

Bodhicaryāvatāra: An Introduction to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life

by Śāntideva

In the language of India: *Bodhicaryāvatāra*

In the language of Tibet: བྱང་ལྷན་སེམས་དཔའི་རྒྱུད་པ་ལ་འཇུག་པ། (*changchub sempé chöpa la jukpa*)

In the English language: *Introduction to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*

Homage to the buddhas and bodhisattvas!

Chapter 1 — The Benefits of Bodhicitta

1. With devotion I pay homage to the buddhas gone to bliss,
To their Dharma body, noble heirs and all worthy of respect.
In accordance with the scriptures, I shall now in brief describe
The way to adopt the discipline of all the buddhas' heirs.
2. There is nothing here that's not been said before;
And I have no skill in the art of composition.
Therefore I do not expect this to be of much use to others,
And write it only to acquaint it to my mind.
3. Through this, my faith will be strengthened for a while,
And I will grow more accustomed to what is virtuous.
Then should others, somehow equal to myself in fortune,
Chance upon these words, they might find them beneficial.
4. This free and well-favoured human form is difficult to obtain.
Now that we have the chance to realise the full human potential,
If we don't make good use of this opportunity,
How could we possibly expect to have such a chance again?
5. Like a flash of lightning on a dark and cloudy night,
Which, for just a single instant, sheds its brilliant light,
Rarely, through the buddhas' power,
A mind of virtue arises, briefly, to people of the world.
6. All ordinary virtues therefore are forever feeble,
Whilst negativity is strong and difficult to bear—
But for the mind intent on perfect buddhahood,
What other virtue could ever overcome it?

7. Contemplating wisely throughout the ages,
The mighty buddhas have seen its great benefit:
That it helps the boundless multitude of beings
Easily to gain the highest states of bliss.
8. Those who long to triumph over life's distress,
And who wish to put an end to others' sorrows,
Those who seek to experience abundant joys—
Let them never turn their backs on bodhicitta.
9. For the very instant that bodhicitta is born
In the weary captives enslaved within saṃsāra,
They are called heirs of the bliss-gone buddhas,
Honourable to gods, humans, and the world.
10. Like the alchemists' supreme elixir,
It takes this ordinary, impure human form,
And makes of it a buddha's priceless body—
Such is bodhicitta: let us grasp it firmly!
11. With their boundless wisdom, beings' only guides,
Have investigated thoroughly and seen its value.
Thus whoever longs for freedom from conditioned states
Should grasp this precious bodhicitta and guard it well.
12. All other virtues are like the plantain tree:
They bear their fruit, and then they are no more.
Yet constantly the marvellous tree of bodhicitta
Yields fruit and, undiminished, grows forevermore.
13. Even those who've committed intolerable misdeeds,
Through having bodhicitta instantly are freed,
Just like a brave companion banishing all one's fears—
Why then would the prudent fail to put their trust in it?
14. Just like a great inferno at the ends of time,
It annihilates terrible misdeeds in but an instant.
Thus its benefits are vast beyond all measuring,
As the wise Lord Maitreya explained to Sudhana.
15. Understand that, briefly stated,
Bodhicitta has two aspects:
The mind aspiring to awaken,
And bodhicitta that's enacted.

16. Just as one understands the difference
Between wishing to go and setting out upon a journey,
The wise should understand these two,
Recognizing their difference and their order.
17. Bodhicitta in aspiration brings about great results,
Even as we continue to circle within saṃsāra;
Yet it does not bring about a ceaseless stream of merit,
For that will come solely from active bodhicitta.
18. From the moment we genuinely take up
This irreversible attitude—
The mind that aspires to liberate entirely
The infinite realms of beings,
19. From then on, even while asleep,
Or during moments of inattention,
A plentiful, unceasing force of merit
Will arise, equal to the vastness of the sky.
20. This was explained by the Buddha,
Together with supporting reasons,
In a teaching given at Subāhu's request,
For the sake of those inclined to lesser paths.
21. If boundless merit comes to anyone who,
With the intention to be of benefit,
Has the thought simply to relieve the pain
Of those afflicted merely with a headache,
22. What need is there to speak of the wish
To dispel all beings' boundless sufferings,
Or the longing that they all might gain
Enlightened qualities infinite in number.
23. Do even our fathers or our mothers
Have such benevolence as this?
Do the gods or the great sages?
Does even mighty Brahmā?
24. If these beings have never before
Held this aspiration for their own sake—
Not even in their dreams—how could
They have made this wish for others?

25. A thought such as this—wanting for others
What they do not wish for even for themselves—
Is an extraordinary and precious state of mind,
And its occurrence a marvel unlike any other!
26. This source of joy for all who wander in existence,
This elixir that heals the sufferings of all beings,
This priceless jewel within the mind—
How could such merit ever be evaluated?
27. For if the simple wish to benefit others
Surpasses offerings made before the buddhas,
What need is there to mention striving
For the welfare of all without exception?
28. Although seeking to avoid pain,
They run headlong into suffering.
They long for happiness, but foolishly
Destroy it, as if it were their enemy.
29. To satisfy with every kind of joy,
And to cut through all the sufferings
Of those who lack any real happiness,
And are oppressed by sorrow's burden,
30. To bring an end as well to their delusion—
What other virtue is comparable to this?
What friend is there who does as much?
What else is there which is as meritorious?
31. If even those who do good deeds as repayment
For past favours are worthy of some praise,
What need is there to mention the bodhisattvas,
Whose perfect actions are carried out unbidden?
32. There are those who offer meals occasionally, and to just a few;
Their gifts, which are no more than food, are made in just a moment,
And with disrespect, to bring nourishment for merely half a day—
And yet such people are honoured by the world as virtuous.
33. Yet how does this compare to those who give
Over many ages and to the whole infinity of beings,
Constantly offering them the fulfilment of their every wish:
The unsurpassable happiness born of blissful buddhahood?

34. And those who develop feelings of hostility,
Towards these benefactors, the buddhas' heirs,
Will languish in the hells, the mighty Sage has said,
For aeons equal to the moments of their malice.
35. By contrast, to look upon them well,
Will yield benefits in still greater measure.
For even in adversity, the buddhas' heirs
Bring no harm, only virtue that naturally increases.
36. I bow down before all those in whom
This most precious, sacred mind is born!
I take refuge in those great sources of joy
Who bring bliss even to those who harm them.

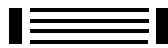
| Translated by Adam Pearcey, 2007.

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