
Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

བྱང་ལྷན་མེད་པའི་སྤྱོད་པ་ལ་འཇུག་པ་བཞུགས་སོ།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

22 October 2013

By focusing on the *Refuge and Bodhicitta Prayer* as a motivation we can now engage in the *tong len* meditation practice. [meditation]

To set the motivation for the teaching, we can think along these lines:

In order to benefit all sentient beings, by liberating them from suffering and leading them to the ultimate state of happiness, I first need to achieve enlightenment myself. So, for that purpose I will listen to the teaching and practise well.

If one wonders, 'What is the purpose of coming to listen to these teachings?', then this motivation can serve as a reminder of the purpose of listening to the Dharma. This motivation indicates that it is not sufficient just to aspire to become enlightened; rather we need to actually put the Dharma into practice. When we set this motivation it actually ensures that our activities of teaching and listening to the Dharma becomes meaningful.

It is good to understand the significance of one's motivation. When one generates such a positive motivation in accordance with the altruistic wish to achieve enlightenment, that which encompasses the three principles of the path, then the whole Mahayana path is encompassed in that motivation. That's why it is extremely meaningful. While generating that positive motivation is crucial, the only way to bring that to fruition is through study and practice. Without both study and practice, one cannot actualise those good intentions.

Now let us return to the text; my intention is to try to go through the text a bit more quickly.

4.2.3. The power of the thorough application of the antidote

4.2.3.1. THE REASON WHY IT IS APPROPRIATE TO PURIFY NEGATIVITY (CONT.)

4.2.3.1.2. Showing the necessity to relate it to the example of the abyss

The outline uses the example of an abyss to show the necessity of purification.

The relevant verse in the root text reads:

57. *If one needs to be conscientious
Regarding ordinary small abysses,
What need is there to mention
The abyss that goes down a thousand bagtse?*

Gyalsab Je's commentary on this verse reads:

If one needs to be very conscientious with small heights like hills, where falling down would merely cause injuries to one's limbs, then what need is there to mention that one has to be conscientious about not falling into the great abyss

of 32000 *bagtse*, only indicated here by one thousand, where one needs to remain for a long time if one falls down?

One needs to rely on the antidote to the afflictions.

The first part of the commentary presents the analogy of an abyss between mountains. One has to take great care and *be very conscientious* about not falling down into an abyss. Out of the fear of falling and breaking one's limbs and so forth, one applies conscientiousness to avoid falling down into such an abyss. Now if we normally take extreme measures to protect ourselves from physical injury, then, as the commentary mentions, *what need is there to mention* the need to protect ourselves from the great abyss that one would fall into if one commits negativities. Such an abyss is greater in depth than any abyss on mountains; the text mentions an abyss of 32000 *bagtse* or leagues, which is the measure of the depth of the lower realms. So the abyss that one would fall into by creating negativities would be that of the unfortunate rebirths, which are not only incredibly deep but also extremely difficult to escape from.

Therefore one needs to be conscientious and apply methods to protect oneself from falling into the deep abyss of the lower realms. One needs to ensure that one applies *the antidotes to the afflictions*, which are the cause of all negativities, within a virtuous frame of mind. There is a significant point why the power of thorough application specifies applying antidotes to the afflictions; that is because in order to completely eradicate all negativity one has to apply the antidotes to the afflictions.

What one needs to derive from this explanation is that the ultimate goal is to completely overcome and purify all negativity from its very roots. Thus, it is only by completely eradicating the afflictions from their very root that we can be satisfied that we have completely purified all our negativities, and that eradication is achieved through the purification practices that have been presented.

As explained in the teachings, the main afflictions are attachment and grasping. Due to the ignorance about karma and its effects, we are compelled to take rebirth again and again in cyclic existence. So when the link of grasping and attachment is severed, we will not have to take rebirth again in cyclic existence. Therefore attachment and grasping are the main links that we need to break in order to achieve the cessation of rebirth in cyclic existence, and the lower rebirths in particular. The main point is that without overcoming attachment and grasping, one will have to continuously experience the consequences of negative karma in cyclic existence.

4.2.3.2. WHY IT IS APPROPRIATE TO PURIFY SOON

This outline indicates that it is not adequate to think that we will purify our negativities some time in the future, by thinking, 'Oh, I can gradually and slowly purify negativities'. The point presented here is that one needs to engage in purification right now!

There are two subheadings to this heading:

4.2.3.2.1. Strive in the antidote to the afflictions starting today.

4.2.3.2.2. It is unsuitable to be lazy in meditating on the path, because there is no reason to be unafraid of suffering.

With respect to the first subheading, we need to see that this is an exhortation to strive to apply the antidote for overcoming afflictions, starting right now, and not leave it for another time. We are so habituated to procrastinating and leaving things for later! This teaching cuts through all of that and points the finger at us saying, 'You can't leave it for later; you have to do it right now!' If we actually take heed of this presentation, we will find great purpose and meaning in this exhortation.

The second subheading is very profound. *There is no reason to be unafraid of suffering* also implies that when one achieves the state of being certain of not having to experience the consequences of negativities, then at that time there is no need to be afraid of suffering. This means that one should be very afraid of suffering if one has not purified the negativities and applied antidotes to one's afflictions. *It is unsuitable to be lazy in meditating on the path*, means that one needs to apply the meditations and practise *on the path*.

4.2.3.2.1. Strive in the antidote to the afflictions starting today

The verse from the root text reads:

58. *It is unsuitable to abide comfortably
Saying 'I won't die right today'.
The time of the self becoming non-existent
Will come about without any doubt.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains the meaning of this verse quite clearly, so I might not have to elaborate too much. I will of course elaborate when I feel capable of doing so, but when I am not too sure about something then I won't! The commentary begins with a rhetorical proposition:

One may think: Although it is necessary to strive in the antidote, it is good enough to start next month or year.

The answer to that is:

It is appropriate to start right from today because it is unsuitable to remain comfortably, not applying the antidote and being lazy, thinking that one will not die today. As there is no certainty that one will not die today, the time for me to become non-existent will most likely be tomorrow.

Hence I shall not be lazy and strive from today.

This of course relates to the points I've mentioned earlier. As a way to overcome the thought that it is not necessary to strive to apply the antidote right now, this is an exhortation to apply it right away. Immediately! The rationale behind the hypothetical proposition is that it may be acceptable to apply the antidotes to the delusions and negativity later. The response is in fact *it is appropriate to start right from today because it is unsuitable to remain comfortably, not applying the antidote and being lazy, thinking that one will not die right today*. Thinking that one will not die today implies that there is no certainty about when death will occur.

Here, *laziness* refers to the laziness that is associated with feeling comfortable about indulging in frivolous

activities, or having a good time in a worldly sense—socialising with friends, having a party, perhaps going out for a picnic and having a drink or two, enjoying a nice meal and so forth. The underlying state of mind that makes these plans definitely gives no thought to the fact that one could die at any given moment. That is the laziness of comfort, where we *remain comfortably*, engaging in worldly pleasures.

Actually all forms of attachment have an aspect of laziness. The definition of enthusiasm or joyous effort is being happy and joyful about creating virtue; the opposite of that is laziness, which is being happy to engage in non-virtue. Laziness does not necessarily refer to being inactive and passive, lying around doing nothing—some forms of laziness involve being very active. Indeed, the definition of laziness here is applied to someone who would normally be seen as being very active and talented, but only in pursuing their attachments.

Therefore we are being exhorted to not give in to the laziness of being comfortable, thinking we will not die today and not applying the antidote. This is inappropriate, *as there is no certainty one will not die today, the time for me to become non-existent will most likely be tomorrow!* As death could come as soon as the next day, the conclusion is *I shall not be lazy and strive from today*.

Then Gyaltsab Je quotes from a text called the *Letter of Kanika*

From the *Letter of Kanika*:

This is for tomorrow, today I do this—
This is not a pure action for a human
Because the time to become non-existent,
The tomorrow, is certain to come.

The practical implication of these instructions is that we need to ensure that we apply the antidotes to negativity by following the process of purification throughout the day. As ordinary beings it is inevitable that we will commit some negativity, however as soon as we realise that we have done so, we need to apply the antidote, which is purification; this is essential. If we commit negativity in the morning we need to try and confess and purify that by noon; if negativities have been committed at noon, we need to purify them by late afternoon; and at night we recall the negativities committed in the evening or throughout the day and apply the antidotes for purifying them. If we were not to purify them that evening, and die before we get out of bed the next day, then some of our negativity would remain unpurified, which would be most unfortunate.

To re-emphasise the point, if we purify our negativities before going to bed, then even if we were not to wake up the next morning, we would have purified at least some negativities. That is the attitude we need to carry throughout our lives.

The way to purify negativities is to apply the four opponent powers, which are being presented here in this second chapter.

- The first part of the confession and purification is to develop strong regret about having committed that negativity, thinking, 'It is extremely unfortunate that

I have again fallen victim to the delusions and have thus committed such negativity'.

- Having generated that remorse one will naturally want to do something about it. 'What can I do to rectify that negativity I have committed?' At that point one needs to rely on an object that will help one to rectify that negativity. So the next opponent power is the power of reliance on the basis, which is the Three Jewels and sentient beings. When one develops a strong reliance on the objects of refuge, the relevance of that strong refuge becomes most apparent.
- Even though they are essential, developing regret and relying on the objects of refuge is not sufficient, as they do not completely eradicate the negativity. The next opponent power is the power of thorough application of the antidote. Here one needs to engage in the activity of applying the antidote to the negativity, in particular to the delusions that are the cause of the negativity. So applying the antidote and understanding how to apply the antidote is really essential.
- To seal all of that, one resolves not to commit that negativity again.

This is how we purify negativity. We need to be aware that we can very easily engage in negativity. Just as we might be compelled to engage in some negativity within a few moments, by the same token it is also possible for us to apply the purification practice within a few moments. When we know the method then it's just a matter of bringing it to mind and acknowledging the negativity one has committed, feeling regret and so forth. So these four opponent powers can be applied in the same time that it takes to commit the negativity! So, as we have the means on hand at all times, it is most appropriate that we apply them.

As many of you would already be aware, the preliminary practices before engaging in a committed meditation practice, such as a long retreat, mainly consist of purification practices, and we need to understand their significance. Without purifying the negativities that our mind is still carrying, our meditation would not be fruitful as we would not be able to maintain any clarity or focus. We need to apply that principle to our regular practice, as purification practice is not just important but essential. I feel that as beginners, it would be more worthwhile to spend fifteen or twenty minutes doing a purification practice, rather than sitting cross-legged, with our eyes closed trying to focus on an object, while still being affected by distractions, and assuming it is meditation. Because we have not purified our negativities, our mind will not be focussed and will drift here and there. So I feel that it would be much more worthwhile to use one's time for a purification practice. Indeed, without having purified negativity the mind will be neither settled nor focussed. I'm relaying an important point here.

In relation to the appropriateness of applying the antidote to afflictions, let us take the example of attachment. If one has applied the antidote to overcome attachment, then to the degree that one has successfully done so, the mind

will not be affected by attachment and so one's meditation would be much more stable. Otherwise attachment will be a hindrance to one's meditation, and most of the obstacles to meditation are in the form of attachment. Because of this, Shantideva explains the antidotes for overcoming attachments in great detail in the eighth chapter of the *Bodhicharyavatara* text.

4.2.3.2.2. *It is unsuitable to be lazy in meditating on the path, because there is no reason to be unafraid of suffering*

As mentioned previously, there is no certainty about not having to be afraid of suffering, so *it is unsuitable to be lazy in meditating on the path*.

The verse relating to this reads:

*59. Who will offer me freedom from fear?
How will I be freed from danger?
If I am definite to vanish
How can I remain with a happy mind?*

Again, Gyaltsab Je's commentary begins with a hypothetical proposition:

Even though death occurs, being afraid of it will not help, so there is no need to be afraid.

Then the commentary continues:

One sees and hears that all others die. Thus while the fear of falling into the lower realms is there, what holy person can bestow fearlessness by saying that there is no need to be afraid of negativities and death?

Since there is nobody that can bestow freedom from negativities and death, how will one attain liberation if one does not strive in the antidote? One will not, and through death one will definitely become non-existent.

So why do you, due to the force of laziness, remain with a happy mind, and not strive in the antidotes to the negativities? This is unsuitable. Strive in meditating on the antidote!

We all operate under the assumption of the preliminary hypothetical statement. We often make comments like, 'Oh, I'm not afraid of death? Why should I be afraid?' Yet even though we say this casually, that fear might definitely arise quite strongly when the prospect of death is imminent. As the commentary explains, *one sees and hears that all others die and the fear of falling into the lower realms is there*. This is something that we can all relate to.

What holy person can bestow fearlessness on you emphasises the earlier point, that while *one sees and hears that all others die, and the fear of falling into the lower realms is there*, and since there is no holy being who can bestow fearlessness on you, you need to purify negativities.

Since there is nobody who can bestow freedom from negativities and death, how will one attain liberation if one does not strive in the antidote? One will not, and through death one will definitely become non-existent means that life as one knows it will completely end. It doesn't mean that one becomes totally non-existent, rather that this life will be severed, thus becoming non-existent in the context of this present life.

Thus the conclusion is, *so why do you, due to the force of laziness, remain with a happy mind, and not strive in the*

antidotes to the negativities? This is unsuitable and one should strive in meditating on the antidote!

Again, *laziness* does not refer to the laziness we understand in the worldly sense, which refers to someone who is inactive and just laying around and not doing anything. In this context a lazy person could be very active and engaging in much frivolous activity, and be enjoying the comforts of life out of attachment. To be more specific, applying the antidotes requires some exertion and some effort. Thinking that everything is fine and that we are just enjoying life, while not considering the negativities one is engaging in, let alone the need to apply the antidotes, is the laziness that is referred to here. As indicated earlier, the laziness of procrastination is also included here. We also need to protect ourselves from the sort of laziness that thinks, 'Oh, I can do it tomorrow, the day after tomorrow, or next week, or next month and so forth'.

As mentioned in the teachings, all virtues can become an antidote when they are practised with the intention of purifying negativities. As we all attempt to engage in virtue on a regular basis, and do some practices and so forth, it is good to ensure that these practices become a means to serve as an antidote.

4.2.4. The power of not reversing into the fault again

The fourth power is the power of not reversing into the fault again. It is good to remember the significance of the actual order of the practices of the four opponent powers. As explained previously, the first power, the power of thorough repudiation is, in short, the power of regret. The stronger the sense of regret one has, the more readily the intention to do something about the negativity one has committed will arise, and the more stable the next opponent power, the power of the basis, will naturally be. Then the third opponent power, the power of the thorough application of the antidote, will also be strong.

The power of not reversing into the fault again is divided into three:

4.2.4.1. Restraining oneself henceforth because of regretting the negativity

4.2.4.2. Confessing what one did before

4.2.4.3. Making a promise to refrain from the negativity after having requested attention

4.2.4.1. RESTRAINING ONESELF HENCEFORTH BECAUSE OF REGRETTING THE NEGATIVITY

This is sub-divided into two:

4.2.4.1.1. Purifying meaningless negativity

4.2.4.1.2. Striving day and night to be liberated from negativity

4.2.4.1.1. Purifying meaningless negativity

This is further sub-divided into two:

4.2.4.1.1.1. It is unsuitable to be attached because possessions are unreliable

4.2.4.1.1.2. It is unsuitable to be attached to family and so forth

4.2.4.1.1.1. It is unsuitable to be attached because possessions are unreliable

The verse relating to this reads:

60. Of past experiences, which have ceased,

What has remained of them?

By grasping at them

I transgressed the advice of the teacher.

The commentary's explanation of this reads:

The experiences of enjoyment of past cyclic existence were unreliable and have ceased. Now what is left of these enjoyments that I took to have essence? There is nothing left.

Therefore, regret having transgressed the advice of the teacher, and then generated negativity due to having grasped at, and being attached to, these phenomena without essence.

As the commentary explains, *the experiences of enjoyment of past cyclic existence were unreliable*. This also implies that one has experienced all types of enjoyments within cyclic existence. That is definitely true! There are no enjoyments that we have experienced in this life that are not related to the five senses—we have seen beautiful objects and sights, we have heard beautiful sounds, we have tasted beautiful tastes and enjoyed fragrant smells, and have experienced beautiful tactile feelings. If we think of past lifetimes then we can definitely say that there is nothing that we have not experienced. But while we have definitely experienced every pleasure in relation to the five senses, they were *unreliable*, meaning that there was no real value and substance to them.

When the commentary mentions that they *were unreliable and have ceased*, it is indicating that because they cease, they are unreliable. So there is an interrelationship between cessation and unreliability. Whatever the enjoyment or pleasure we may have experienced from the five senses, the moment of actual pleasure is the first moment when the sense consciousness meets with the sense object. But the very next moment, the pleasure that one has experienced ceases. Therefore nothing remains; there is no substance and nothing remains. So what remains from the enjoyments in the past? They were only momentary and there's nothing left to show the enjoyment we experienced.

When the commentary says *now what is left of these enjoyments*, the implication of *now* is, why do we still become attached to the enjoyments, failing to see that they were momentary and unreliable? Why are we still so attached to the enjoyments of the five senses when they have no essence? We experience pleasure or enjoyment at the moment of contact between the sense and the sense object, but at the very next moment the enjoyment ceases and there is nothing left. Not having realised this, we have continuously engaged in negativities.

Having considered that, we need to take the initiative, and *regret having transgressed the advice of the teacher and then generated negativity due to having grasped at, and being attached to, these phenomena without essence*. Here, *teacher* can refer to one's own teacher, the teacher of the three times, the Buddha Shakyamuni, and the bodhisattvas. We have *transgressed* or completely ignored the advice they presented in the past, and have continuously engaged in negativities by grasping *and being attached to phenomena*. The verse under the heading *It is unsuitable to be attached because possessions are unreliable* has thus explained succinctly that the enjoyment that we experience is only momentary and is thus unreliable. So why continue to

engage in that, as there is nothing to be gained? The Tibetan word used here, *lhakpa*, means *extra*. So there is nothing extra to be gained by engaging in the enjoyments of the five senses. Having understood and acknowledged that, one needs to apply the opponent power of regret about having transgressed the advice of the teachers and so forth.

4.2.4.1.1.2. It is unsuitable to be attached to friends and so forth

The verse relating to this reads:

61. *If, in a similar fashion to this life,
I have to give up friends and relatives,
And I have to go alone,
How suitable are all friends and non-friends?*

Here Gyaltsab Je's commentary states:

This body I have while alive is without essence, and leaving behind friends and relatives in a similar fashion, I have to go, without certainty of the direction and without freedom.

Regardless of whether they are friends or non-friends, they do not have the slightest benefit, and it is unsuitable to have attachment to them.

This body I have while alive is without essence indicates that even though one is alive, one's body is already without essence. If that is so now, how much more so when, at the time of death, one has to discard one's body, friends and relatives. Those to whom one would otherwise have been attached will be of no help.

One has to leave behind the things with which one is most familiar such as one's cherished body, one's friends and relatives, and go completely alone on an unfamiliar journey. We have no choice; while it is certain that we have to go on to the next existence, the next life, we don't have any knowledge or wisdom regarding how to go about that. We are not sure how that journey is taken and how we will go on that journey. There is no certainty. So here again, we are exhorted to be wary about having too much attachment to our body, our possessions and particularly to our friends and relatives.

Now is the time to train our minds to prepare for the time of death. Here we are being given a succinct presentation of the method and means to prepare ourselves for our death, which is inevitable. The main point is that neither friends nor relatives can benefit us or help us at the time of death, the crucial moment when we have to go on a journey all by ourselves. So we need to reduce our strong attachment to our possessions, body, friends and relatives, which will release the mind so that it will accept and be ready for death whenever it occurs.

As one of the great masters mentioned, our body is just like a guesthouse where we spend a night or two, where the consciousness is the guest!

As explained and emphasised in this and other teachings, at the time of death nothing but the Dharma will help. Since it is only the Dharma that will benefit us at the time of death, we need to rely upon it now, and try to integrate the practice of the Dharma into our lives now. Without applying ourselves to practise now, we cannot expect the Dharma to miraculously help us at the time of death. So the way to practise the Dharma now is to avoid creating

negativity in relation to our possessions and friends and so forth, and to create virtue.

The next session is a discussion session followed by the exam, however my intention is to try to finish the third chapter this year. So we can have the discussion night, skip the exam and then we continue with the teaching straight after the discussion.

It seems that there are many who like the discussion and who seem to benefit from it.

Student: Some prefer the exam.

Maybe that's something we can look into at the next session. It is good to find a general consensus of what works and what doesn't work based on our experience. When there is a general consensus of what works, then it is worthwhile following. Of course, we can't always accept the opinions of one or two people, but when there is a general consensus of what works and what doesn't work, we can follow that.

It's good to follow the opinions of the younger generation such as Tara, who comments that she likes the discussion.

So as a compromise, this time around we will have the discussion but no exam, and continue the teaching after that, but next time around we will have the exam and no discussion. Next year we will see how we should proceed. Of course from my side, I like to try to go through the text, but I think that two teachings a week might be too hard for you.

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

Transcribed by Bernii Wright

Edit 1 by Adair Bunnett

Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

Edited Version

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