
Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

བྱང་ལྷན་སེམས་དཔའི་སྣོད་པ་ལ་འཇུག་པ་བཞུགས་སོ།

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Based on the motivation we have just generated, we can engage in the meditation practice. *[meditation]*

In order to ensure that our tong len practice is intact, we first need to familiarise our mind with meditating on compassion for all sentient beings. That entails bringing to mind the various sufferings that are experienced by sentient beings, and generating a strong wish that they be free from that suffering. Here we can think about the different types of sufferings that are experienced. We first contemplate on the suffering of suffering, which are the obvious physical and mental suffering that sentient beings experience. Then we focus on the suffering of change that sentient beings experience. Finally we focus on the all-pervasive suffering of sentient beings. As we contemplate the various forms of suffering that they experience, we generate the strong wish, 'May all sentient beings be free from every type of suffering'. So in this way, by bringing to mind the sufferings of sentient beings and wishing them to be free from that, we generate compassion.

To ensure our love and compassion for sentient beings is free from bias, we need to develop a state of mind that sees all sentient beings as being equal. We already have a spontaneous feeling of love and compassion for those closest to us. When we see them being deprived of happiness, it is natural for us to wish them to be happy. When we see them suffering, it is also natural for us to wish them to be free from that suffering.

When we go beyond those who are close to us, in particular, those who we don't get along with, or those we consider as enemies, we might actually feel glad when they are deprived of happiness and experiencing suffering. We often hear comments such as, 'Oh they deserve to suffer!' made by others when they see people they don't get along with experiencing suffering and hardships. They may even wish that their enemy experience even more difficulties and hardships. That attitude is the complete antithesis of the love and compassion that is to be developed here, which is an unbiased love and compassion towards all beings.

We need to change our attitude and our way of thinking, particularly in relation to those we normally don't get along with; those who irritate us and so forth. When they are suffering and deprived of happiness, if we can start to feel how wonderful it would be if they were to be happy and free from their suffering, then that is a sign of the transformation that is taking place in our mind—the benchmark of a true sense of love and compassion. So we need to familiarise our mind with developing an unbiased sense of love and compassion towards all.

When we feel love and compassion for those we feel close to, while feeling hostile towards enemies, wishing them even more suffering and deprived of happiness, then that is a biased form of love and compassion. We need to train our mind so that we can extend our love and compassion towards all beings, particularly to those who are difficult to

get along with. We begin to establish the real basis of unbiased bodhicitta when we genuinely wish them happiness, and that they not experience any kind of suffering.

While we may have not yet developed actual bodhicitta, we can definitely establish the basis of bodhicitta in our mental continuum. That in itself would be an incredible achievement in this lifetime. We would have then secured an incredible personal benefit for our own physical and mental well-being. When we start feeling a genuine sense of concern for others, wishing them to be happy and wishing them not to experience any suffering, then naturally we won't feel any hostility or ill-will towards them.

Furthermore, because it's an unbiased love and compassion, we will not be particularly attached to some and distant to others. That in turn enables a lot of disturbing thoughts based on attachment and hostility to subside. Then, quite naturally, our mind will become much more tranquil, happy and joyful. So, there is an immediate personal benefit. As mentioned earlier, if we can establish a firm basis of bodhicitta in our mental continuum, we can feel quite satisfied with this significant achievement in this life.

Familiarity with unbiased love and compassion towards all beings will naturally induce the intention to benefit others, which is also unbiased and without discrimination. That establishes the proper basis to benefit other sentient beings. Thus, whatever help one extends to others will be really pure, because it is not mixed with the self-cherishing attitude.

Even though we may not have developed spontaneous, uncontrived bodhicitta yet, we can definitely acquaint ourselves with a genuinely unbiased and indiscriminating wish to benefit others that is based on unbiased love and compassion. Through contemplation, we come to realise that if we are to benefit others by freeing them from all suffering and leading them to ultimate happiness, we need to achieve enlightenment ourselves. Even though that attitude may not be uncontrived bodhicitta yet, it is a very similar attitude; at our ordinary level, that is the closest we can get to actual bodhicitta. As it is similar to actual bodhicitta, it is a really worthwhile achievement. In fact, the unbiased wish to benefit others without discrimination, which is based on unbiased love and compassion for others, is essential.

Lama Tsong Khapa had a very significant purpose in mind when he emphasised the importance of first developing immeasurable equanimity as the first of the seven-point cause and effect technique for developing bodhicitta. In fact this presentation of developing equanimity first is said to be a unique presentation of Lama Tsong Khapa, as it is not found in the works of the other Kadampa masters. When the four immeasurable thoughts are presented, immeasurable love and compassion usually comes first and immeasurable equanimity comes later, but in the six-session practice immeasurable equanimity is presented first. So this is in line with Lama Tsong Khapa's presentation, which comes from his own experience of his practice of developing bodhicitta. I have explained this point many times previously which is really important for you to keep in mind.

Also in order to develop unbiased love and compassion, we need to first develop renunciation. Without developing renunciation there is no way that we can develop love and compassion in our hearts. Thus, the order in which these states of mind are developed is presented meticulously in the teachings. If we wish to develop this incredible state of

mind of bodhicitta, we need to establish the sequence by cultivating earlier states of mind.

If we are to subdue our unruly mind it is essential that we try to incorporate the understanding we gain from the teachings into our practice. Otherwise there's not much purpose in listening to and studying the Dharma. Although it will definitely leave a good imprint on the mind, there will not be much more benefit than that. We need to make an effort to really integrate the practice into our life so that our mind starts to be transformed from an unruly one to a more subdued, gentler and kinder mind. Otherwise our practice has not really served much purpose. However this transformation doesn't come about immediately. Rather, it requires investigating our state of mind on a daily basis, and analysing what kind of thoughts or attitudes are influencing our mind. A daily analysis of our thoughts and state of mind is crucial for our practice.

If we stubbornly remain just as we are, then the Dharma will not have much effect upon us. We can check whether any transformation has taken place so far by looking back at our lives. Before we heard and made any attempt to practise the Dharma, when someone out of attachment showed us nice gestures and so forth, we would have also responded out of attachment with nice gestures and the like. Likewise, when someone related to us with anger and hostility, we would have also immediately responded with anger and hostility. That's how our mind was prior to integrating the Dharma in our life. So have we changed or not? Has any true transformation taken place or not? This is something we need to gauge now. Do we react in the same way as we did previously? If we do, then we have remained stubborn, and a true transformation has not taken place. But if we find that our reactions have changed significantly, then a transformation has taken place.

Are we practising Dharma if we respond with attachment to someone who relates to us out of attachment? How could it be Dharma? If we really look into our situation we will see that it is because we react to attachment with attachment that so many complications and problems arise in our life. Alternatively, if we start to relate to others with a genuine sense of concern and a kind mind, then that is the gauge of a true transformation. When we start to become much more relaxed, joyful and happier in this life, that leads onto even more benefit in our future lives. So by developing a kinder mind, we experience both the long-term benefit in our future lives, as well as the short-term benefit in this very lifetime.

In summary, for any transformation to take place we need to integrate the Dharma into our life. Then we won't stubbornly hold onto our same old attitudes and same old behaviours. The way to make that transformation is to really analyse our mind, constantly being aware of our attitudes and our state of mind, and then making an attempt to overcome and change that, rather than holding onto the same states of mind and attitudes. By applying the Dharma in that way, we make that transformation come about. If we remain as we are with no change at all, then the Dharma is not having any effect.

These are points that are presented in the text we are studying, which is why I am highlighting them to you here. The next few verses indicate that we need to be mindful of how we have the perfect conditions right now for practising the Dharma and integrating it into our lives. We are human beings free of all adverse conditions and we have come into contact with the perfect Mahayana teachings, and the perfect Mahayana teachers who present those teachings. We also

have all the other conditions that give us leisure to practise the Dharma. So we have to make some attempt to utilise these incredible and fortunate conditions to transform our mind, and practise according to the basic principles of the teachings. Right now we have the good fortune of having sufficient food, shelter, clothing and all the rest of the good conditions associated with being human. But if we are not mindful to secure and protect our future wellbeing, then in twenty years or so we might find ourselves living amongst animals and surrounded by the conditions of the animal realm. We will then be deprived of all the good conditions that we enjoy now. This is not fantasy but a real probability.

So in order to protect ourselves from having to experience that fate, we need to really integrate the essential points of the practice of the Dharma into our everyday lives. That is what I personally feel. I feel liberation and enlightenment might be quite beyond my reach right now, but I can, at the very least, protect myself from unfortunate rebirths. If I cannot do some practice and integrate the Dharma to a certain degree, then having met the perfect Mahayana teachings and perfect Mahayana teachers would have been completely wasted.

If we cannot even protect ourselves from being reborn in the unfortunate realms, then what benefit would there have been in meeting with these perfect conditions now? We might aspire to the highest goals, but on a more practical level we need to ensure that, at the very least, we protect ourselves from being reborn in the unfortunate realms in the near future.

Before she passed away, a former study group member, Caryn Clarke said, 'I'm not really afraid of death itself. I don't feel too anxious about the actual experience of death, but what I do really feel anxious about is not being able to meet with similar opportunities again in the future'. Then she went on to say that studying with me for about seven years was an incredibly fortunate time, and that her only anxiety was, 'Will I be able to obtain such conditions in the future again?' In fact Caryn was giving us a really significant message. The conditions that Caryn was not sure she would get again are the very conditions that we enjoy now! So we have to utilise them as a way to gain something meaningful.

Caryn also confided in me that she felt much more relaxed and calmer at the hospice. Whenever she went back home, there were relatives and family and a lot of disturbances and distractions, whereas at the hospice she had more time to herself. So despite the pain and agony in her body, she was still considering what was best for her practice. She said, 'In the hospice environment I get the opportunity to do more Tara mantras and recite some prayers, and I feel much calmer, and my mind is much more settled'.

4.2.1. The power of thorough repudiation (cont.)

4.2.1.2. MEDITATING ON REGRET BY FEARING DEATH WITH NEGATIVITY AND GOING FOR REFUGE

Again, the outline just by itself presents a really significant point. It concerns how to develop a sense of regret about the prospects of having to die without purifying one's negativities. Having contemplated that, one takes the initiative of going for refuge.

We'll get to the explanation in the commentary shortly, but first we need to get a sense of the context of this heading. Fear of having to die with negativity refers to the fear of having to experience the ripened result of negativity. As mentioned in our last session, the ripened result of negativity is to be reborn in the unfortunate realms, which

are realms of intense suffering. The way to prevent that unfortunate outcome is to rely on an object that can protect one from having to experience them. Here the objects of reliance are the Three Jewels. Thus, *and going for refuge* indicates the fourth of the four opponent powers, the power of the basis or reliance. Here, relying on the Three Jewels means wholeheartedly taking refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha; this serves as an antidote for overcoming the consequences of negativity, which would otherwise have to be experienced as a ripened result in the lower realms.

When one generates that strong fear of having to experience the consequence of the suffering of the lower realms, a strong sense of regret arises. The greater the extent of the fear in our mind, the greater the sense of regret about having engaged in that negativity will be. Then one contemplates, 'Can I overcome this negativity?' 'What can I rely upon that will overcome my negativities?' If it is possible to rely upon something that will protect us, then obviously we will want to rely on it wholeheartedly.

It is at this point that one develops a strong sense of refuge in the Three Jewels. So the first part of the cause for developing refuge is the fear of experiencing the sufferings of the lower realms, and the second part is wholehearted reliance on the objects of refuge.

By relying on the Buddha we are able to rely on the unmistakable method and the teachings that the Buddha presented. The Sangha helps us to access the teachings and practise them. While the Buddha presents the unmistakable method, which is the teachings, and the Sangha are the helpers, the actual protector is the Dharma itself. When the Dharma is actualised in one's own mind, then it becomes our actual protector. So we need to understand that the Dharma is the real protector. This systematic presentation is helpful in understanding how the objects of refuge protect us.

The relevant verse of the root text is:

32. *Without having purified my negativity,
I will die before by having been killed.
Please rescue me from this with the method
That liberates quickly.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary on this verse reads:

If I do not confess my negativities immediately, then I will be killed prematurely by the lord of death while possessing unpurified negativity, and go to the lower realms.

Therefore I petition you to rescue me with all means, to quickly free me from the negativity.

We are now at the point where we have recognised and identified what the negativities are. Thus the need to confess and purify them naturally follows. Confessing one's negativities as a way to purify them means that one will not have to experience the ripened results of those negativities. That is the real meaning of purification. Negativity is purified when one applies a method that prevents one from having to experience the ripened results of negativity.

If I do not confess my negativities immediately conveys a sense of urgency. That is because the time of death is uncertain. Because of the uncertainty of when death will occur, there is a very strong probability that one could die before one gets around to confessing and purifying one's negativities. So if one confesses and applies a purification practice immediately, one can be comfortable about not having to experience the result in the next life, regardless of how soon one dies.

This presentation is related to the three main reasons why the time of death is uncertain, which are presented in the lam rim: death itself is certain; however the time of death is uncertain; and at the time of death nothing but the Dharma can be of benefit. The point being made by this verse is that the time of death is uncertain.

When the commentary says *then I will be killed prematurely by the lord of death* we need to understand that *the lord of death* is not some sort of mythological demon of death. We need to relate *lord of death* to the conditions of death and understand that we could meet with the conditions of death at any time. If we experience death while possessing unpurified negativity then we will be reborn in the lower realms. *Therefore, as mentioned here, I petition you, which refers to the three objects of refuge, to rescue me with all means, to quickly free me from the negativity.* So refuge is presented here as the ultimate protector, serving as the unmistakable objects of reliance to purify one's negativity.

Then Gyaltsab Je poses a query to introduce the next verse.

Query: Why should it be necessary to be rescued quickly, as one will not die before one has finished purifying one's karma?

The answer to that is presented in the following verse:

33. *This capricious lord of death
Does not rely upon whether it is accomplished
or not.
Hence everybody, the sick and healthy,
Cannot trust their adventitious life.*

In his commentary, Gyaltsab Je explains how the verse serves as an answer to that earlier query. As it reads:

Answer: This lord of death cannot be relied upon for even one moment. He will come, regardless of whether one has accomplished purifying one's negativities or not, regardless of whether one has finished one's projects or not, and so forth.

Hence, everybody, whether sick or not, whether the life force is finished or not, dies adventitiously, and it is uncertain even if one will die today or not. Therefore one should purify it quickly.

Again we need to remember that what is personified as *the lord of death* refers to the conditions of death, which *cannot be relied upon*. In other words death can happen at any moment. We all know of so many instances where one moment a person is around and the next moment they are not. They can be sitting on a chair, or standing up, and by the time they sit down on the chair their life has ceased. We might assume we will live to be 80, or maybe 70 or 75 if we are less ambitious! But there is no guarantee that we will live to such a ripe old age. When we look around there are so many who die prematurely; so death can occur at any moment.

Death does not wait until one has completed purifying one's negativities. So the answer to the opening query, 'What is the rush in trying to purify my negativities? I'll only die after I have purified my negativities' is that the time of death is uncertain. If we don't know when it will occur, how can we possibly guarantee that we will have purified all our negativities before we die? The fact is that death could easily befall us before we get around to purifying our negativities. Death does not wait around for us to finish whatever project we may have; it's not as if death says, 'I will let you finish what you're doing first and then I will come'. Death can come at any time. Furthermore it's not as if death only follows those who are sick and spares those who are healthy. Whether one is sick or healthy, death can occur at any time.

This gives us the impetus to immediately purify our negative karmas through confession. The simplest way to do this is by firstly developing a strong regret for the negativities one has engaged in, and then going for refuge. This is one very simple method that we can do at any time. Developing strong regret and based on that, taking wholehearted refuge in the Three Jewels, is a really simple practice that we can easily do.

In relation to the point that death does not wait around for us to finish our projects, previous masters have told this story about how a teacher promised to take a young monk on a picnic. So, the young monk would periodically remind the teacher, 'teacher, when are we going to go on a picnic? The teacher's usual response was, 'We will go, we will go, once I finish all my work'. On one occasion the teacher noticed something in the distance and asked the young student, 'What is that over there?' to which the student replied, 'Oh that is someone who is going on a picnic after having finished all their work!' What they were seeing, in fact, was the body of a dead person being carried to the cremation site.

The main point of the story is that death can happen at any time, so we cannot wait around thinking that we will have time to finish our tasks sometime in the future. This implies that we need to apply the antidotes for overcoming our negativities immediately, because death can happen at any time.

Another point we need to derive is that we need to put our mind to accomplishing whatever we have decided to do. If we just leave it as something to be done later, then we may end up never being able to accomplish it. Overzealousness can also be a problem. There is another story about an individual who neglected the practical aspects and was too ambitious about what he wanted to try to practice. He came to me and said, 'I am very, very determined to do a long retreat'. So I tried to give some practical advice, saying 'Perhaps focus on earning some money to secure your livelihood first'. But he was determined and he said, 'Well, you know, I could die before I am able to do a retreat, so I would rather do the retreat right away'. I said, 'Well, that's true. That sort of thinking is good, so OK, do what you wish'. As it turned out he ended up doing neither the retreat nor securing his livelihood, because he lost his job as well!

We need to put an effort into accomplishing Dharma practice, and put aside any thoughts of procrastination. There's no sense in saying, 'You know, maybe I won't do that now; I would rather not do it'. We need to try to accomplish our Dharma practice as a matter of urgency.

With respect to the point about the lord of death not waiting, regardless of whether someone is *sick or not*, I can share another story on this point. In Dhargye Monastery, which was near my home town in Tibet, there were two brothers, one of whom was quite ill, who was nursed by his healthy brother. However, the healthier brother suddenly died, while the sick one was still alive. When the other monks were consoling him he made this comment, 'It seems that the lord of death has brought the wrong message. Why did he take my brother who was healthy, when it should have been me?'

When the commentary states *whether the life force is finished or not*, it is referring to age. The lord of death, or more specifically the conditions for death, can occur at any time regardless of one's age. We have all seen many examples of someone dying, regardless of their age or physical condition. Just recently on the news there was a report of a house

collapsing during a wedding ceremony, which caused the death a number of people, and of course there are earthquakes and so forth where this happens. Not so long ago there was a story about a well-known person who went for a walk in the park and did not return, because he had suddenly died.

The emphasis here is on really contemplating the impermanent nature of our life, and the many examples of unexpected death, and use that understanding as a reminder of how our life is very transient and death can occur at any time. The reason for contemplating this is so that it can serve as an impetus to practise the Dharma, and integrate it into our everyday lives.

We need to regret our negativities and apply the measure of confession to purify them. If we look around we can see that while there are many who are completely distracted by frivolous and mundane worldly activities, there are very few who are seriously practising Dharma. Some people die before they even have a chance to understand Dharma, let alone being able to practise it. These are bare facts. So death is a reality that we need to keep in mind as an impetus for our own practice.

These points are really significant personal instructions, which should serve to encourage us to take our practice a bit more seriously, and put a bit more time and energy into it.

Now we will recite the Tara Praises, which we can dedicate to Lyn Coleman who is about to have surgery either today or tomorrow. As she hasn't had her surgery yet, there's time for us to do prayers for the surgery to go well and be successful, and that she may recover quickly, and be able to join us again in study group.

Extracts from *Entrance for the Child of the Conquerors* used with the kind permission of Ven. Fedor Stracke

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Edited Version

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