise. The Prasangikas disagree with this Cittamatra view.

Verse 19

*The flame, in fact, can never light itself.
And why? Because the darkness never dims it!
“The blueness of a blue thing,” you will say,
“Depends, unlike a crystal, on no other thing.*

Verse 20

*“Likewise some perceptions
Rise from other things-while some do not.”
But what is blue has never of itself imposed
A blueness on its nonblue self.*

Verse 21

*The phrase “the lamp illuminates itself”
The mind can know and formulate.
But what is there to know and say
That “mind is self-illuminating”?*

Verse 22

*The mind, indeed, is never seen by anyone,
And therefore, whether it can know or cannot know itself,
Just like the beauty of a barren woman's daughter,
This merely forms the subject of a pointless conversation.*

The Prasangikas point out to the Cittamatrins that they are seeking to establish outer existence based only on mind and no other factors.

Verse 23

*“But if,” you ask, “the mind is not self-knowing,
How does it remember what it knew?”
We say that like the poison of the water rat,
It's from the link with outer things that memory occurs.*

Prasangikas declare that it is incorrect to assert that things come solely from mind because it is outer objects which trigger a memory of the objects. The Prasangikas go on to fault the Cittamatra for saying that the mind is not self knowing because how then would mind remember what it knew from the past? During winter, when rat bites a person, its poison does not affect the person. However, when the rat bites in summer, the poison is active and at that time, mind then remembers the rat and being bitten by it. This, the Prasangikas say is how mind actualises outer objects i.e. from past incidents which create an imprint and the mind then recalls as a memory.

Verse 24

*“In certain cases,” you will say, “the mind
Can see the minds of others, how then not itself?”
But through the application of a magic balm,
The eye may see the treasure, but the salve it does not see.*

Verse 25

*It’s indeed not our object to disprove
Experiences of sight or sound or knowing
Our aim is here to undermine the causes of sorrows:
The thought that such phenomena have true existence.*

The Prasangikas explain that the purpose of this discussion is not merely to debate. It is to discuss the causes of suffering and to find the solutions of suffering and the wrong view of existence is the cause of suffering. Believing in true existence is the root cause of suffering.

The bodhicitta teachings based on Mahayanic approach method are based on Lama Serlingpa and the wisdom teachings of the Mahayana are based on Nagarjuna.

Verse 26

*“Illusions are not other than the mind,” you say,
And yet you also claim that they are not the same.
But must they not be different if the mind is real?
And how can mind be real if there’s no difference?*

The views of the second subdivision of the Cittamatra school are called False Aspectarians. To them, the Prasangikas say that – Since you assert that the outer objects of perception are non-existent, then how can mind (mental imprints) be truly existent?

Verse 27

“A mirage may be known,” you say, “though lacking true existence.”

The knower is the same: it knows, but is a mirage.

“But what supports samsara must be real,” you say,

“Or else samsara is like empty space.”

The Prasangikas state that a mirage can be perceived based on a formation of conditions, even though it lacks true existence. The perceiver/mind is likewise lacking in true existence. The Prasangikas fault the Cittamatra who say that samsara is truly existing (as it comes from mind) because it would then mean that samsara and nirvana are either truly existing or non-existent at all. Yet, when questioned about whether samsara exists or not, the Cittamtrin would say “Of course it does”. If so, in what manner would it exist? The outer object would have to have characteristics too. Therefore, the Cittamatra view is flawed. Even if a car, according to Cittamatra view is non-existent and merely arises due to imprint of mind, the fact is that a car functions on its own.

Verse 28

*But how could the unreal proceed to function,
Even if it rests on something real?
This mind of yours is isolated and alone,
Alone, in solitude, and unaccompanied.*

Verse 29

*If the mind indeed is free of objects,
Even if it rests on something real?
This mind of yours is isolated and alone,
Alone, in solitude, and unaccompanied.*

The Cittamatra's term of "mental imprint" seems similar to the Prasangika's term of "merely-labelled" but the meaning and logic behind the two terms are very different.

Verse 30

*Even if we know that all is like illusion,
How will this dispel afflictive passion?
Magicians may indeed themselves desire
The mirage-women they themselves create.*

Verse 31

*The reason is they have not rid themselves
Of habits of desiring objects of perception;
And when they gaze upon such things,
Their aptitude for emptiness is weak indeed.*

How does the understanding that all appearances are like illusions, pacify delusions, since magicians might believe in their own creations? If one knows it is illusion-like, why does one still have desire? It is due to past habituation and one's reliance on the gross levels of mind. The ultimate wisdom mind, the Buddha nature is clean-clear. Delusions like ignorance are what causes one to assert wrong views.

Verse 32

*By training in this aptitude for emptiness,
The habit to perceive substantiality will fade.
By training in the view that all lacks entity,
This view itself will also disappear.*

By training in meditation on dependent arising, emptiness, the lack of inherent existence, the gross state of mind that has been heavily influenced by the past wrong views that things truly exist, will subsequently fade. Wisdom realising emptiness is the sole solution. For this we need to meditate. Without emptiness, there will be no liberation, no enlightenment. Even though you might have bodhicitta, without no emptiness, enlightenment cannot be achieved. Both are required.

Verse 33

*“There is nothing” - when this is asserted.
No “thing” is there to be examined.
For how can nothing, lacking all support,
Remain before the mind as something present?*

There is nothing – nothing is truly existent. When viewing things, things exist on the basis of dependence.

Verse 34

*When real and nonreal both
Are absent from before the mind,
Nothing else remains for mind to do
But rest in perfect peace, from concepts free.*

We need to come to a state where we are totally free from conceptual mind.

Verse 35

*As the wishing jewel and tree of miracles
Fulfill and satisfy all hopes and wishes,
Likewise, through their prayers for those who might be trained,
Victorious Ones appear within the world.*

Due to the absence of inherent existence, i.e. that there is no fixed characteristic of anything one encounters, Buddhas arise in the world. Wisdom is actualised on the basis of the lack on inherent existence.

Verse 36

*The healing shrine of the garuda,
Even when its builder was long dead,
Continued even ages thence
To remedy and soothe all plagues and venom.*

The reason for Buddhas and Bodhisattvas being able to bring benefit to sentient beings is due to past causes created and conditions. When they achieve the ultimate enlightenment state, they are able to benefit. Example, the Garuda shrine was built for healing, especially for sicknesses arising from the harms caused by nagas. Brahmin Shangu while training on the path, accomplished the powers of the Garuda and built the shrine. Even though Shangu passed away a long time ago, benefit from that shrine is still being derived.

Relics do not possess consciousness but they benefit beings because realised beings from whom the relics came, made strong prayers which infused every part of their being and become the cause and condition that anyone making offerings to relics, would gain same effect as paying homage to the Buddha. Though ultimately non-existent from its own side, there is still benefit. Similarly with images of Buddhas.

Verse 38

*“But how,” you ask, “can offerings made
To beings freed from all discursiveness give fruit?”
it’s said that whether buddhas live or pass beyond,
The offerings made to them have equal merit.*

In Maitreya's Mahāsiddha Sūtra it is stated that "Offerings made to me today and those made in the future to my relics, both have the equal merit and same result".

Verse 39

*Whether you assert the relative or ultimate,
The scriptures say that merit will result
Merits will be gained regardless
Of the Buddha's true or relative existence.*

Whether one understands the 2 truths according to the Prasangikas' view or not, there is still benefit to studying it and the subject of emptiness because the practice is related to Buddha, Dharma and Sangha.

Verse 40

*"We're freed," you say, "through seeing the (Four) Truths-
What use is it to us, this view of voidness?"
But as the scriptures have themselves proclaimed,
Without it there is no enlightenment.*

The Mahayana teachings originate from the Buddha. Some Shravakas say that since liberation can be gained through seeing the 16 aspects of the 4 Noble Truths, what is the importance of studying emptiness as asserted by Prasangikas? It is important to study the final view on emptiness (Prasangikas) because all the scriptures state that the Buddha proclaimed that without realising emptiness, none of the 3 stages of enlightenment – of Shravaka, Pratyeka, Bodhisattva – can be accomplished.

Note that the Theravadan schools only assert the emptiness of self and do not assert emptiness of phenomena; whereas the Mahayana schools assert the emptiness of self (the concept of “I”) and the emptiness of phenomena (the aggregates and the outer world). The Buddha says that as long as one asserts the absence of inherent existence, whether based on lack of inherent existence of self or the lack of inherent existence of self and of phenomena, is enough to overcome samsara.

Verse 41

*You say the Mahayana has no certainty.
But how do you substantiate your own tradition?
“Because it is accepted by both parties,” you will say.
But at the outset, you yourselves lacked proof!*

Verse 42

*The reasons why you trust in your tradition
May likewise be applied to Mahayana.
Moreover, if accord between two parties shows the truth,
The Vedas and rest are also true.*

The Prasangikas address the critics of the Mahayana who allege that the Mahayana is not the Buddha’s teachings by saying how do they (the critics from the lower schools) prove their view is correct? Mere acceptance by people does not establish correctness. For if it is purely based on people agreeing, then the Vedas would also come into the category of truth.

Verse 43

*“Mahayana is at fault,” you say, “because it is contested.”
But by non-Buddhists are your scriptures also questioned,
While other Buddhist schools impugn and spurn them.
Therefore, your tradition you must now abandon.*

Verse 44

*The true monk is the very root of Dharma,
But difficult it is to be a monk indeed.
And hard it is for minds enmeshed in thoughts
To pass beyond the bonds of suffering.*

The “true monk” refers to the Arya Sangha of the Triple Gem. However, to become an Arya being, one must eliminate all delusions including ignorance, and for that, one must realise the lack of inherent existence. To achieve path of seeing, one needs to realise emptiness directly based on the view of the highest school of the Prasangikas.

Verse 45

*You say there’s liberation in the instant
That defilements are entirely forsaken.
Yet those who from defilements are set free
Continue to display the influence of karma.*

The lower schools (Shravaka and Pratyeka) assert 3 types of practitioners – (1) the non- returner (2) the returner manifesting a samsaric body (3) the

Arhat who still needs 7 lifetimes of samsaric rebirth. The Shravakas seem to assert that when they attain the Sharavaka nirvana, the moment they die, they gain liberation.

Verse 46

*“Only for a while,” you say. “For it is certain
That the cause of rebirth, craving, is exhausted.”
They have no craving, granted, through defiled emotion.
But how could they avoid the craving linked with ignorance?*

Verse 47

*This craving is produced by virtue of sensation,
And sensation, this they surely have.
Concepts linger still within their minds;
And it is to these concepts that they cling.*

Due to not understanding the lack of inherent existence, mind will be affected by mistaken conceptuality and hence, have samsaric rebirth.

Verse 48

*The mind that has not realized voidness,
May be halted, but will once again arise-
Just as from a nonperceptual absorption,
Therefore, voidness must be cultivated.*

The mind that is not free from the extremes of true existence and nihilism (the belief that nothing exists) and fails to realise emptiness, will be forced into samsaric rebirth.

Verse 49

*If all that is encompassed by the sutras
You hold to be the Buddha's perfect speech,
Why do you not hold the greater part of Mahayana,
Which with your sutras is in perfect harmony?*

The Prasangikas say to the lower schools, since you hold your teachings to be from the Buddha, likewise the Mahayana is also from the Buddha and for the same purpose of removing delusions, so why not accept it (the Mahayana teachings) wholeheartedly.

Verse 50

*If due to just a single jarring element,
The whole is held to be at fault,
How might not a single point in concord with the sutras
Vindicate the rest as Buddha's teaching?*

When learning the Mahayana, one must not be narrow-minded and must respect all Buddhist traditions. The Theravadans follow only the Pali canon and not teachings of Nalanda pandits. Hence, in the Pali canon, there is not much evidence of Mahayana teachings.

Verse 51

*Mahakashyapa himself and others
Could not sound the depths of such a teaching.
Who will therefore say they are to be rejected
Just because they are not grasped by you?*

Verse 52

*To linger and abide within samsara,
But freed from every craving and from every fear,
To work the benefit of those who ignorantly suffer.
Such is the fruit that emptiness will bear.*

Verse 53

*From this, the voidness doctrine will be seen
To be immune from all attack.
And so, with every doubt abandoned,
Let us mediate upon this emptiness.*

Without emptiness practice, it would be impossible to become a Buddha. One should gain both scriptural knowledge, as well as experiential knowledge on the subject. Finally, one should come to the conviction that samsara and the peace of nirvana should be abandoned (so as to work for sentient beings).

Verse 54

Afflictive passion and the veils of ignorance-

The cure for these is emptiness.

Therefore, how could they not mediate upon it

Who wish swiftly to attain omniscience?

By adopting the teachings on emptiness presented by the Prasangikas, emotional obscuration (delusions which are the cause of samsara), as well as cognitive obscuration (the peace of nirvana) must be abandoned. The realisation of the emptiness of self can eliminate the obscuration to nirvana/liberation; The realisation of the emptiness of phenomena can eliminate the obscuration to omniscience. When one realises emptiness of phenomena, one will naturally understand emptiness of self but not vice-versa.

Verse 55

Whatever is the source of pain and suffering,

Let that be the object of our fear.

But voidness will ally our every sorrow;

how could it be for us a thing of dread?

Verse 56

If such a thing as "I" exists indeed,

Then terrors, granted, will torment it.

But since no self or "I" exist at all,

What is there left for fears to terrify?

Emptiness is a crucial realisation to attain, so it is worth bearing hardship to gain the realisation on emptiness. Since self is not inherently existent, there is no need to have fear of any kind.

Verse 57

*The teeth, the hair, the nails are not the “I,”
And “I” is not the bones or blood;
The mucus from the nose, and phlegm, are not the “I,”
And neither is it made of lymph or pus.*

The understanding of the emptiness of the self can be obtained through meditative analysis. Start by analysing whether self exists on each of 32 teeth, the 100,000 thousand of strands of hair, the 20 pieces of nails, 360 pieces of bone. How about on the blood or tissues. Neither is the I the body fluids; neither is the I at the chest or in the head. Do likewise with aspects of the mind and moments of mind. Check every single corner to see if you can point to one single object that is the “I”.

Verse 58

*The “I” is not the body’s grease or sweat,
The lungs and liver likewise do not constitute it.
Neither are the inner organs “I,”
Not yet the body’s excrement and waste.*

You might then raise the question - Is the I not a combination of parts? Answer: So if I Tenzin Zopa lose one limb, I am no longer Tenzin Zopa?

If the collation of parts is treated as an independent entity, as somehow having its own characteristics, that is a mistake view. It would be correct to say that Tenzin Zopa is a label onto the aggregates (body, consciousness, feeling, cognition, karmic imprints) but the collection of aggregates as an independent entity, not requiring any mental labelling (in this case, giving the label “Tenzin Zopa”) would be wrong view. The label must be on a valid base (the appropriate conventional truth of a base).

Verse 60

*If the hearing consciousness is permanent,
It follows that it's hearing all the time.
If there is no object, what is knowing what?
Why do you now say that there consciousness?*

Verse 61

*If consciousness is that which does not know,
It follows that a stick is also conscious.
Therefore, in the absence of a thing to know,
It is clear that consciousness will not arise.*

Verse 62

*“But consciousness may turn to apprehend a form,” you say.
But why, then, does it cease to hear?
Perhaps you say the sound's no longer there.
If so, the hearing consciousness is likewise absent.*

Verse 63

*How could that which has the nature of perceiving sound
Be changed into a form-perceiver?
“A single man,” you say, “can be both son and father.”
But there are merely names; his nature is not so.*

Verse 64

*Thus “pleasure,” “pain,” neutrality”
Do not partake of fatherhood or sonship,
And we indeed have never yet observed
A consciousness of form perceiving sound.*

Verse 65

*“But like an actor,” you will say, “it takes on different roles.”
If so, this consciousness is not a changeless thing.
“It’s one thing,” you will say, “with different modes.”
That’s unity indeed, and never seen before!*

Verse 66

*“But different modes,” you claim, “without reality.”
And so its essence you must now describe.
You say that this is simply knowing-
All beings therefore are a single thing.*

Verse 67

*What has mind and what does not have mind
Are likewise one, for both are equal in existing.
If the difference features are deceptive,
What is the support that underlies them?*

This is the assertion of the non-Buddhist Samkya school includes their view that self is the consciousness and permanent in nature.

Verse 68

*Something destitute of mind, we hold, cannot be self,
For mindlessness means matter, like a vase.
“But,” you say, “the self has consciousness, when joined to mind.”
But this refutes its nature of unconsciousness.*

Verse 69

*If the self, moreover, is immutable,
What change in it could mingling with the mind produce?
And selfhood we might equally affirm
Of empty space, inert and destitute of mind.*

Chetrakpa (non Buddhist, Nayayiga school) assert that the self is the non-consciousness.

Verse 70

*“If,” you ask, “the self does not exist,
How can acts be lined with their results?
If when the deed is done, the doer is no more,
Who is there to reap the karmic fruit?”*

Verse 71

*The basis of the act and fruit are not the same,
And thus a self lacks scope for its activity.
On this, both you and we are in accord-
What point is there in our debating?*

When we say that things are impermanent, it does not mean that they are non-existent. The Prasangikas are asserting that things are dependently-existent, not inherently existent. Let us look at cause and effect: When the result comes about, the cause is over. Similarly, when a 2nd moment of action arises, the 1st moment is over. Conditioned phenomena function in that manner i.e. one of impermanence.

Verse 72

*A cause co-terminous with its result
Is something quite impossible to see.
And only in the context of a single mental stream
Can it be said that one who acts will later reap the fruit.*

Verse 73

*The thoughts now passed, and those to come, are not the self;
They are no more, or are not yet.
Is then the self the thought which now is born?
If so, it sinks to nothing when the latter fades.*

Verse 74

*For instance, we may take banana tree-
Cutting through the fibres, finding nothing.
Likewise analytical instigation
Will find no "I," no underlying self.*

To analyse the self is like cutting a banana tree: There is no solid part of the tree which one can point to and say this is the "essence" of the banana tree – as you cut through, one merely encounters layers and layers of fibre. The banana tree comes about through causes, conditions, parts and the mental label of "banana tree". Likewise when one investigates where the "I" exists, one will find nothing to point to apart from that which comes about dependently on factors like causes and conditions, parts and mental imputation.

Verse 75

*"If being," you will say, "have no existence,
Who will be the object of compassion?"
Those whom ignorance imputes and vows to save,
Intending thus to gain the lofty goal.*

Verse 76

*“Since beings are no more,” you ask, “who gains the fruit?”
it’s true! The aspiration’s made in ignorance.
But for the total vanquishing of sorrow,
The goal, which ignorance conceives, should not be spurned.*

If there is no existence of self, there should be no existence of sentient beings either. If so, who is the object of our compassion? Again, we need to remember that the statement “no existence of self” refers to no inherently-existing self. There is a self that comes from causes and conditions, parts and mental imputation. However, our ignorant mind makes us see the self as independently existing, as if the self does not require parts and mental imputation to form the concept “I”.

We are here rejecting the independently or truly-existent I.

Verse 77

*The source of sorrow is the pride of saying “I,”
Fostered and increased by false belief in self.
To this you may say that there’s no redress,
But meditation on no-self will be the supreme way.*

The concept of the inherently-existing “I” is false and a source of suffering. Through past life habituation, we seize at the notion of “I” as something solid there, with fixed characteristics. By reminding oneself that “I” is merely-labelled, over time, one will have loosen one’s grasping at this “I”. It is this strong self-grasping that has led one to having an emotional mind, which creates all forms of negative karma.

Q: If we have business competitors, how do we apply emptiness?

Ans: Firstly, it is no point getting angry or frustrated with the competitor. Like oneself, he too is seeking happiness. Instead, one should work harder and at the same, accumulate more merits, which are supportive conditions for success. From the viewpoint of emptiness, reflect on how the competitor and the business problem do not inherently-exist . Whether the competitor is a problem or not is entirely dependent on one's view: If one sees him as a thief of one's profits, then it creates suffering; but if one sees the competitor as an opportunity for one to be more creative at work, to practice patience, to practice ethics, then instantly, the competitor becomes one's helper and not a harm-giver. Instantly, the suffering of having a competitor ceases. It totally depends on how the mind perceives the competitor and the situation.

Verse 78

*What we call the body is not feet or shins,
The body, likewise, is not thighs or loins.
It's not the belly nor indeed the back,
And from the chest and arms the body is not formed.*

Verse 79

*The body is not ribs or hands,
Armpits, shoulders, bowels, or entrails;
It is not the head or throat:
From none of these is "body" constituted.*

Verse 80

*If “body,” step by step,
Pervades and spreads itself throughout its members,
Its parts indeed are present in the parts.
But where does “body,” in itself, abide?*

Verse 81

*If ‘body,” single and entire,
Is present in the hand and other members,
However many parts there are, the hand and all the rest,
You’ll find an equal quantity of “bodies.”*

Examine the body whether it contains true existence or not. If one asserts that the “I” is one with the aggregates, then since there are 5 aggregates, does it mean there are 5 “I”s?

Verse 82

*If “body” is not outside or within its parts,
How is it, then, residing in its members?
And since it has no basis other than its parts,
How can it be said to be at all?*

If the “I” is not outside its parts nor within its parts, the only conclusion is that the “I” totally lacks inherent existence. When one is able to effortlessly see that self and phenomena are merely-labelled by mind onto a valid base, one gains the realisation of emptiness. In the Mahayana 5 Paths, the

day one realises emptiness directly is when one enters the Path of Seeing and the 1st of the 10 Grounds (level of practice).

Verse 83

*Thus there is no “body” in the limbs,
But from illusion does the idea spring,
To be affixed to a specific shape-
Just as when a scarecrow is mistaken for a man.*

There is no “I” in the limbs but the delusion of ignorance creates the concept of “I” onto the aggregates and believes it to be true. The example given is when one mistakes a scarecrow in the rice fields for a real person. It is just a matter of perception. The same principle applies in ordinary life with people and situations.

Verse 84

*As long as the conditions are assembled,
A body will appear and seem to be a man.
As long as all the parts are likewise present,
It’s there that we will see a body.*

Verse 85

*Likewise, since it is a group of fingers,
The hand itself is not a single entity.
And so it is with fingers, made of joints-
And joints themselves consist of many parts.*

This verse here explains as when the factors such as causes and conditions, parts of a valid base etc come together, there will be the basis for a mental label. This illustrates that things exist but do not exist inherently because it requires many factors to come together and the mind to give it a label. Another example is one's hand – there are parts of the hand such as fingers. There is the conventional existence of a hand but it came about by depending on various factors. Hence, the ultimate nature of one's hand is the lack of inherent existence and hand is merely-labelled onto a valid base (fingers etc).

Verse 86

*These parts themselves will break down into atoms,
And atoms will divide according to direction.
These fragments, too, will also fall to nothing.
Thus atoms are like empty space-they have no real existence.*

Why is it we are able to establish the 2 Truths through examples of the self or the hand? We establish convention/relative truth because existence comes about through a combination of causes and conditions, parts and mental labels. At the same time we see that as it required many factors to give rise to self or hand, it means that there is no single, inherently existing self nor hand. Each are merely labelled onto a (valid) base.

Verse 87

*All from, therefore, is like a dream,
And who will be attached to it, who thus investigates?
The body, in this way, has no existence;
What is male, therefore, and what is female?*

Through understanding how mind labels what it encounters which then gives rise to the perception of the object/person/situation, we begin to understand that the ultimate nature of a person, of the aggregates and of the outer world, is likewise the product of factors and mental imputation. This in turn means that object/person/situation lacks independent, inherent-existence and are thus empty of inherent existence, empty of true existence. Hence, the emptiness of self and the emptiness of phenomena.

"All form is like a dream and who will be attached to it.." means that our conceptual mind is constantly interpreting all that it encounters. If we interpret a feeling as a hardship, then we suffer; if we interpret it as happiness then we experience as happiness. Ultimately, the person who experiences the feelings and the feelings by themselves are non-existent. However, we can only understand this through investigation and analysis. As the Madhyamika Prasangika say, see all existence as being merely labelled (i.e. labelled onto a base) and not existing from its own side. Emptiness meditation can be so effective to end suffering. If we investigate with a concentration- mind and apply such wisdom on emptiness, we will realise that suffering and happiness is a conceptual dance – one can transform suffering into happiness.

Therefore, enlightenment is right here and not somewhere out there. However, it requires a change in conceptual thinking; even the concepts themselves are empty of inherent existence; at the end of the day, enlightenment and samara lack inherent existence and in this way, all are of one taste. It is because suffering is empty of inherent existence and is not fixed nor solidly existing, that change is possible, that transformation to enlightenment is possible.

Meditators who gain realisations on the 2 Truths will see one truth – that there is no inherent existence. First, one puts effort to establish the two truths; once one is familiar with that, one then moves towards establishing the one truth. We can do this when we are free from conceptual mind (of ignorance). However, at this stage of realising the 2 truths as fundamentally being a single truth, it does not mean that one has attained the enlightenment mind. More work on mental perceptions still needs to be done.

Verse 88

*If suffering itself is truly real,
Then why is joy not altogether quenched thereby?
If pleasure's real, then why will pleasant tastes
Not comfortable and amuse a man in agony?*

If suffering is truly existent and its nature is the way we currently perceive suffering, then the suffering should be consistent, the same every moment, permanent. E.g. if one is feeling sad, one should be feeling sad all the time because it “exists” and no change of mind will alter this because it is inherently existing. Similarly, if joy is truly existent, it should be everlasting. If pleasure is real, then there should be no space to feel suffering. However, that is not our experience. When the suffering feeling decreases, there is a feeling of happiness; when happiness is interrupted, there is unhappiness – it is not fixed, it is not solidly existing there, it is not inherently existing.

Verse 89

*If the feeling fails to be experienced,
Through being overwhelmed by something stronger,
How can “feeling” rightly be ascribed
To that which lacks the character of being felt?*

Similarly, when a feeling is experienced and a stronger, opposing feeling then dominates, the effect of the earlier feeling declines. This shows that the earlier feeling was not inherently existing.

Verse 90

*Perhaps you say that only subtle pain remains,
Its grosser form has now been overmastered,
Or rather it is felt as mere pleasure.
But what is subtle still remains itself.*

When you destroy what you regard as the characteristics of suffering, the suffering disappears; when you dismantle the concept of “problem”, the situation is no longer a problem. Hence, when problems come, do not run towards external solutions but sit and meditate to find the nature of the problem (our belief that problems inherently exist) and the solution will surface. By meditating this way, one will gain freedom from the conceptual mind. However, when we destroy the conceptual mind (which is based on ignorance), not all accumulated negative karmas will be destroyed because there are gross and subtle defilements. Subtle defilements are the obscurations to liberation and obscurations to enlightenment and these can only be removed by direct realisations into emptiness combined with perfected bodhicitta.

Verse 91

*If, through presence of its opposite,
Pain and sorrow fail to manifest,
To claim with such conviction that it's felt
Is surely nothing more than empty words.*

Pain and sorrow are mental labels. Pain will not be experienced if the cause and conditions of the pain are not present and if the mind did not label it as “pain”. If the pain is real, it will not depend on causes and conditions and factors but will exist on its own. But it is not.

One of the main causes is our conceptual mind that is affected by delusions. The word “pain” has actually no base we simply label it so. In human relationships – we commit mistakes and accuse the other persons because we make assumptions and affix mental labels onto people and situations and in so doing, end up hurting others and ourselves feeling hurt too. Let us take the example of one’s hand. We have this concept of an inherently existing hand being the possession of an inherently existing “I” (hence, “my hand”) and with this thought, feelings in relation to the hand arises. In fact, there is no inherently existing hand. Hand appears due to many factors and does not independently exist.

Verse 92

*Since so it is, the antidote
Is meditation and analysis.
Investigation and resultant concentration
Is indeed the food and sustenance of yogis.*

This is the advice to be kept in our hearts: We need to build up conviction that the antidote to suffering and all forms of feelings, is meditation and analysis on the nature of self and of phenomena i.e. meditation on emptiness. Check whether things and situations exist in the manner in which they appear or not.

We soon discover that yogis have, through concentration, overcome the disturbance of outer elements and delusions – one example was my late master –Through his practice on wisdom analysis, he was able to control elements and remain unaffected by any form of disturbing thoughts. When he manifested passing way, yes, his body came to an end but his mind was free from conceptual disturbance. In order for us to be able to attain this state and engage with human beings, we first have to practice in solitude.

Verse 93

*If between the sense power and a thing
There is a space, how will the two terms meet?
If there is no space, they form a unity,
And therefore, what is it that meets with what?*

Some say that feelings must exist because of the true existence of its cause. But Shantideva argues that if that is the case, are conceptual mind and feeling are separate entities? If so, how do these two meet and give rise to an effect? So they cannot be separate. However, they cannot be in oneness either because if they were, cause and effect would have to exist in the same moment. But we know that this is not so because when the result arises, cause is finished, so it's not possible for them to be existing,

united in one moment. Basically, feelings come about in an interdependent manner and do not require a truly existent cause to produce the feeling.

Verse 94

*Atoms and atoms cannot interpenetrate,
For they are equal, lacking any volume.
But if they do not penetrate, they do not mingle;
And if they do not mingle, there is no encounter.*

Atoms and atoms cannot penetrate each other (the Samkya school says atoms have no parts but exist in a subtle way). If there are no parts and momentary function on subtle atoms, we will come to the conclusion that there is no link between cause and effect; and the atoms cannot come together to form objects. So here, parts operate at a cooperative level but there is no individual self-existent part and particles.

Verse 95

*For how could anyone accept
That what is partless could be said to meet?
And you must show me, if you ever saw,
A contact taking place between two partless things.*

The challenge is thrown to the Samkyas (non-Buddhist school who assert partless atoms) “If you are confident, show me how partless things can meet and it seems like there is no law of cause and effect?” If there are no parts, no directions, then it would not possible to meet. Right now,

because West exists, East exists. There is a dependency of things. There is nothing that characterises something as “East “. Similarly, “I “ arises because of the conceptual mind which imputes a label of “self” or “I” onto a base (of aggregates).

Verse 96

*The consciousness is immaterial,
And so one cannot speak of contact with it.
A combination, too, has no reality,
And this we have already demonstrated.*

The Madhyamika re-assert that consciousness also lacks inherent existence as preciously demonstrated in the earlier verses (V85 and V86).

Verse 97

*Therefore, if there is no touch or contact,
Whence is it that feeling takes its rise?
What purpose is there, then, in all our striving,
What is it, then, that torments what?*

Thus if there is no contact between feelings and its causes, where do feelings arise? The contact is not like physical contact. The contact here is just a matter of the collation of factors which have the potency to give rise to feelings, which again are due to deluded conceptual mind, imputing onto a base. Since it is just a projection of that deluded mind, there is no reason for us to believe that the projection (the feeling) is real and grasp onto it.

The conclusion is thus to let go of the grasping and clinging towards the feeling of happiness, as it is merely a projection of the deluded conceptual mind and this awareness will ease the consciousness to a non-grasping, neutral state which in itself is quite an achievement.

Verse 98

*Since there is no subject for sensation,
And sensation, too, lacks all existence,
Why, when this you clearly understand,
Will you not pause and turn away from craving?*

We also need to refute the lower Madhyamika school (Madyamika-Sautrantika) view on emptiness as well because they assert the true existence of the base. To the Prasangikas, the base also lacks inherent existence. One needs to be able to establish through meditative analysis, the lack of true existence of both subject (mind) and object (outer object). When we are able to do this, we will see that feelings are the product of a conceptual mind which mistakenly perceives feelings as “real” and this, there is no basis for it and yet they bring much suffering. Hereon, one should cease craving for “feelings” as if they were truly existent.

Verse 99

*Seeing then, and sense of touch
Are stuff of insubstantial dreams.
If perceiving consciousness arises simultaneously,
How could such a feeling be perceived?*

If subject and object arise simultaneously or if cause and effect simultaneously exist, then how could any feeling be perceived?

The point here is that feelings come from cause. It is not possible for cause and effect to be occurring at the same time. Feelings dependently arise and do not need a truly existent cause to produce the feeling.

Verse 100

*If the one arises first, the other after,
Memory occurs and not direct sensation.
Sensation, then, does not perceive itself,
And likewise, by another it is not perceived.*

Which comes first? Feeling or consciousness? Feelings and consciousness do not arise simultaneously; they do not arise by themselves but arise dependently from an appropriate cause – ie. appropriate cause because otherwise, planting rice will produce apples; humans will be produced by animals etc and that would be all upside down.

Verse 101

*The subject of sensation has no real existence,
Thus sensation, likewise, has no being.
What damage, then, can be inflicted
On this aggregate deprived of self?*

The verse refutes the assertion that things do not need to depend on previous causes i.e. existence can come about through self production e.g.

suffering comes from itself and no other factors. This verse raises the complaint that there is no I who commits karma, who purifies, etc, who becomes the Buddha? Self production implies that a person can come into being by itself, without father and mother or any prior cause. This is refuted.

Verse 102

The mind within the senses does not dwell;

It has no place in outer things, like form,

And in between, the mind does not abide:

Not out, not in, not elsewhere can the mind be found.

Here is the debate with the Cittamatra, who assert that external objects lack true existence and are mere results of imprints of mind. However the Cittamatra assert that mental imprints are truly existent. Sometimes, we think this way too (although we are supposed to follow the Prasangika school!)

The Prasangika challenges the above assertion by stating that the mind within the senses does not truly exist; neither does it exist in outer objects; neither does it exist in feelings. Therefore, the mind also lacks inherent existence.

We come to the conclusion that mind is also non-inherently existing.

Right now, we may only understand this intellectually without a direct experience of emptiness. However, we if we persevere in meditation on

this, we will come to the stage where the conceptual mind is abandoned. This is not actual liberation but a high realisation state. One will be free from the bondage of conceptual ideas. When we receive bad news, we should investigate where the troubled feeling comes from, what is the source of this disturbance. Is there a truly existent feeling or source of problem or not? Check it out. Make this a daily meditation. Meditate on how it is the tendency of the conceptual mind to mistakenly hold onto true existence. However, very few can successfully gain realisations into emptiness directly, to see the absence of inherent existence directly. That is why very few are liberated.

Verse 103

*Something not within the body, and yet nowhere else,
That does not merge with it nor stand apart-
Something such as this does not exist, not even slightly.
Beings have nirvana by their nature.*

The “nirvana “ referred to here is the freedom from the conceptual mind, through understanding the nature of that phenomena. If we can free ourselves from one conceptual mind of permanence, for example, that would be like attaining a small nirvana. The moment we understand the nature of this contaminated body and able to openly accept it, what a sense of freedom!

Nagarjuna and Lama Tsongkhapa advised that before we can gain freedom from delusions, we need to realise the object of negation first i.e. the object to be refuted which is the inherently existing I.

After meditating for a long time on emptiness, one will arrive at the point where one completely loses the grasping to or perception of the true/inherent existence of mind. This causes some fear to arise but that must be managed through the sustained analysis of the nature of reality. First, we mistakenly believed in true existence (that I and things truly exist); then we encountered the terms like “no inherent existence” and we began to move towards the other extreme of nihilism (a belief that nothing exists). We tend to dwell in one of the two extremes i.e. of true existence and nihilism. This should stop and instead, we need to cultivate the middle way i.e. seeing the “I” as existing in a dependent way i.e. that the “I” comes about from a combination of factors like causes and conditions, parts of the object (base) and then mental labelling is put by one’s mind onto this collation of factors. By failing to see the “I” as dependently arising, we will grasp to the “I” as if it truly, inherently, independently exists.

As long as subtle self-grasping exists, we cannot actualise emptiness. In the Prajnaparamita Sutra – The nature of mind is clarity and the ability to cognise/know. It is this clear cognition which when trained, progresses to omniscience.

Verse 104

If consciousness precedes the cognized object,

With regard to what does it arise?

If consciousness arises with its object,

Again, regarding what does it arise?

Other philosophers assert that mind exists because outer objects exist e.g. a vase exists, therefore mind exists because without it, there would be no

mind to cognise it. It is clear that this logic is faulty. Mind can still function without external objects.

Verse 105

*If consciousness comes later than its object,
Once again, from what does it arise?
Thus the origin of all phenomena
Lies beyond the reach of understanding.*

If consciousness comes after the appearance of an object, from what does consciousness arise? The manner in which phenomena comes about needs to be discovered through the meditative, non-conceptual mind. Conventional nature eventually also dissolves into the ultimate truth. All existence lies in one nature i.e. emptiness. When we apply this understanding to phenomena after applying the same understanding to the self, it becomes a forceful means to remove obscurations to omniscience.

Verse 106

*“If this is so” you say, “the relative will cease,
And then the two truths - what becomes of them?
If relative depends on beings’ minds,
This means nirvana is attained by none.”*

Relative truth is dependent on the conceptual mind. For meditators, even the relative truth that is dependent on the conceptual mind has to cease; otherwise, no one will attain nirvana. Buddha sees both relative truth and

ultimate truth simultaneously. The Buddha dwells in ultimate truth (and thus has no experience of suffering) but because he sees sentient beings, he sees the relative truth that sentient beings see (i.e. the Buddhas can perceive the sufferings of sentient beings but does not experience them). When Arya Beings see emptiness, they only see ultimate truth during their meditation on emptiness but in the post-meditation period, they see relative truth but no longer believe in it.

Verse 107

*This relative is just the thoughts of beings;
That is not the relative of beings in nirvana.
If thoughts come after this, then that is still the relative;
If not, the relative has truly ceased.*

From the 2 Truths, relative truth is like an optical illusion; when one is free from the conceptual mind, relative truth will cease.

Verse 108

*Analysis and what is to be analyzed
Are linked together, mutually dependent.
It is on the basis of conventional consensus,
That all examination is expressed.*

Ordinary beings have and utilise the conceptual mind, which is influenced by ignorance. Thus, analysis and examination should constantly be carried out on such minds. When one realises emptiness directly, one sees the

true nature of existence i.e. the absence of inherent existence, whatever phenomena is perceived then would not require further investigation.

In some dreams, we are being chased and when we wake up we find ourselves breathing heavily but have the awareness that the chase was just a dream. When we realise emptiness, we see that all phenomena are illusion-like as well and hence, there would be no need to grasp at them. With this manner of thinking, there will be no suffering.

The unbalanced emotional mind experiences much suffering. The one who is free from the grasping mind is in a stable, comforting state because that mind is not dragged here and there by emotions and delusions. There is the conventional truth of an “I” that that accumulates merit and gains freedom from samsara. However, this “I” is dependently arising and not truly or inherently existing.

Verse 109

*“But when the process of analysis
Is made in turn the object of our scrutiny,
This investigation, likewise, may be analyzed,
And thus we find an infinite regress.”*

There is another school of philosophy which disapproves of the Prasangika’s approach towards analysing the mode of investigation of the 2 Truths. That school asserts that if one did that, there will be no end to analysis. The Prasangikas reply to this appears in verse 110.

Verse 110

*If phenomena are truly analyzed,
No basis for analysis remains.
Deprived of further object, it subsides.
That indeed is said to be nirvana.*

This is the Prasangika's response to verse 109. If one correctly analyses, there will come a point where there is no longer a need for analysis. When one comes to the conclusion that there is no inherently existing base to be analysed, one realises ultimate truth and that is nirvana.

Verse 111

*Those who say that "both are true"
Are hard pressed to maintain their case.
if consciousness reveals the truth of things,
By what support is consciousness upheld?*

If one says that both of the 2 Truths have true existence, that will be hard to prove. The 2 Truths are taught in the context of the conceptual, ordinary perception. At meditational level, only one truth (ultimate truth) is relevant.

Verse 112

*If objects show that consciousness exists,
What, in turn, upholds the truth of objects?
If both subsist through mutual dependence,
Both thereby will lose their true existence.*

If outer objects show that consciousness exist, what upholds the truth of objects? If both exist through dependent arising, the concept of true existence is then defeated.

Verse 113

*If, without a son, a man cannot be father;
Whence, indeed, will such a son arise?
There is no father in the absence of a son.
Just so, the mind and object have no true existence.*

The interdependence of things is illustrated here – the notion of a father arises in dependence on a child, e.g. a son. Hence similarly, mind and object exist in the nature of inter-dependence.

Verse 114

*“The plant arises from the seed,” you say,
“So why should not the seed be thence inferred?
Consciousness arises from the object-
How does it now show the thing’s existence?”*

Verse 115

*A consciousness that’s different from the plant itself
Deduces the existence of the seed.
But what will show that consciousness exist,
Whereby the object is itself established?*

Consciousness interpret outer objects and due to the inter-dependence between mind and a valid base (object), there is no inherent/true existence in the base nor mind itself. The Prasangikas use the same example to establish a lack of inherent existence.

Verse 116

*At times direct perception of the world
Perceives that all things have their causes.
The different segments of the lotus flower
Arise from similar diversity of causes.*

Due to the varying levels of merit and ability of sentient beings, the Buddha had to reveal emptiness in the manner that suited the listener.

Verse 117

*“But what gives rise,” you ask, “to such diversity of causes?”
An ever earlier variety of cause, we say.
“And how,” you ask, “do certain fruits derive from certain causes?”
Through the power, we answer, of preceding causes.*

Verse 118

*If Ishvara is held to be the cause of beings,
You must now define for us his nature.
If, by this, you simply mean the elements,
No need to tire ourselves disputing names!*

Some philosophers struggle with the doctrine of emptiness; some are more comfortable with the concept of a creator-god. This gave rise to philosophers who asserted that all suffering and bounty are the creation of gods like Ishvara etc. The Prasangikas challenged these philosophers to describe the nature of Ishvara – if he is permanent, then it is self defeating argument because how can permanence function to create impermanent beings and phenomena? if he is supreme in mercy, why then are beings in suffering? Why so many differences between then? If god is perfected, why is he not listening to prayers? If you say suffering is punishment from god for wrongdoings, where is the supremely compassionate god who should instead be guiding and liberating living beings, rather than making them more deluded through the hardships endured. When you search for a creator-god, there are many refutations that can be raised. Whereas the karma explanation is pure logic. As for emptiness, without the realisation of emptiness, there will be no liberation nor enlightenment.

Verse 119

*Yet earth and other elements are many,
Impermanent, inert, without divinity.
Trampled underfoot, they are impure,
And thus they cannot be a God Omnipotent.*

Verse 120

*The Deity cannot be Space - inert and lifeless.
He cannot be the Self, for this we have refuted.
He's inconceivable, they say. Then likewise his creatorship.
Is there any point, therefore, to such a claim?*

Verse 121

*What is it he wishes to create?
Has he made the self and all the elements?
But are not self and elements and he, himself, eternal?
And consciousness, we know, arise from its object;*

Verse 122

*Pain and pleasure have, from all time, sprung from karma,
So tell us, what has this Divinity produced?
And if Creation's cause is unoriginate,
How can origin be part of the result?*

We have no respect for the environment, hence the elements break down and this affects us; we cause harm and create the causes to receive harm and is not created by god. Suffering and delusion are due to past karma and not external factors.

Verse 123

*Why are creatures not created constantly,
For Ishvara relies on nothing but himself?
And if there's nothing that he has not made,
What remains on which he might depend?*

Verse 124

*If Ishvara depends, the cause of all
Is prior circumstances, and no longer he.
When these obtain, he cannot but create;
When these are absent, he is powerless to make.*

The Prasangikas state that if one asserts that god God creates in dependence on sentient beings, then his power is derived from beings, so if beings are not there, he is powerless e.g. if the assertion is that because living beings commit wrongdoings, god punishes them, god's actions are actually dependent on sentient beings and if so, without sentient beings, he actions would be limited; similarly if god's creation is also dependent on sentient beings, where is his supremacy? This debate is not to be critical. Rather, it is to analyse the assertions of various philosophical schools to gain a better understanding of the cause of self and phenomena.

For Buddhist, when one takes Refuge, one expects the Triple Gem to thereon look after oneself but never think of the refuge vows and how to integrate them into one's daily life. So when we pray, we should not ask the Triple Gem to make things right for us (as that would be similar to creator-god concept) but rather, we have to do the practice ourselves to purify negativities, accumulate merits and achieve our goals.

When we do practices e.g. wealth vase practice, this is to create positive karma that is premised on the wish to utilise one's resources to benefit others and not only oneself. It is certainly not to merely ask the deities to grant us things! The practice of guru devotion should be studied very well, even before having Guru. Otherwise, we could end up having

improper expectations of the Guru, we might doubt guru's advice. Inability to practice well is due to lack of conviction in the Guru. Ultimately, that practice is to change one's own karma. Like Milarepa, the moment he was able to see Guru as Buddha, he saw Marpa in the deity's mandala. From his perception, he saw only purity in his Guru and this inspiration sustained him in his practice.

Verse 125

*If Almighty God does not intend,
But yet creates, another thing has forced him
If he wishes to create, he's swayed by his desire.
Even though Creator, then, what comes of his Omnipotence?*

This is yet another debate on the creator-god concept. If god's creation is dependent on sentient beings (as illustrated in verse 124 above), where is his power and omnipotence. The fact that so many sentient beings live in inequality and terrifying conditions; sufferings for some, happiness for others, disasters in every corner, how can one accept a wise and all-knowing creator? However, as HH Dalai Lama says, every religion has its own virtues and benefits. However, when it comes to the topic of emptiness as the ultimate nature, the teachings of Nagarjuna and Lama Tsongkhapa are still supreme.

Verse 126

*Those who say that atoms are the permanent foundation
Have indeed already been refuted.
The Samkhyas are the ones who hold
The Primal Substance as enduring cause.*

Verse 127

*“Pleasure,” “pain,” neutrality,” so-called,
Are qualities which, when they rest
In equilibrium, are termed the Primal Substance.
The universe arise when they are disturbed.*

The non-Buddhist Samkya believes Primal Substance and self production.

Verse 128

*Three natures in a unity are disallowed;
This unity, therefore, cannot exist.
These qualities, likewise, have no existence,
These qualities, likewise, have no existence,
For they must also be assigned a triple nature.*

The Prasangika’s reply is that only by virtue of the absence of self production and the Primal Substance, that the 5 senses come about and all objects exist dependently. Without understanding dependent arising, one will not be able to establish happiness and its causes; suffering and its causes.

Verse 129

*If these qualities have no existence,
A thing like sound is very far from plausible!
And cloth, and other mindless objects,
Cannot be the seat of feelings such as pleasure.*

Verse 130

*“But,” you say, “these things possess the nature of their cause.”
But have we not investigated “things” already?
For you the cause is pleasure and the like,
But from pleasure, cloth has never sprung!*

Verse 131

*Pleasure, rather, is produced from cloth,
But this is nonexistent, therefore pleasure likewise.
As for permanence of pleasure and the rest-
Well, there’s a thing that’s never been observed.*

The feeling of the smoothness of cloth is pleasurable but that is ultimately lacking in inherent existence. For Samkyas however, they say that if cloth did not exist, one would not be able to experience the smoothness of it.

Verse 132

*If pleasure and the rest are true existents,
Why are they not constantly perceived?
And if you claim they take on subtle form,
How can coarseness change, transforming into subtlety?*

The rebuttal to verse 132 is that if the cloth and pleasure are truly existent, one ought to constantly derive pleasure from the cloth but that is clearly not true as the cloth is impermanent and likewise pleasure.

Verse 133

*If coarseness is abandoned, subtlety assumed,
Such transition indicates impermanence.
Why then not accept that, in this way,
All things will have the character of transience?*

Verse 134

*If you say the coarser aspect is itself the pleasure,
The manifest sensation is of course impermanent.
And what does not exist in any sense,
Because it has no being, cannot manifest.*

Since the Samkyas say that when the gross nature subsides, the subtle nature remains, this shows changeability. If so, why do the Samkyas not accept impermanence? Their assertion is due to not knowing momentary changes.

Verse 135

*You do not intend that what is manifest
Lacked earlier existence - yet this is the meaning.
And if results exist within their cause,
Those who eat their food, consume their excrement.*

The Prasangikas here fault the Samkya's view that that the result exists at the time of cause. They point out that such an assertion would be the same as saying that excrement is produced at the same time the food is being eaten.

Verse 136

*And likewise with the money they would spend on clothing,
Let them rather buy the cotton grain to wear.
“But,” you say, “the world is ignorant and blind.”
Since this is taught by those who know the truth,*

Verse 137

*This knowledge must be present in the worldly.
And if they have it, why do they not see?
You say, “The views of worldly folk are false.”
Therefore, what they clearly see has no validity.*

Verse 138

*“But if there is no truth in their cognition,
All that it assesses is performe deceptive.
Meditation on the supreme truth of voidness
Cease, therefore, to have any meaning.”*

If the Samkya assertion of the cause and result existing at the same moment is correct, then even meditators cannot discover ultimate truth. One might as well believe in Big Bang theory where consciousness and humans and the universe began from one point in time. If one holds this view, very difficult to establish ultimate truth and even relative truth.

Verse 139

*If there is no object for analysis,
There can be no grasping of its nonexistence.
Therefore, a deceptive object of whatever kind
Will also have a voidness equally deceptive.*

When we are able to refute the object of negation, we will arrive at the non affirmative negation i.e. the emptiness is to be realised is that self and phenomena are all free from inherent existence. The term “non-affirmative negation” comes about in this way - we say we wish to negate believing in inherent existence but the fact is that there is no inherent existence in the first place, so what is there to negate, hence arriving at this point is arriving at the non affirmative negation. We need to gain realisations on this.

Verse 140

*Thus, when in a dream, a child has died,
The state of mind which thinks he is no more
Will overwhelm the thought that he was living.
And yet, both thoughts are equally deceptive.*

Verse 141

*Therefore, as we see through such investigation,
Nothing is that does not have a cause;
And nothing is existent in its causes
Taken one by one or in the aggregate.*

We need to deconstruct our grasping to inherent existence and construct a clear awareness of the the lack of inherent existence i.e. that all are merely labelled (onto valid bases).

Verse 142

*It does not come from somewhere else,
Neither does it stay, nor yet depart.
How will what confusion takes for truth
In may sense be different from a mirage?*

Verse 143

*Things, then, bodied forth by magic spells,
And that which is displayed by dint of causes-
“Whence have these arisen?” we should ask;
And were they go to, that we should examine!*

Verse 144

*What arises through the meeting of conditions
And ceases to exist when these are lacking,
Is artificial like the mirror image;
How can true existence be ascribed to it?*

Where do mirages come from? They are mere illusion. Similarly, if we do not analyse all that we perceive, we will end up believing in false appearances. When our face is reflected in the mirror, our face is not inside the mirror but it has the appearance of being so! Our other perceptions are similarly mistaken.

Verse 145

*Something that exist with true existence-
What need is there for it to have a cause?
Something that is wholly inexistent-
Again, what need has it to have a cause?*

If something truly exists (the doctrine of true existence), there is no need for its cause; and if something does not exist (nihilism), there is no need to even talk about causes – this verse is refuting the 2 extremes.

Verse 146

*Even by a hundred million causes,
No transformation is there in nonentity.
For if this keeps its status, how could entity occur?
And likewise, what is there that could so change?*

Verse 147

*When nonbeing prevails, if there's no being,
When could being ever supervene?
For insofar as entity does not occur,
Nonentity itself will not depart.*

Verse 148

*And if nonentity is not dispersed,
No chance is there for entity to manifest.
Being cannot change and turn to nonbeing,
Otherwise it has a double nature.*

Verse 149

*Thus there is no being,
Likewise no cessation.
Therefore beings, each and every one,
Are unborn and are never ceasing.*

There are no inherently existing beings, no inherently existing cessation.

Verse 150

*Wandering beings, thus, resemble dreams
And also the banana tree, if you examine well.
No difference is there, in their own true nature,
Between the states of suffering and beyond all sorrow.*

Verse 151

*Thus, with things devoid of true existence,
What is there to gain, and what to lose?
Who is there to pay me court and honors,
And who is there to scorn and to revile me?*

When you cut the banana tree, it is only layers that are seen and there is no real essence of its own entity. One of the benefits of realising emptiness, of seeing that the self has no true existence, is overcoming the 8 worldly concerns.

Verse 152

*Pain and pleasure, whence do these arise?
And what is there to give me joy and sorrow?
In this quest and search for perfect truth,
Who is craving, what is there to crave?*

Due to one's understanding of dependent arising and the absence of true existence, one comes to the conclusion that there is nothing to be grasped at.

Verse 153

*Examine now this world of living beings:
Who is there therein to pass away?
What is there to come, and what has been?
And who, indeed, are relatives and friends?*

The principle explained in verse 152 applies to loved ones and possessions i.e. there is no need to grasp at them. Whether one has or has not, it is fine. When friends away, goodbye; when friends come, welcome. There is not need to struggle. Appreciate having but do not grasp. Nagarjuna says all things and experiences as equal and the 8 worldly concerns are not worthy objects of your mind.

Verse 154

*May beings like myself discern and grasp
That all things have the character of space!
But those who long for happiness and ease,
Through disputes or the cause of pleasures,*

This is a reminder to regard all things as being like a dream or space. Those who truly wish for happiness and peace, should relinquish the conceptual mind and the 8 worldly concerns.

Verse 155

*Are deeply troubled, or else thrilled with joy.
They suffer, strive, contend among themselves,
Slashing, stabbing, injuring each other:
They live their lives engulfed in many evils.*

Due to being unable to realise the lack of true existence, self grasping arises and from that, all forms of conflict and suffering arises. Gyaltsab Je says that when emptiness is realised, all sins are purified and real compassion can arise.

Verse 156

*From time to time they surface in the states of bliss,
Abandoning themselves to many pleasures.
But dying down they fall to suffer torment,
Long, unbearable, in realms of sorrow.*

Verse 157

*Many are the chasms and abysses of existence,
Where the truth of voidness is not found.
All is contradiction, all denial,
Suchness, or its like, can find no place.*

If one wants to abide in happiness, emptiness realisation is crucial. Otherwise, everything we do that we might think is virtue, may be creating cause for samsara. We may perform an act of kindness to sentient beings but if our so acting is based on the mistaken view that they inherently exist, then although there is merit, it is worldly merit and is the cause for more samsara. Without understanding emptiness, there can be no true freedom from suffering.

Verse 158

*There, exceeding all description,
Is the shoreless sea of pain unbearable.
Here it is that strength is low,
And lives are flickering and brief.*

Understanding of emptiness counters the concept of the true existence of things. If we do Dharma practices for samsaric goals, we have wasted our time and effort. Hence, although emptiness teachings are difficult, it is worth studying it if it secures total freedom and lasting happiness. During Buddha's time, there was a man named Lekyong, who endured great suffering due to accumulating negative karma from the past, without having a moment for the seeds of joy to manifest. However, by merely listening to the emptiness teachings just once, without understanding much of what he heard, was able to purify his past negative karma. Such is the potency of the emptiness teachings.

Verse 159

*All activities for sake of life and health,
Relief of hunger and of weariness,
Time consumed in sleep, all accident and injury,
And sterile friendships with the childish-*

Verse 160

*Thus life passes quickly, meaningless.
True discernment - hard it is to have!
How then shall we ever find the means
To curb the futile wanderings of the mind?*

Life passes quickly. What is the real Dharma? Emptiness. Even to hear these teachings, like Lekyong did, great benefits come. Spending hours listening to emptiness teachings, even without full comprehension, will not be

wasted. We should try to spend our time, including our last moments of our lives, thinking about emptiness teachings.

Verse 161

*Further, evil forces work and strain
To cast us headlong into states of woe;
Manifold are false, deceptive trails,
And it is hard to dissipate our doubts.*

There are many obstacles to our happiness. We cannot take receiving teachings for granted either. Not many people can consume the emptiness teachings not because the teachings are not valid but because not everyone has the karma to receive them. Like diamonds, only a few people possess them. It is not because diamonds are not valuable but because they are rare and precious.

Verse 162

*Hard it is to find again this state of freedom,
Harder yet to come upon enlightened teachers,
Hard, indeed, to turn aside the torrent of defilement!
Alas, our sorrows fall in endless streams!*

Verse 163

*Sad it is indeed that living beings,
Carried on the flood of bitter pain,
However terrible their plight may be,
Do not perceive they suffer so!*

Contemplate: To receive the wisdom teachings on emptiness is difficult. Even if the teachings are available in books and recordings, it is difficult for one to set aside the time to study it; even if one has the time, one may not meet find teachers who can explain emptiness teachings (some teachers are not confident to explain emptiness, as the karmic consequence of misleading others on this topic, is very heavy); to find a conducive environment to concentrate on this topic is difficult. On top of that, life is fragile. Then, we live in samsara which means distractions of every kind - even if we want to hear the teachings, there are needs of children and family which may not allow one the time. Many obstacles to receiving the emptiness teachings.

Therefore, having met them, one needs to put effort to exploring the teachings. As long as emptiness is cultivated, the Bodhisattva 's mind is free for suffering.

Verse 164

*Some there are who bathe themselves repeatedly,
And afterwards they scorch themselves with fire,
Suffering intensely all the while,
Yet there they stay, proclaiming loud their bliss.*

Some due to the practices prescribed by their faith, torture their body and they regard it as bliss. The waters at Mount Kailash are freezing but some devotees jump into that water thinking it will bring them liberation. Since emptiness teachings can secure us liberation and enlightenment, if we fail to effort into it, we have wasted a precious opportunity for

peerless happiness.

We need to constantly meditate on death and impermanence in order to optimise our life and the time we have left. If one forgets to meditate on these in the morning, the afternoon is wasted; if do not do this in afternoon, the night is wasted. And if do not meditate on this at every moment, next moment wasted too. This is the Kadampa masters' conclusion.

Verse 165

*Likewise there are some who live and act
As though old age and death will never come to them
But then life's over and there comes
The dreadful fall into the states of loss.*

Verse 166

*When shall I be able to allay and quench
The dreadful heat of suffering's blazing fires,
With plenteous rains of my won bliss
That pour torrential from my clouds of merit?*

We need not to ask when we will be free from suffering, when we will be liberated from saamsara. We can answer this ourselves – when we achieve samatha (calm abiding concentration) and special insight (vipassana) into emptiness; we achieve the unification of concentration and wisdom. Until then, there is no end to samsara.

Verse 167

*My wealth of merit gathered in,
With reverence but without conceptual aim,
When shall I reveal this truth of emptiness
To those who go to ruin through belief in substance?*

Whatever physical, spiritual, material or wisdom strength we may have, we should marshal all of these towards cultivating the wisdom realising emptiness. If you have money, spend the money to go to places where wisdom teachings from valid teachers like HH Dalai Lama are being given. If you have health, use it to study well and not spend too much energy on worldly pastimes. To understand emptiness deeply, there is the need for study, contemplation, meditation, questioning and debate. When masters visit, make good use of that opportunity to ask questions and clarify your doubts.

Chapter 10: Dedication

As stated in the sutras it is stated, “If the wishing gems of the 2 accumulations are not well polished with good aspirations, the needed wishes for good fruits will not arise, so finish all your work with dedication”. In order to accomplish all our virtuous intentions up to actualising enlightenment, proper dedication of one’s efforts is needed.

“The failure to dedicate virtuous actions towards the good of others is a fault. Not to dedicate or dedicating wrongly (i.e. influenced by the 8 worldly concerns) or dedicating boastfully to impress others or regretting one’s virtuous deeds, are all faults”.

It is also stated that dedication is a path of never ending merit. So we shouldn’t forget to dedicate. The act of dedication will continuously multiply one’s merit. Need to dedicate with altruistic mind / bodhicitta. One will then enjoy the benefit of receiving the happiness of realisations on the stages of the path up to full enlightenment.

“A drop of water that enters the great sea will not dry up until the sea itself runs dry; the virtue that is pledged, is not fulfilled until Buddhahood is gained”. By dedicating for one’s full enlightenment for the sake of all beings, samsaric happiness will materialised as a by-product; nirvana will be actualised, enlightenment attained. When we make dedications, sometimes the self-cherishing mind arises to create worry e.g. thinking that sharing merits with others will reduce the merits available to help one’s own problems. This is mistaken thinking.

Shantideva composed this Dedication chapter in a detailed manner as the practice of dedication brings such great benefits. These days, very few practitioners offer detailed dedications due to the lack of time, not being patient enough, not knowing the extent of meaning and benefits coming from dedication. Look at our Kyabje Lama Zopa Rinpoche - his dedications are extensive, mentioning all realms one by one. When it comes to benefitting beings effectively, the time or hardship does not matter. Sometimes, Rinpoche spends hours on dedication.

Shantideva specifically mentions the individual realms, as well as generally dedicated to pacify the sufferings of the Desire Realm, Form and Formless realms. In this way, we can see how Kyabje Lama Zopa Rinpoche follows Shantideva's footsteps – firstly, dedicate generally for the benefit of all beings; then dedicate specifically to individual realms. Rinpoche additionally dedicates to world leaders, and terrorists too, for them to have compassion and be guided by bodhicitta. By dedicating specifically, there is special effect.

Verse 1

*By all the virtue I have now amassed
By composition of this book, which speaks
Of entry to the bodhisattva way,
May every being tread the path to Buddhahood.*

Even though Shantideva had completed the teachings on the 6 Perfections and a detailed discussion on emptiness in Chapter 9 on Wisdom, he proceeded to composing this Dedication chapter. It is an instruction to

guide practitioners and he dedicated it to all beings to be able to enter the Bodhisattva's way of life. After studying this text, we should try our best to follow the footsteps of Shantideva in order to attain enlightenment.

Verse 2

*May beings everywhere who suffer
Torment in their minds and bodies
Have, by virtue of my merit,
Joy and happiness in boundless measure.*

Here is the dedication for all 6 realm sentient beings who suffer due to past negative karma, to have their sufferings ceased, due to whatever merits Shantideva had accumulated.

Verse 3

*As long as they may linger in samsara,
May their present joy know no decline,
And may they taste of unsurpassed beatitude
In constant and unbroken continuity.*

By reflecting on the sufferings of the 6 realm beings, generate from deep within your heart, great compassion and a sense of responsibility to liberate them.

To reinforce this, engage into the learning the methods of cultivating bodhicitta, namely the 6 cause & 1 effect method and the exchanging of self with others method and then putting them into practice.

Verse 4

*Throughout the spheres ad reaches of the world,
In hellish states wherever they may be,
May beings fettered there, tormented,
Taste the bliss and peace of Sukhavati.*

This dedication is particularly dedicated to 3 lower realm beings. How horrifying their sufferings are, particularly the hell realm sufferings. One should meditate on the sufferings of the various hells and generate bodhicitta.

Discipline oneself by checking one's attitude and actions. If we do not purify our karma now, we are already experiencing the same suffering as hell beings, with more intensive suffering to come. Dedicate one's virtues to hell beings and pray for them to be brought to the Pureland.

Verse 5

*May those caught in the freezing ice be warmed.
And from the massing clouds of bodhisattva's prayers
May torrents rain in boundless streams
To cool those burning in the infernal fires.*

The cold hells and hot hells are specially mentioned here. Do tong len practice and dedicate one's merits to the beings trapped in these terrifying hells.

Verse 6

*May forests where the leaves are blades and swords
become sweet groves and pleasant woodland glades.*

*And may the trees of miracles appear,
Supplanting those upon the hill of shalmali.*

Around the cold and hot hell realms, there are 16 Neighbouring Hells – such as the hell whose forests of the hell shamali trees which have blades and swords for leaves. One should meditate on each of such suffering environments to generate compassion. Act in compassion and then dedicate one’s virtue.

Verse 7

*And may the very pits of hell be sweet
With fragrant pools all perfumed with the scent of lotuses,
Be lovely with the cries of swan and goose
And water fowl so pleasing to the ear.*

Verse 8

*May fiery coals turn into heaps of jewels,
The burning ground become a crystal floor,
The crushing hills celestial abodes,
Adorned with offerings, the dwelling place of buddhas.*

To awaken us to the tortures of the hell realms – the verse describes the Hell of Unrelenting Pain; Hell of Burning Ground. The cause to be born in

these hells is due to abandoning Dharma and committing 5 heinous crimes (killing mother, killing father, spilling the blood of a Buddha, slaying an Arhat and causing schism amongst the Sangha community). Although we may commit mistakes and not be mindful of Dharma, it is not as heavy as not bothering to understand Dharma even though it is presented to us. Ignorance is such heavy karma.

The hell rebirth is not punishment from Buddha or some god. It is the inevitable result that arises from the karmic seed of not wanting to know Dharma or ignoring whatever Dharma one has encountered. Since Dharma eliminates suffering, when we abandon it or ignore it, the logical result is continuing to have suffering and the longer we do this, the more intense the suffering, hence the hell existence.

Whatever merit one has, dedicates it towards transforming all that suffering into wondrous environments. “Crushing hills” is another of the Neighbouring Hells. One needs to reflect on sufferings so as to be able to generate strong compassion. When one has some level of conviction in karma, any time one sees references to the hell realms, it should inspire one to practice and benefit others.

Verse 9

*May the hail of lave, fiery stones, and weapons
Henceforth become a rain of blossom.
May those whose hell it is to fight and wound
Be turned to lovers offering their flowers.*

Another Neighbouring Hell is the Hell of Lava where there are skies of fiery stones, burning lava and blazing weapons. The cause for being born here is harmful speech and bitter criticism. Hence, one has to be careful about how one speaks. Be gentle and kind. However, we are stubborn and difficult to tame, so we carry on as we please. Put effort to behave well and guide others to behave. If one cannot restrain careless, hurtful speech, enter into silent retreat – that would be the best for oneself (and for others!)

Another cause for rebirth in the lava hells is harming spirits and nagas /snakes e.g. destroying nature; using their skins for bags and shoes, controlling and manipulating them through charms. Reviving Hell – this is where one constantly fights and gets wounded repeatedly, with no means of healing.

Shantideva dedicates his virtues towards transforming the hell realm experiences into the soft rain of blossoms and love. There was once an army soldier who later became a monk but for a long time, continued to have frightening dreams of killing and being killed; being revived and then brutally killed again. He would wake up with intense fear. This experience is similar to the ripened result of rebirth in the hell, from actions of killing. That is why is so important to make prayers for there to be no conflicts, no wars because whilst the suffering in those situations is great, the suffering yet to come in hell rebirths is unimaginably worse.

Verse 10

*And those engulfed in fiery Vaitarani,
Their flesh destroyed, their bones bleached white as kunda flowers.
May they, through all my merit's strength, have godlike forms,
And sport with goddesses in Mandakini's peaceful streams.*

The Hell of Vaitarani – the cause for rebirth here is the killing animals which live in water e.g. fish. It is one of the Neighbouring Hells and suffering there is for aeons.

Verse 11

*“What fear is it,” they’ll ask, “that grips the henchmen of the
Deadly Lord, the frightful vultures and the carrion crows?
What noble strength is it that brings us joy and drives
away our dreadful night?”
And looking skyward they will see the shining form of Vajrapani.
Then may their sins be quenched in joy, and may they go to him.*

Whenever we do meditation on compassion, it is very effective to visualise Vajrapani and oneself as being initiated into Vajrapani practice, complete with all the abilities to eliminate the sufferings of sentient beings, in particular those arising from harming animals, nagas, destroying nature, harming spirits. Vajrapani is a Buddha deity symbolising the Buddha's skilful means. If one has received the mantra transmission of Vajrapani, one can give it to another by requesting the other person to put her/her palms at heart, feel the presence of the Triple Gem, visualise the mantra Om Vajrapani Hum coming from Vajrapani's own mouth emanating as

light rays, recite that mantra 3x and dedicate with bodhicitta, this action of transmitting the practice to benefit sentient beings.

Verse 12

*And when they see the seething lave-flood of hell
Extinguishing in a rain of blossoms, drenched in scented water,
At once fulfilled in bliss, they'll ask. "How can this be?"
And thus the denizens of hell will see the One Who Holds the Lotus.*

Sentient beings are greatly benefitted when one does deity-Buddha meditation in relation to sentient beings. The Chenresig practice: Visualise Chenresig on your crown and from Chenresig's heart, light rays are sent towards all beings, liberating them all from suffering. This is not a fantasy practice. Such meditative practices have effect because they were advised by the Buddha and practiced by past and present masters with great positive effect.

Verse 13

*"Friends, throw away your fears and quickly gather here.
For who is it who comes to banish dread,
this youth with bound up, gleaming hair,
This loving bodhisattva saving and protecting every being,
Whose power relieves all pain, increasing joy?"*

Verse 14

*“Do you see the splendor of his house that echoes praises
of a thousand goddesses,
The hundred gods who lay their diadems before his lotus feet,
The rain of flowers falling on his head, his eyes moist with compassion?”
Thus may those in hell cry out on seeing Manjughosha.*

Meditation on Manjushri: First one reflect that the reason that sentient beings and especially hell beings suffer so much is due to ignorance and self grasping. Hence, Manjushri or his seed syllable DHIH is an effective antidote for ignorance. Visualise multiple Manjushris or DHIH syllables multiply into a mass of snowflakes , which descend onto sentient beings and upon touching them, all all ignorance of self and phenomena, are purified.

This is a detailed description of how to meditate on Manjushri not only through visualisation but also through sound. Follow the method in this verse to train oneself into generating compassion.

Verse 15

*And likewise when, through these my roots of virtue,
They see the joyful clouds let fall their cooling scented rain,
Their obscurations cleansed by bodhisattvas like Samantabhadra,
May all those languishing in hell come now to perfect happiness.*

Meditation on Samantabhadra: Bodhisattva Samantabhadra transforms into clouds of protection and relieves the sufferings of all beings.

Verse 16

*And may the stooping animals be freed
From fear of being preyed upon, each other's food.
And may the famished spirits have such joy
As those who dwell within the northern continent.*

Verse 17

*And may they be replete and satisfied
By streams of milk that pour
From noble Lord Avalokita's hand,
And bathing in it, may they be refreshed and cooled.*

Here, animals are the focus of dedication: Meditate on the specific sufferings of the animal realm which are that of constant fear of not understanding their environment and being devoured by bigger animals. Meditate to the point of having an awareness, even during one's sleep to offer protection to animals from harm. Although one's pet may appear peaceful and contented, such fear pervades its existence.

There is no need to wait for animal liberation puja. One can simply think of Chenresig, recite Mani prayer and dedicate to animals. When going to the market to buy animals for animal liberation, choose that are in the greatest danger of being killed. Avoid biased thought when selecting the animals to be bought for release, which might bring regret later.

Verse 18

*And my the blind receive their sight,
And may the deaf begin to hear,
And women near their time bring forth
Like Mayadevi, free from any pain.*

This relates to dedicating one's virtues to humans who do not have perfect faculties to have the causes & conditions to cultivate Dharma. Being an obstacle to someone learning Dharma is a cause for one to become blind. Criticising Dharma – e.g. a Mahayana follower criticising Theravada practice or a Theravadan criticising the Mahayana or Tantra likewise, also incurs heavy karma. Gyaltsab Je's Commentary explains this very clearly.

All religions have followers who are mischievous but the teachings of those faiths contain methods to cultivate virtue, so one should not criticise other faiths. Having a perverse idea of Dharma, destroying Dharma texts, putting texts on floor (should put on table which ideally should be higher than one's waist, with as nice a brocade as one can afford, as a sign of respect for the profundity of the teachings), are examples of not respecting the Dharma.

When a beautiful throne is offered to one's Buddhist Master, it is not the fault of extravagance in relation to the person sitting on the throne but rather, it is to show to respect for the Dharma being given to listeners. Making a gompa beautiful is to glorify the Dharma, as it contains representations of the holy Triple Gem.

When needing to dispose of Dharma books e.g. due to damage or missing pages, remember that one is still handling the representation of the Dharma

Refuge. If one approaching death and there is no one to take care of text, offer them to the temple or properly dispose of the texts. Best if there is a stupa house to place such texts in. If burning of the text is resorted to, the burning of Dharma text must be carefully done: Picture the fire base as a mandala palace, the fire as the wisdom-fire deity; visualise text dissolving into emptiness, from which arises the syllable AH and that dissolves into the deity and only after this, are the texts to be put into the flame.

If we put our phone next to us during our prayer session, when someone calls and you answer it, your prayer is interrupted, giving rise to the caller committing a form of negative karma. That is why it is best to do one's prayer practices in the early hours of the morning before anyone wakes up, so that there is no interruption. Or switch off the phone. When you finish your session, dedicate and motivate that when you meet your family or anyone other living being, may the person(s) who sees you be liberated. In this way, having breakfast with the family becomes a cause for liberation.

Someone might be offering music to the Buddha but you dislike the sound of that music and take action to stop it. There too, you are interrupting an offering to the Buddha. Once we have reached the point of seeing emptiness directly, everything is pure. However, because we are still in a conceptual state, we have to find ways to avoid committing negative karma. Likewise, your concern for others should inspire you to help them avoid doing negative acts.

When using vajra, bell and damaru, be considerate. If one publicly uses them without regard to whether someone else in the room is engaging in silent concentration, the negative karma of distracting others from Dharma could occur. In such public situations, one can just hold the vajra and bell

without moving them.

Dedicate prayers to those who nearing childbirth, that they have painless deliveries like Buddha's mother, Queen Mayadevi. Before the Buddha was born, Queen Mayadevi taught Dharma to farmers along the way and made charity to others where were auspicious circumstances for the birth of the holy child. Ordinarily, when a child emerges into the external world, from the smooth womb of the mother straight into the harsh elemental world, all sensations are experienced intensely. However, the Buddha's birth was effortless and blissful. So we dedicate to all women that they may experience such childbirths. This verse also gives wise advice to expectant mothers to cultivate virtue in order to create auspicious conditions for the child.

Verse 19

*And may the naked now be clothed,
And all the hungry eat their fill.
And may those parched with thirst receive
Pure waters and delicious drink.*

Not having even basic resources like food and clothing, is due to miserliness and calculative about giving; having a jealous mind; having stolen holy objects, sutras, stupas relics. Thus, when one buys antique holy objects from other parts of the world, one needs to be careful as some of these objects were stolen and sold in the black market. If we partake in this, although one's intention to invite a holy object home is good, due to the object coming into one's hands through many negative factors, it can cause disturbance to oneself. Hence, consecration by realised beings is strongly advised.

Verse 20

*May the poor and destitute find wealth,
The haggard and the careworn, joy.
May confidence relieve those in despair
And bring them steadfastness and every excellence.*

We should dedicate towards the poor.

Verse 21

*May every being ailing with disease
Be freed at once from every malady.
May all the sickness that afflicts the living
Be instantly and permanently healed.*

When we contract diseases, it is due to one having harmed others, engaged in killing.

Killing here includes killing highly realised beings, ordinary beings, larger animals (who suffer more when they are killed), using black-magic charms, harming nagas, harming the environment. Even supporting or rejoicing in such action is negative karma. Looking for mediums who use spirits and black-magic charms is also a form of supporting negative actions because they tend to use formless spirits to do their work.

If we look carefully at those who rely on mediums, they have some kind of mental disorder – I know because many people come to see me during consultation and it is often the case that such people instead of analysing

and working on their own karma, resort to mediums. Some mediums may be able to foretell the short-term future but they cannot provide long term guidance because they and the spirits they use are suffering samsaric beings. They have no long term help to offer. Instead, reliance on them make trouble inevitable and will ruin you completely. If seeking for wealth from such questionable sources, it will deplete your wealth; if seeking health, your health will fail in serious circumstances. The Buddha has already taught the remedies for all our problems, so we cannot expect the Buddha to speak again. That is why Buddha statues remain silent!

We blame the Buddha for his remedies being too slow thereby “forcing” oneself to go to mediums – what a huge excuse to conceal one’s laziness. Buddha has already taught the complete path of reasoning and antidotes. It is for us to apply them and not seek short cuts by going to mediums. HH Dalai Lama has often advised against the Shugden practice, which is described as a form of spirit-worship – those who have done the practice due to not being clear about Refuge in the Triple Gem, do become wealthy but at the end of the day, encounter so great suffering of mental and physical disorders. In some cases, this causes them to return to Shugden practice as they gain temporary relief but again, the suffering returns in an intensified form. This is why His Holiness advises against taking refuge in spirits, who can only provide some form of temporary, limited help but because spirits themselves are in samsara, they cannot provide long term help and eventually we get into deep trouble.

We should make the dedication to gain confidence in pure Dharma practice.

Verse 22

*May those who go in dread have no more fear.
May captives be unchained and now set free.
And may the weak receive their strength.
May living beings help each other in kindness.*

Dedicate to be able to grant protection from every fear. There are 8 Tara drawings on LDC's Tara shrine – this is to grant protection from the 8 fears. Every aspect of the drawings there has significance. The fearful states of mind arising from attachment, anger and ignorance are far greater than fears in relation to external things like fierce animals. Fear from inner causes go deep, so one can invoke a particular Tara to help oneself overcome that.

Verse 23

*May travellers upon the road
Find happiness no matter where they go,
And may they gain, without the need of toil,
The goals on which they set their hearts.*

Ordinary beings can be described as travellers on samsara's journey. As we aim are Bodhisattva practitioners, all beings should be equal to us and thus we should unconditionally and non-discriminately take care of them and dedicate towards their enlightenment.

Verse 24

*May those who put to sea in boat or ship
Attain the ports that they desire,
And may they safely come to shore
And sweet reunion with their kith and kin.*

Verse 25

*May those who lose their way and stray
In misery, find fellow travelers,
And safe from threat of thieves and savage beasts,
Be tireless, and their journey light.*

Dedication to grant protection to those travellers who have travelled far or lost their way or are in danger of harm. Pray to Maritsema at sunrise or sunset for the purpose of one's journey be accomplished by dispelling all hindrances.

At Tsum, there was once an area containing a few bushes on the side of the nunnery compound, which was said to have been the residence of nagas. Anyone who dug the earth at these bushes would fall seriously ill or even die. So for over 100 years, no one dared to dig or build anything in the area of these bushes. During the Tsum Project, the area had to be developed to contain 100 over rooms, dining room and gompa for the Sangha. So with the heart of benefitting the Sangha and the Tsum community, as well as the nagas, I took the responsibility to clear the land and build; to invite the Buddha Dharma and Sangha there. For that, I did the Maritsema practice to avoid incurring obstacles. None of the local villagers dared to help me

to clear the land, so I had to engage Nepalis from Solo Khumbu (who had no idea of this naga history). As of now, the project is almost complete and it was done without obstacles. Nearby, there arose natural drips of water. Upon checking with a master, he explained that this drip was nagas' nectar which arose due to their being pleased. The bodhicitta motivation helps everyone including nagas.

Verse 26

*May children and the old, the weak, protectorless,
Bewildered in the wild and pathless wastes,
And those whose minds are dulled, and all who are insane,
Have pure celestial beings as their guardians.*

Those who are protectorless need help. We should dedicate our merits to them for their fears to be pacified and for them to remember Dharma.

There were 2 monks travelling in a remote place with 2 demons following them – one demon had an imprint of Dharma and the other did not. Both came to eat the monks. When the monks were together, the positive energy too high for the demons to attack. When the two monks were about to go on their separate ways, the demons were excited at the prospect of being able to devour them. Just then, each of the monks respectfully said to the other, "Take good care of yourself". The demon without Dharma imprint wanted to immediately jump on the monks but the other demon who had Dharma imprint hesitated, saying that they should not do so as the monks were expressing Dharma. What Dharma was there in those parting words, complained the demon without Dharma imprint. His demon companion

explained that the sincere expression of care for each other, was supreme Dharma. Even demons understand this.

Verse 27

*May all attain the human state,
And be possessed of wisdom, faith, and love.
With perfect livelihood and sustenance,
May they have mindfulness throughout their lives.*

Verse 28

*May everyone have unrestricted wealth,
Just like the treasury of space,
Enjoying it according to their wish,
Without a trace of harm or enmity.*

Dedicate for everyone to gain the precious human rebirth, to be free from the 8 worldly concerns which are obstacles to Dharma practice and to actualise the Path. When Bodhisattvas achieve the concentration called treasury of space, just by thinking it, will appear e.g. teachings, texts and resources for practice.

Verse 29

*May beings destitute of splendor,
Become magnificent and bright.
And those worn down by toil and drudgery
Acquire great beauty and perfection.*

In the realms of gods, demi-gods and humans, there is tremendous suffering when others have more. There is no contentment at all. This verse asks us to make a prayer for such beings to have a mind of rejoicing, a state where happiness comes easily.

Verse 30

*May all the women in this world
Attain the strength of masculinity.
And may the lowly come to excellence,
The proud and haughty lose their arrogance.*

Despite men and women being equal in many ways, women are more likely to be bullied and taken advantaged of by men. This prayer is for women to have full freedom, safety, opportunities and respect (there are many cultures where women are treated badly). Women have 32 differences from men, which pose as inconveniences to practising Dharma e.g. though some women do not wish to have babies, local culture or family pressures force them to have babies and with that, all the attendant sufferings come to them; many women are slighter built and vulnerable to being physically bullied. As Dharma practitioners, it is said that women are more suited and effective in practising bodhicitta.

Verse 31

*And thus by all the merit I have gained,
May every being, leaving none aside,
Abandon all their evil ways
Embracing goodness now and every more.*

Verse 32

*From bodhichitta may they never separate,
And constantly engage in bodhisattva deeds.
And may they be accepted as disciples by the buddhas,
And turn aside from what is demon's work.*

Dedicate towards ignorance and hence, evil to be overcome and for goodness to prevail.

The Path of the Bodhisattva requires consistency between one's attitude and one's action. There is little point in overcoming obstacles like distractions, laziness, intoxication, agitation and quarrelling etc but still not working for the welfare of sentient beings. Note that some realised beings like the Mindrolling Rinpoche used to manifest sleeping most hours of the day but in truth, he was a living Bodhisattva; agitation and quarrelling.

You might ask whether ordinary householders are able to integrate the Bodhisattva attitude and conduct into their lay lives. You can. It is a matter of your mind. If your motivation to take care of the family and one's business is to sincerely benefit sentient beings as well, then you are engaging in Bodhisattva attitude & action. However, without this attitude, one is merely indulging in samsaric activity and will encounter obstacles to practice and obstacles to life. Before sleeping, one should generate bodhicitta.

The next set of verses contain prayers of aspiration for the world to be transformed into a pureland. Dedication and aspiration are different. Dedication requires the substance to dedicate e.g. one's merit from

virtuous activities; aspiration does not require a substance but merely the wish. Both are important to sustain one's practice and gain fruition from it.

Verse 34

*On every side, in all the ten directions,
May groves of wish-fulfilling trees abound,
Resounding with the sweetness of the Teachings,
Spoken by the buddhas and their bodhisattva children.*

Verse 35

*And may the earth be wholesome everywhere,
Free from boulders, cliffs, and chasms,
Flat and even like a level palm
And smooth like lapis lazuli.*

The purpose of describing the beauty and perfection of the purelands is to overcome conceptual impurity. It is a powerful technique. For example, the ground of the Pureland is described as being as smooth and beautiful as the precious stone of lapis lazuli.

Verse 36

*And for many circles of disciples,
May multitudes of bodhisattvas
Rise in every land,
Adorning them with every excellence.*

In for there to be a “Sangha community” or “monastery” which can preserve the Dharma, one needs at least 4 fully-ordained monks. From amongst them there should be an Abbot, a Disciplinary and a manager/administrator to attend to the daily needs of the Sangha community. However, not all monasteries have a complete set of staff and resources.

If there is no Sangha community, there will be no Buddhadharma. In order to give full-ordination vows to new Sangha, there needs to be present in the ordination ceremony, 10 fully ordained Sangha. The purpose of any Dharma community is the preservation of the Buddhadharma, which requires proper scriptural knowledge and practice. Having only one is not complete. If there are no Dharma discourses, Buddhadharma will decline. That is why the 3 great Gelug monasteries put effort to studying and preserving the Nalanda tradition.

Kyabje Lama Zopa Rinpoche provides 3 meals a day at Sera Je monastery. I was at Sera Je before Rinpoche started to provide the Sangha meals there – the daily meal was a bit of rice with watery dhal and we had to pay around Rp50 - 100 Rp but to get that, one had to work. I worked in the corn field for 3 years – it was hot, there were snakes in the fields and during exam time, one had to work in the field in the morning and rush to exams in the afternoon. Sometimes I missed meals because the monastery dining hall was far away. Conditions were challenging but despite hardship, very few monks gave up studying. We had planted papaya trees in the fields but they took time to bear fruit. Some nearby houses had papaya – so it was papaya for breakfast, lunch and dinner, until whole body became orange. Previously, many monks were lacking in nutrition but still had energy to study and debate to late hours but after some time, many fell sick. These

days with Rinpoche taking over the provision of meals to the Sangha, they now have proper rice, dhal and salad. The reason for Rinpoche taking up the responsibility to provide food to the Sangha is for the preservation of Dharma. If the 3 great monasteries disappear, the Buddhadharma will disappear.

An average monk's day starts at 5am till 1am (due to late night debate). Although you might see some monks acting strangely, generally, monks are studying seriously and practising according to Nalanda tradition. Right now at Sera Je Monastery, South India, there are about 4000 monks. In the olden days in Tibet, Sera Monastery alone accounted for 10,000 monks. Rinpoche also offers a small allowance to all teachers at the 3 Gelug monasteries and Tantric Colleges to help sustain teachers. Rinpoche's Dharma activities are vast. So we must make prayers never to be separated from Rinpoche as Guru because he combines bodhicitta, wisdom and action.

In a Dharma Centre, attending classes is how to preserve the Buddhadharma. When we study at the monastery for over 20 years, we may gain some knowledge but the depth of understanding nevertheless depends on application. However, there is perseverance. Taking that as an example, if we here give up the teachings because we find some Dharma points difficult to tackle or it is inconvenient to come to class, what a great waste. Kyabe Lama Zopa Rinpoche has often said that despite many years of study, he still felt that he had not done any practice. When he went back to his Lawudo cave and saw teachings that his previous incarnation had written, it changed him. One of the point Rinpoche mentioned as being particularly illuminating was the need to seal one's dedication with emptiness i.e. to reflect on how the practitioner, the prayer, merits, sentient beings are all empty of inherent existence.

Vasubandhu wrote “The teacher’s doctrine has 2 aspects – for transmission and for realisations. The first is held and spoken forth; and the second is the practice. “

Raise prayers for families to always be supportive of Dharma.

Verse 37

*From bird song and the sighing of the trees,
From shafts of light and from the sky itself,
May living beings, each and every one,
Perceive the constant sound of Dharma.*

This is a prayer for Dharma to be heard and seen and perceived in a multitude of ways by all sentient beings. Even when birds singing, may that cause one to hear and reflect the Dharma; may the sound of a bell or a car driving by, bring about one’s contemplation on Dharma.

If one hears the emptiness teaching in this life, even if that person is unable to attain enlightenment within this lifetime, one will be born as a disciple of Maitreya Buddha when he descends upon this world. Those who heard emptiness teachings during Buddha Kasyhapa’s time became disciples of Shakyamuni Buddha and attained liberation. Rather than taking it for granted, we need to pray that all sentient beings can receive the wisdom teachings.

Verse 38

*May they come into the presence of the buddhas,
And meet with bodhisattvas, offspring of the same.
With clouds of offerings unbounded,
May the teachers of the world be worshiped.*

A prayer for all beings to have Dharma connection with the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas and properly honour Teachers of the Dharma.

Many beings were alive during Buddha's time but were born in a place without access to Dharma. We can observe that even amongst Buddhists, very few have access to qualified Dharma teachers.

Verse 39

*May kindly spirits bring the rains on time,
For harvests to be rich and plentiful.
may princes rule according to the Truth,
And may the world be blessed with all prosperity.*

This is the prayer for abundance and ethical conduct by rulers. All actions done through body, speech and mind should be in harmony with the Dharma.

Verse 40

*May medicines be strong and full of virtue;
May healing spells be chanted with success.
May spirits of the air that feed on flesh
Be kind, their minds imbued with pity.*

Verse 41

*And let no being ever suffer pain;
Let them neither ail nor languish, never doing evil.
May they have no fear, nor suffer insults,
And may their minds be ever free from sorrow.*

May all medicines be effective and all prayers be effective for the welfare of others. All of us must raise prayers in this way, to create the causes and conditions for these to materialise.

Verse 42

*In monasteries, temples, and the like,
May reading and reciting widely flourish.
May harmony prevail among the Sangha,
And may its purpose be all fulfilled.*

Make prayer for the Sangha community to flourish, be harmonious, excel in studies, perfected in their practices and upholding of vows.

The Liberator of Dharma depends on the Sangha community studying well and practising the Dharma to propagate it beneficially. In degenerate times, the interest to become Sangha is confronted with challenges e.g. due to technology, impatience to persevere at study, concerns about what one can do in terms of survival. The old monks always used to remind us younger monks how during their time, they had to sit on cold, stone floors whereas nowadays, we bring thick cushions to the prayer hall; how they used to rely on dim, incense light to read as compared to solar lamps that are now

used. Young monks would retort to say that monks nowadays have merits to have solar lights and thick cushions! (Laughter). Notwithstanding decent conditions, many do not wish to remain in monastery. The older monks who had fewer texts seem to have better quality knowledge. Hardship and less distractions often produce better results.

When I was a young monk, I was not allowed to have monk friends nor invite others to my room to spend time casually. I was instructed to frequently change debate partners in order to get different perspectives of topics, so there was limited opportunity and time to make friends. I would write down their viewpoints and found them helpful.

Ten years ago, there was not enough space for monks. These days, missions are sent to encourage young males to join the monastery. Over time, the preservation of Dharma has become increasingly difficult.

Verse 43

*May ordained monks intent upon the practice
Find perfect places for retreat in solitude,
Abandon every vagrant thought,
And meditate with trained and serviceable minds.*

Pray that all Sanghas, including oneself as a lay practitioner, remain in the practice of the 3 higher trainings of morality, concentration and wisdom; to be able to find a solitary place for meditative practice. Many famous meditative places of past masters have become tourist places. It is not easy to find a conducive place to meditate for long retreats. Kyabje Lama

Zopa Rinpoche encouraged Khensur Rinpoche to do retreat where Geshe Lama Konchog did retreat in the Tsum area. But now, villagers are trying to encourage tourists and arrange for an airport to be constructed, so that area too will eventually be affected.

Verse 44

*May nuns have all their wants supplied;
May quarrelling, vindictiveness be strange to them.
Let all who have embraced monastic life
Uphold a pure and unimpaired observance.*

Nuns have their own problems requiring special dedication. There have been many past accounts of nuns quarrelling and being vengeful. All are still on the path of cultivation. Pray that all samayas and vows be upheld. Managing monks and nuns are different. Nuns are better than monks in terms of studies and performing tasks. However, emotional trouble in the nunnery seem to happen more often. There seems to be less complications with monks in this regard. So you see, it is important to pray for all sentient beings – lay and Sangha communities included!

Verse 45

*May they feel regret when discipline is broken,
And always may they strive to cleanse away their faults.
May they thus obtain a fortunate rebirth,
Wherein to undertake unflinching discipline.*

If one breaks any vows taken, heavy karma is incurred. Once broken, the remedy must be immediately applied. Fully ordained monks have a monthly confession session and this is done only amongst them and each must repeat the vows one by one as a self-check to ascertain whether one has broken a vow and if a broken vow is identified, confession must be made. Novice monks also have their own confession session. It is necessary to partake in confession sessions with fellow Sangha, so it is good to return to the monastery for this.

Verse 46

*May the wise and learned be revered
And always be sustained by offerings.
With minds suffused with purity,
May their renown spread far and wide.*

May those who do virtue be known, not for the purpose of status but to encourage others to follow their example. Expressing the qualities of the Gurus, the Buddhas, the Bodhisattvas is very important as instructions to oneself and to inspire oneself and others.

Verse 47

*May beings never languish in the lower realms;
May pain and hardship be unknown to them.
Enjoying more than godlike strength and beauty,
may buddhahood for them be swiftly gained.*

Verse 48

*Again and yet again may sentient beings
Make offerings to all the buddha.
And with Buddha's unimagined bliss
May they enjoy undimmed and constant happiness.*

Make strong dedications for the sake of perfecting the supreme goal of enlightenment to benefit all sentient beings.

Verse 49

*May all the bodhisattvas now fulfill
Their high intention for the sake of beings,
And sentient beings likewise now receive
The good the buddhas have in store for them.*

Verse 50

*And may the arhats and pratyekabuddhas
At length attain their perfect happiness.*

Verse 51

*And may I also, through Manjushri's kindness,
Reach the ground of Perfect Joy,
And throughout the stream of all my lives
Embrace monastic ordination.*

Shantideva pays homage to Manjushri for his blessings in enabling him to complete this text and prayed to sustain the pure conduct of the Bodhisattva and pure ordination vows. It is highly meaningful for one to make dedication that one can become Sangha in proper Sangha community to practice Dharma extensively and completely for the benefit of all.

Verse 52

*Thus may I abide, sustained
By simple, ordinary fare.
And in every life obtain
A dwelling place in perfect solitude.*

Verse 53

*Whenever I desire to gaze on him
Or put him the slightest question,
May I behold the unobstructed vision
Of Manjughosha, my protector.*

The prayers are here are to be able to renounce the worldly life and go into solitary practice to gain realisations that will empower one to be of real benefit to others. Pray for one's tutelary deity to descend and remain one in one's heart, to guide one in practice and clear all inner and outer obstacles and for one to actualise the Path.

Verse 54

*To satisfy the needs of beings
Dwelling in the ten directions, to the margins of the sky,
May I reflect in every deed
The perfect exploits of Manjushri.*

One prayers to always follow footsteps of Manjushri.

Verse 55

*And now as long as space endures,
As long as there are beings to be found,
May I continue likewise to remain
To drive away the sorrows of the world.*

This is the favourite prayer of HH Dalai Lama and one of the most celebrated verses of Shantidva: It expresses the commitment to remain amongst sentient beings to provide guidance and comfort from sorrow, regardless of the great hardships involved. In this way, wherever one is, that is the best place to practice. “Solitude” is not a physical condition; it does not necessarily mean staying alone. It is a state of being in singular focus and not be distracted nor swayed by obstacles.

Verse 56

*The pains and sorrows of all wandering beings-
May they ripen wholly on myself.
And my the virtuous company of bodhisattvas
Bring about the happiness of beings.*

This is the favourite prayer of my master, the late Geshe Lama Konchog. Even when he was diagnosed with cancer and undergoing intense physical difficulty, his mind was happier than ever before, due to this verse. Geshe Lama Konchog was first diagnosed with cancer, he went for medical treatment, he was told to go for an operation to take out his whole stomach (which he underwent), only to be told it was not cancer. Despite this entire disaster, he asked me to buy flowers and gifts to offer to the doctor and all the medical staff who attended to him. He did not allow any arguments to be had with the doctor or medical team because he regarded his condition as the best opportunity for him to do tong len, to take on the sufferings of others and exchange that with giving them happiness.

Verse 57

*May the Doctrine, only remedy for suffering,
The source of every bliss and happiness,
Be nurtured and upheld with reverence,
And throughout a vast continuance of time, endure!*

One must always propagate and preserve the Buddhadharma. This is what Kyabje Lama Zopa Rinpoche is doing through his service and generosity to monasteries.

Verse 58

*And now to Manjughosha I prostrate,
Whose kindness is the wellspring of my good intent.
And to my virtuous friends I also bow,
Whose inspiration gave me strength to grow.*

Shantideva again pays homage to Manjushri whom he accredited with whatever Shantideva knew and also remembered and gave thanksgiving his Gurus, including Ginadeva (his ordination master) from whom he had learned much. Shantideva never spoke of his own abilities and attributed all his virtues to the Buddhas and his Gurus.

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The sponsoring family of this book wishes to remain anonymous. Their dedication is

“ May all sentient beings gain the optimum human rebirth, meet perfectly qualified Mahayana teachers and have the interest & opportunity to study the wonderful Dharma and attain enlightenment.”

HOW TO TREAT DHARMA BOOKS

Dharma books contain the teachings of the Buddha. They have the power to protect against lower rebirth and to point the way to liberation.

Therefore, they should be treated with respect – kept off the floor and places where people sit or walk and should not be stepped over. They should be covered or protected for transporting and kept in a high, clean place separated from other mundane materials. Other objects, including statues and stupas, should not be placed on top of dharma books and materials. Licking the fingers to turn pages is considered negative and will create negative karma.

If it is necessary to dispose of written dharma materials, they should be burned rather than thrown in the trash.

When offering dharma texts to the fire, first recite the mantra OM AH HUNG, then visualize the letters of the texts to be burned absorbing into the syllable AH and the AH absorbing into you, transmitting their wisdom to your mind stream. After that, as you continue to recite OM AH HUNG, you can offer the texts to the fire.

Kyabje Lama Zopa Rinpoche has specifically advised that photos or images of holy beings, deities and other holy objects should not be burned and instead placed with respect in stupas or other high clean places so that they do not end up on the ground.



Biodata of Geshe Tenzin Zopa

Geshe Tenzin Zopa holds a doctorate in Buddhist Philosophy from Sera Jey Monastic University in South India and is a master in Tibetan Buddhist rituals. He is currently the Resident Teacher at Losang Dragpa Buddhist Society, Malaysia and was for a long time, the Director of the Tsum Valley Project (in the Himalayan

region), which provides Buddhist study and practice facilities and accomodation for the community in the Valley. Geshe Tenzin Zopa is the principal and focal point of the award winning film titled “Unmistaken Child” which chronicles the search for the reincarnation of his great master.

Geshe Tenzin Zopa has a contemporary style of teaching which he combines with the ancient wisdom derived from his years of philosophical studies and debate, thereby benefitting everyone who has met or heard him teach. Geshe Tenzin Zopa is the face of a dynamic and socially engaged Buddhism in the 21st century.

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