
Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

བྱང་ཆུབ་སེམས་དཔའི་སྤྱོད་པ་ལ་འཇུག་པ་བཞུགས་སོ་

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

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Based on the refuge and bodhicitta motivation that we have just generated, we can now engage in the meditation practice. [*meditation*]

4.2.1. The power of thorough repudiation (cont.)

4.2.1.3. MEDITATING ON REGRET BY CONSIDERING ELABORATELY THE WAY ONE MEANINGLESSLY GENERATED NEGATIVITY

This is subdivided into four categories:

4.2.1.3.1. Regret for having created negativity for friends, relatives, body and possessions, not knowing that they are unreliable

4.2.1.3.2. An example of how it becomes a mere object of memory at the time of death

4.2.1.3.3. Regretting having generated negativity for them by directly seeing their unreliability now

4.2.1.3.4. Regretting having generated negativity, by not realising the uncertainty of the time of one's death.

From the headings alone we can see the meticulous presentation of the material of the text. We need to see this presentation as a personal instruction that will serve as a means to generate virtue and merit, and abandon or purify negativity. These are the two main aspects of practice that we need to develop.

4.2.1.3.1. Regret for having created negativity for friends, relatives, body and possessions, not knowing that they are unreliable

From this presentation one can derive an understanding of how negativities are created because of not knowing that friends, relatives, body and possessions are unreliable. This implies that once we gain an understanding of the Dharma and the points mentioned here, we will know all the reasons for engaging in the practice of avoiding creating negativity.

The verse that relates to this outline reads:

34. *Leaving all behind I have to depart.
Not understanding this
I create manifold negativities
For the purpose of friends and non-friends.*

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je explains:

Leaving everything behind, such as friends, possessions and even the flesh and bones I was born with, I have to depart alone to the other side.

Not understanding this, I generated many negativities because of protecting friends and destroying enemies. This I regret.

This is quite easy to understand. As explained in the commentary *leaving everything behind* indicates that eventually one has to leave everything behind, such as friends and possessions. Friends can turn into enemies, and those we once considered as enemies can turn into

friends. So to that extent they are also unreliable. However the main point is that we will eventually have to leave behind friends as well as possessions, which include all the things that are essential to sustain ourselves, such as food, dwellings, clothing and so forth.

Even the flesh and bones I was born with refers to our most intimate possession, our own body, which we have possessed from the moment we were born. So when we die we have to leave behind even our most intimate possession. In order to go forward to the next life we have to leave behind everything that we possess now. Inevitably we have to face departing from this life alone. We also experience the transition to the next life completely alone. However most of us fail to understand or accept this reality.

The important point to derive from this explanation is that we are unable to take anything with us onto the next life. Thus, friends, possessions and even our own body cannot help us at the crucial moment of death. This understanding can be of practical benefit in our life now because it can help to lessen our strong cravings and attachments to these things. Normally we have strong attachment to those we feel close to, such as our relatives and friends, and aversion to those who are distant, and because of that we create a lot of negativity. So a lot of negativity is incurred as a result of maintaining such attitudes.

As the commentary states, *not understanding this, I generated many negativities because of protecting friends and destroying enemies. This I regret.* As mentioned previously, we have created a lot of negativities under the influence of strong attachment to those we consider close. We have also created a lot of negativity when we have been under the influence of anger and hatred for our enemies. By bringing to mind all the negativities that we have created, and specifically thinking about the unpleasant consequences, i.e. the ripened results of these negativities, we develop strong regret about having created these actions. Developing strong regret has deep significance because, as the masters have explained in the past, strong regret in itself will purify at least half of the negativity that one has incurred.

In order to explain the meaning of the next verse, Gyaltsab Je begins his commentary with:

It is unsuitable to create negativity for their purpose ...

The verse comes at this point:

35. *Non-friends become non-existent,
Also friends become non-existent.
As I also become non-existent
Everybody becomes non-existent.*

Then Gyaltsab Je goes on to explain the meaning of this verse:

... as non-friends, friends and oneself all become non-existent immediately afterwards.

Similarly, relatives, possessions and the like become non-existent. They are completely unreliable, and any negativity done for their sake, out of attachment or anger, is regrettable.

Here *non-friends* refers to enemies, who *become non-existent*. Even if one is not able to vanquish one's enemies, they will naturally become non-existent when they die. Not only will our fierce enemies become non-existent when they die, but our close *friends* and dear relatives will also die, and also become non-existent. So there is no purpose in exerting ourselves in creating negativities to try to nourish and protect them.

The next point is that we also become non-existent. Not only will external friends and enemies become non-existent when they perish, but the very individual who discriminates between friends and enemies will also become non-existent. This is indicating that inevitably we all have to face the same fate of death. It is not just a matter of looking outwards and seeing what fate others will have to undergo, but we too will have to undergo the same fate. So, the main point is that we need to relate the reality of this situation to ourselves.

Having mentioned that one creates a lot of negativity in relation to one's friends and enemies, there might be some thought that although enemies and friends will perish, one will not have to experience that same fate oneself and therefore will not experience the results of those negativities in the future. However, that is not the case. The creator of that negativity will definitely perish and have to experience the consequences of the negativity they have created. That is the crucial point that one really needs to reflect upon.

4.2.1.3.2. Example of how they become a mere object of memory at the time of death

All worldly things become mere objects of memory at the time of death, so they cannot help us in any way at that crucial time. The only thing that will be of benefit at that time is the Dharma. That is the implication of this heading.

The verse relating to this heading reads:

36. *Like the experiences during a dream,
Each and every phenomenon we engage
Becomes also an object of memory.
All that is past becomes unobservable.*

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je states:

For example, the minimal happiness experienced during a dream is only an object of memory after we wake up. Similarly, the objects that we fantasised to be happiness at first, and which we engaged in, are, at the time of death, but a mere memory.

As explained here, when we dream we have all sorts of experiences; sometimes happy experiences and sometimes, when we have nightmares, very fearsome ones. However, whether it was a pleasant or unpleasant experience, when we wake up those experiences are not there anymore, and we realise that it was all but a mere dream. As the commentary explains, the happiness experienced in a dream is merely an object of memory after we wake up. Of course, we have all had that experience. We sometimes have dreams where everything seems to be so pleasant; the area we are in, and our friends are pleasant and everything is so very comfortable. But at other times there may be great fears and so forth. Of course, when we wake up, there's

nothing left but a memory, as dreams don't leave any physical residue behind.

Using that as an example, the commentary explains that *similarly, the objects that we fantasised to be happiness at first, and which we engaged in, are, at the time of death, but a mere memory*. What is referred to as *fantasised to be happiness* refers to all of the worldly or contaminated samsaric pleasures, which are just fleeting and momentary and not true objects of pleasure. At the time of death nothing but memories remain.

Then Gyaltsab Je goes on to explain:

- Therefore one should make repeatedly the decision to only practise the Dharma right now.

This is the main point: at the time of death, nothing is of benefit except the Dharma. What we normally consider as being of benefit, such as relatives, friends and possessions and so forth, cannot benefit us at the time of death. Likewise, what we normally consider as being harmful, such as enemies, cannot harm us at the time of death. The real harm comes from the negativity that we have accumulated, and the only benefit we can receive at the time of death comes from the Dharma.

To emphasise the main point again, it is not friends or relatives and the like who can benefit us when we die, but only the Dharma. Likewise, at the time of death enemies cannot harm us. Nothing can harm us but our own negativity. At the last stages of our life only our own negativities can harm us. Contemplating that prospect, we need to make the decision *to only practise Dharma*. That is the only concern we should have in mind. This decision to practise the Dharma comes as result of repeatedly thinking about these points, and then reaching the firm conclusion that one needs *to only practise the Dharma, beginning right now*.

4.2.1.3.3. Regretting having generated negativity for them by directly seeing their unreliability now

From this outline we can derive the understanding that we don't have to resort to memories of our past lives to see how friends, possessions and so forth and enemies are unreliable. From our own experience in this very life, we know the unreliability of friends, relatives and the like, and thus regret having generated negativity in order to benefit them.

The verse relating to this reads:

37. *Even during the short time we are alive
Many friends and non-friends have passed.
The negativity created for their purpose
Is so unbearable and remains before us.*

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je explains:

Further, even during the short time we are alive, we know from experience that many friends and non-friends have passed. Since the frightening fruitional result of the negativity that we created for their sake still remains in front of us, it is as explained, 'If it cannot be shared by others what use are obstructing friends?'

As the commentary explains, even during the short time you are alive you have experienced the passing of many friends and non-friends. This is particularly true for those in their late 70s, and 80s. Just looking around, we can

remember so many acquaintances and good friends who are gone, and even those with whom we clashed are also gone. Even the younger generation may have had the experience of someone you have known who has passed on and who are no longer around. We know from our own experience that so many friends, relatives and the like, as well as enemies, have passed on.

The next point in relation to this explanation is that *the frightening fruitional result of the negativity that we created for their sake still remains before us*. As so many relatives, friends and acquaintances, as well as enemies or those we didn't get along with have passed on, we might think that the negativity that we created in relation to them has passed on with them, and so everything is fine. However that is not the case. Although the individual beings have passed on, our negativity in relation to them still remains to be experienced as results in the future life. As the commentary states, *the frightening fruitional result of the negativity still remains in front of us*.

The main point we need to reflect upon is that the fruitional results of the negativity that we have created will have to be experienced in the next life. If not confessed, the negativity will not dissipate by itself, thus it will have to be experienced.

As a way to emphasise the earlier point, Gyaltsab Je gives this quotation:

If it cannot be shared by others, then what use are obstructing friends?

Even though friends and enemies may have passed on, the negativity one has created in relation to them remains. We might think it would be fair enough if we could share that negativity with the friends and enemies who were the object of that negativity. However, as this quotation explains, that is not the case. Rather, one will have to experience the consequences of that negativity solely by oneself. Thus, *what use are obstructing friends?* implies that as it is due to attachment to friends that one has created so much negativity, friends are of no real use or benefit to one. In fact, obstructing friends are actually detrimental to one's own well-being and happiness.

As I have indicated in the past, we cannot share either our happiness or our suffering with others. We might be able to share our possessions and wealth with others to some extent, but we can't really divide our own happiness and share it with others. Likewise, others cannot share their happiness with us. Nor can we divide and share unpleasant experiences and suffering. We have to experience that unpleasantness solely by ourselves. This is an important point we need to reflect upon. While we create the negativity in relation to others, the consequences of the negativity are experienced solely by ourselves. As a positive consequence of contemplating these points again and again, we will be motivated to reduce our attachment and aversion to others.

Then Gyaltsab Je concludes his commentary on this verse with the resolution one needs to make:

One should contemplate this again and again, according to the way it is taught, and generate regret for the negativity done for their sake.

This is a summary of the main point. We need to develop strong regret for the negativity that we have created. You

might think that if you have ten friends who were willing to share the burden of your negativity, your share would definitely be lighter, and you would not need to experience the consequences alone. However, that is not the case, as negativity cannot be divided.

It would indeed be quite consoling if we could share our sufferings and even happiness with others. There might be some friends or family who would quite willingly share and remove some of our suffering. But the fact remains that no matter how much concern they have for us (or how much we have for them), we cannot share our suffering.

It would be wonderful if we could actually share our happiness with others but we can't do that either. If that was possible, I can quite confidently say that I have quite a bit of happiness that I am willing to share with others. Unfortunately, I cannot do that. When I see others in a distressed state deprived of any sense of joy and happiness, I would definitely share my happiness and give it to them if I could. When we see the immense suffering of others we might feel compelled to help them, even to the point of taking on their suffering; but while that can be done in the form of a practice, it can't be done in reality.

4.2.1.3.4. *Regretting having generated negativity, by not realising the uncertainty of the time of one's death.*

This, in fact, is one of the main obstructions to practising the Dharma seriously. Even someone with a terminal disease still hopes that they will live for a while longer. In our everyday life, we engage in so many frivolous worldly activities, completely oblivious to the fact that we may die at any moment. The time of death is uncertain, and death can happen at any moment, but because we don't understand this, we continue to engage in amassing negativities.

The verse in relation to this outline reads:

**38. *In this way I am said to be adventitious.
Because I do not realise this,
I generate a multitude of negativities
Out of ignorance, attachment and anger,***

Gyaltsab Je's commentary on this verse reads:

In this way it is explained that I am adventitious, with a mere, brief life where the time of death is uncertain. Not realising this, I have created a multitude of negativities out of ignorance, attachment and anger.

Because negativity causes downfall into the hells, one should meditate on regret many times for having created negativity, by contemplating the certainty of death, the uncertainty of the time of death, and that at the time of death only the Dharma is of benefit, as well as the faults of the lower realms.

This is a clear explanation here, however to emphasise a few of these points further, *I am adventitious*, means that one's life is adventitious, neither being reliable or steady. *With a mere brief life where the time of death is uncertain* refers to the reason why one's life is adventitious or unreliable, because the time of death is uncertain. By not understanding this point or ignoring it, one creates *a multitude of negativities out of this ignorance*.

Here *ignorance* relates specifically to the ignorance of grasping at an individual 'I' or self. It is due to this strong grasping at the 'I' that the sense of self-importance arises. With this sense of 'I am the most important', everything that one does becomes a means to gratify 'me, me, me'! Due to this ignorance of grasping at the self, which induces a strong grasping at the 'I', one develops attachment to one's relatives and those close to oneself who help 'me', and anger or aversion to those one considers being an enemy who might harm 'me'. So out of that strong grasping at the self one creates a lot of negativities.

If those negativities didn't hinder a fortunate rebirth in the next life, then we could rest assured that there would be nothing wrong with creating them. But these negativities lead to rebirth in the unfortunate realms. By contemplating this fact, one regrets many times over the negativity one has created.

The points to really consider again and again are that *the time of death is uncertain*, and that *at the time of death only the Dharma can help us, as well as the faults of the lower realms*.

Contemplating the faults of the lower realms means contemplating the various types of suffering that are experienced there. As mentioned previously, the prospect of having to be reborn as an animal, where one lacks all of the present conditions that we have now should instil a very strong sense of remorse about having created the negativity that leads to such an unfortunate rebirth. We need to think, 'I cannot let my negativity remain unpurified. I definitely have to confess and purify it'. Contemplating the consequences that one will have to experience leads to strong remorse and regret about having created the negativity.

4.2.1.4. CONSIDERING THE WAY NEGATIVITY IS FRIGHTFUL

This has four subdivisions:

4.2.1.4.1. Since nothing can be added to life and it runs out continuously one will definitely die, and if one were to die with negativity, it is fearful

4.2.1.4.2. If one does not purify negativity, then one must experience suffering even in this life

4.2.1.4.3. The reason why it is so very fearful

4.2.1.4.4. The way one will be overwhelmed by suffering later

4.2.1.4.1. Since nothing can be added to life and it runs out continuously one will die, and if one were to die with negativity, it is fearful

If we were destined to live to 100, and that span of a hundred years were to remain constant, then we may not be too worried about it. But from the moment we are born the number of moments, days, and years we still have becomes fewer and fewer. That is the fact that is being presented here.

The relevant verse is:

39. *As day and night have no abiding
This life is continually becoming less;
If there is no adding to the weakening,
Why would someone like me not die?*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

Regardless of whether one is walking, sitting or lying down, without day and night remaining for even one moment, this life is constantly running out and it is impossible to add anything to the lessening life. Why would that not become a reason for someone like me to certainly die? It does.

Regardless of whether one is walking, sitting or lying down indicates that whatever activity in which one may be engaged, without day and night remaining for even one moment, this life is constantly running out. Our life is running out with every moment that passes. Just as we look at a clock, for example, we can see how every hour decreases moment by moment. The second hand does not stop for even a moment. That is exactly how our life is—every second that passes is a second less of whatever lifespan we may have. Even if we have a long lifespan, it is decreasing moment by moment. Furthermore, as the commentary explains, *it is impossible to add anything to the lessening life.* While life is naturally decreasing moment by moment, there is no extra life that can be added on. So the conclusion is, *why would that not become a reason for someone like me to certainly die?* This is a rhetorical question that implies that we will, of course, have to die sooner rather than later.

The conclusion that we need to contemplate is:

Since one will definitely die, and the time of death is uncertain, one should exert oneself in purifying negativity.

The negativity remains with us as we approach death, moment by moment, unless it is purified. Because death *is uncertain* and can happen at any time, *one should exert oneself in purifying negativity* with the same intensity that was mentioned earlier i.e. by developing strong remorse and regret in one's mind.

Once one comes to accept and understand that one has amassed great negativity and develops a strong wish to purify that negativity, the next step then is to know how to purify the negativity with the four opponent powers. Being able to identify the four opponent powers and knowing how to apply them is essential if one is to purify negativities.

Next week will be the discussion week. As usual it would be really good to do the discussion in a good way. The week following that is the exam, and again, it is good for you to prepare well for that.

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

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