
Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

བྱང་ལྷན་མེས་ཀྱི་སྤྱོད་པ་ལ་འཇུག་པ་བཞུགས་སོ།

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Based on the motivation we had just generated, we can engage in the practice of meditation.

[meditation]

In our last session we started Chapter 4, which is Conscientiousness.

1. SHORT EXPLANATION OF THE WAY TO MEDITATE ON CONSCIENTIOUSNESS (CONT.)

The importance of applying conscientiousness was explained earlier as being essential to prevent bodhicitta from declining after it had been generated. I also explained how the bodhisattvas' activities are encompassed in the practices of the six perfections and the four means of gathering disciples.

Although I have already identified and explained the four means of gathering disciples previously, I will list them again. They are: giving whatever is necessary; speaking pleasantly; helping others; and consistency between words and deeds. Here we will notice that the incomparably kind Buddha presented these ways of benefiting others in very practical manner.

The first is giving people what they need through generosity. By engaging in giving, you develop an acquaintance with them where they begin to feel comfortable and develop a bond with you. Along with that, if you utter kind and pleasant words, that will really appeal to them.

We can all relate to the benefit of giving, however generosity needs to be accompanied with kind and pleasant speech so that the recipients can receive it gracefully, without fear or hesitation. For example, when you give food to animals, if you do so with pleasant words it creates a gentle atmosphere that makes them feel comfortable, and then they come close to you and gracefully accept the food. If even animals can appreciate this kind and gentle gesture, then there is no need to mention how humans would relate to it as well.

As you would know, generosity is classified into two types: generosity with material wealth and generosity with the Dharma. Likewise, speaking pleasantly can also be related to a worldly context—such as greeting and welcoming people with pleasant words, and presenting the actual meaning of the Dharma.

The third way of gathering disciples, helping others, particularly relates to presenting the Dharma. Taking the example of helping animals again, when an animal has been treated kindly (with food and pleasant words) it develops trust in the owner, who can then explain things which it will follow, like certain behaviour patterns or even tricks. Animals can learn quite a lot of skills willingly from their owners or trainers that they trust. In

the context of bodhisattvas helping sentient beings, it refers not only to temporary benefit, but that which will benefit sentient beings in all future lives, up until achieving the ultimate state of enlightenment. As part of the means to benefit other beings, you can see that these ways of gathering disciples play a very important role in developing a good relationship with other beings. It is very much in line with the worldly concepts of enacting good deeds for others, thus we can easily relate to this as being a practical ways and means to benefit others.

When we see how the teaching presents these points so meticulously and logically, it gives us the initiative to implement and integrate them in our own practice. It gives us a deeper sense of understanding, and entreats us to use our intelligence, our reasoning and logical way of thinking. For me it definitely provides very good ways to think critically and logically; I am sure you can relate to it as well.

As explained to me by my own teachers and previous masters, the fourth means of gathering disciples, consistency between words and deeds, means to act in accordance with the Dharma. This relates to both entreating others to act in accordance with the Dharma and to follow the advice of the Dharma oneself. So, the third means is to help others by explaining the meaning of the Dharma while the fourth is to implore others, as well as to follow the Dharma oneself.

In our last session I explained how the six perfections serve as a means to acquire good conditions. It is important to also take note of the opposites to each of the six perfections, as the exact opposite is a hindrance to engaging in the practice. For example miserliness is the opposite of generosity, so when we are affected by miserliness this obstructs us from being generous. We will not be able to perfect the practice of generosity if we don't overcome miserliness. Thus, we need to apply an antidote to overcome miserliness to become more and more accustomed to being naturally generous.

We can definitely relate to the ill effects of strong miserliness. Some are not able to make offerings because they are too miserly to use their resources. Furthermore, out of miserliness some are not able to benefit others with their wealth and may not even be able to use their own wealth to benefit themselves. So we can see in a very practical way how miserliness obstructs one from using one's wealth in an optimum way. The antidote for overcoming miserliness is none other than actually engaging in the practice of generosity, by seeing the advantages and benefits of being generous. As we gradually increase acts of generosity, we will begin to overcome miserliness.

To list the other opposites: the opposite of morality is corrupt morality; the opposite of patience is anger or hatred; the opposite of joyous effort is laziness; the opposite of meditation (concentration) is mental wandering and the opposite of wisdom is corrupt wisdom.

So identifying the opposites of the six perfections and overcoming them is necessary to engage in the actual practices. By relating to a bodhisattva's practice of generosity we can definitely understand how it enables a

bodhisattva to fulfil the purpose of others as well as one's own purposes. That should encourage one to also overcome miserliness and begin to practise generosity and so forth.

2. EXPLAINING IT EXTENSIVELY

This is subdivided into two.

- 2.1. Meditating on conscientiousness for bodhicitta
- 2.2. Being conscientious of the trainings

2.1. Meditating on conscientiousness for bodhicitta

This is further subdivided into two.

- 2.1.1. The reason why it is unsuitable to give up bodhicitta
- 2.1.2. The fault of giving it up

The first explains that having taken the bodhisattva vows and making that pledge, it is unsuitable to give up bodhicitta. The reason presented is encompassed in the second point, the fault of giving it up. That is, if one were to give it up, what would the faults be?

2.1.1. The reason why it is unsuitable to give up bodhicitta

The next two verses explain the meaning of this heading.

The first verse reads:

2. *Any action done in the spur of the moment,
Or done without having been considered
carefully,
Although having already committed to them,
It is appropriate to analyse whether to act or to
leave it.*

The commentary explains the meaning of this verse as follows:

Actions that were just engaged in impulsively, without consideration of their benefits and drawbacks, or actions that were minimally analysed but not well investigated before engaged in, are actions that are suitable to be investigated later on, to decide whether to continue them or not, despite having made an earlier commitment.

The first part of the translation reads *actions that were just engaged in* and uses the term *impulsively* which relates to the Tibetan term that has the connotation of not taking any measures to check whether the action one is about to engage in has any advantages or disadvantages, or benefits or drawbacks i.e. just engaging in an activity without first checking. For example, compare taking the bodhisattva vows without first checking the benefits and drawbacks, with first doing some analysis and then taking them. Taking the bodhisattva vows after analysing and understanding them is proper practice, whereas taking the bodhisattva vows without first analysing and understanding what they are would be improper and a fault.

The point to note here is that *without consideration of the benefits or drawbacks or actions that were minimally analysed but not well investigated, are suitable to be investigated later on to decide whether to continue or not, despite having made earlier commitment.*

The Tibetan commentary begins with *despite having made an earlier commitment*, which implies that one has already made a promise to do a certain action. However even if one has made a promise, there are actions that are

suitable to be investigate later on, and decide whether one should continue doing them or not.

The point being presented here is in relation to a bodhisattva's promise. While this may not apply to us directly, as we have not actually developed bodhicitta yet, nevertheless we can still relate this to other aspects in our everyday life. As I regularly share with you, don't be hasty making promises or commitments to others prior to fully understanding what you are committing to. I have often heard people speak of a commitment in a lamenting way such as, 'Oh, I have to follow this through now because I have already made a promise'. A promise is taken very seriously and even though you no longer find the action suitable, because of a promise you feel an obligation to do it. So my advice, which is in line with what is being presented here, is don't be hasty making promises or commitments prior to investigating whether it is something suitable or manageable for you do to. You need to apply this advice into your everyday life situations.

The main point being presented here is that if normal activities that need further investigation are not given up because a promise is made, then what need is there to mention not giving up bodhicitta! This is explained further in the next verse.

What is explained here can also be understood in terms of the two types of trainees on the path: those of intelligent faculty and those of dull faculty. Those of intelligent faculty investigate thoroughly before they actually undertake any activity or practice etc. whereas those of dull intelligence or faculty don't really have the means to thoroughly investigate. They just accept and engage in the practices without too much investigation.

It is explained in the teachings that when those of intelligent faculty make a promise, the commitment is much more firm and stable than from those with dull faculty. That is because the promise or commitment is made after employing thorough investigation and analysis.

However, there is also a phrase in a text which says that siddhis or attainments may be obtained more swiftly by those with dull faculty because they immediately engage in the practice. By taking much more time to investigate and analyse, those with intelligent faculty sometimes get held back and don't engage in the practice right away. So there can be some drawbacks in taking a longer time to achieve their goals.

This relates to stories about some trainees who actually investigated bodhicitta for twelve years before finally feeling committed enough to engage in the practice, whereas those who did not have much intelligence but strong faith, just engaged in the practice, and would have developed bodhicitta sooner.

In comparison to actions done without considering the benefits and drawbacks, or minimally analysed with further room to be investigated and decided upon, the next verse points out:

3. *But how can I discard that
Which has been analysed
By the buddhas and their children with great
wisdom*

And also analysed by myself repeatedly.

The meaning of this verse is explained with a quote from a sutra. It reads:

As it is stated in the *Sutra Requested by Subahu*, the buddhas, and their children such as Maitreya, ...

At this point you can relate to an earlier explanation about the close children or disciples of the Buddha, such as Maitreya, Manjushri and so forth, who

... investigated with great wisdom the mind, praised its qualities and taught it to be indispensable in the *Array of Stalks Sutra* and others. One had also investigated with various reasons why one should definitely take this mind, by thinking about its benefits and so on.

The sutra says *investigated with great wisdom the mind*, which refers to the mind generation of bodhicitta. The close disciples of the Buddha investigated with great wisdom the benefit of bodhicitta, praised its qualities and thought it to be indispensable in *Array of Stalks Sutra* and other sutras. Likewise one had also investigated with various reasons why one should definitely take up this mind by thinking about its benefits.

So, what is being explained here is that if one had already investigated and analysed the various reasons why one should definitely generate the mind of bodhicitta, by thinking of its numerous benefits (which were explained in the first chapter) then one should definitely see reasons to actually adopt it. Having taken such action to consider the benefits of bodhicitta, how can one discard it? One needs to protect it from degenerating until attaining enlightenment.

2.1.2. The fault of giving it up

This outline is further subdivided into three:

2.1.2.1. The fault of going to the lower realms

2.1.2.2. One will degenerate from the welfare of others

2.1.2.3. One has become far from attaining a ground

The thought of *giving it up* refers to the two stages of bodhicitta: aspiring and engaging. When one first takes the vows, one generates a genuine aspiration to achieve enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings, and to bring about ultimate benefit and remove all suffering. Based on this very sincere and very strong intention, the aspiration to achieve enlightenment for that purpose is developed. So the aspiring bodhicitta is developed first and then based on that, one goes further and makes a commitment to actually engage in the practices of a bodhisattva in order to accomplish one's aspirations. So the pledges one makes when one takes the bodhisattva vows have great benefit in themselves. It is a great fault to give up bodhicitta after having taken the vows.

In one prayer about generating this mind, it mentions that one invites all sentient beings as guests to partake in the ultimate happiness and bliss of enlightenment. So having invited all sentient beings as one's guests, one then makes a further commitment to engage in the practices to serve the invited guests, to help them partake in ultimate happiness.

The fault, if one were to give up bodhicitta, is going to the lower realms. As one will have degenerated from the welfare of others, one has become far from attaining a ground.

2.1.2.1. THE FAULT OF GOING TO THE LOWER REALMS

This is subdivided into three

2.1.2.1.1. The reason for going to the lower realms

2.1.2.1.2. Stating supporting evidence

2.1.2.1.3. Refuting objections

2.1.2.1.1. The reason for going to the lower realms

The text reads:

4. *After having made this promise
If one does not engage into the actions,
Then one deceives all sentient beings.
How could one become a migrator?*

The commentary clearly explains the meaning of this verse:

Having made the promise to place all sentient beings in the state of enlightenment, if one then does not practice the path to achieve this aim, then one will have deceived all sentient beings. How will one then become a migrator, as one will never go beyond the lower realms?

The first part of the explanation begins with *having made the promise to place all sentient beings in the state of enlightenment, if one then does not practice the path to achieve this aim*. Many of you, who have already taken bodhisattva vows, will recall that taking the vows initially involves making the promise of generating the aspiration to achieve enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings. Based on that strong aspiration to free all beings from suffering and lead them to ultimate state of happiness, you then generate the mind, 'I definitely need to achieve enlightenment myself'. So, based on that aspiration, the promise involves willingly making the pledge to engage in practices of the six perfections and the four means of gathering disciples.

The pledge one makes when taking the vows is done in the presence of all enlightened beings, the conquerors and their children, i.e. all buddhas and bodhisattvas, so it is in their presence that one generates the aspiration to achieve enlightenment. If it were just an aspiration then there wouldn't be much more responsibility than just being an aspiration, but the pledge involves making a conscious commitment to engage in the practices to achieve enlightenment. So since these vows and pledges are willingly made in presence of all buddhas and bodhisattvas, one has already taken upon oneself the commitment.

One has already promised sentient beings that one will do that. So having made a pledge, if one gives it up, then one will have deceived all sentient beings. Why? Because it is a lie. One promised to do something but one is not keeping that promise. One is not just deceiving one being. Telling a lie to one being is a non-virtue, so you can imagine the negativity one would incur by deceiving all sentient beings. *How will one then one become a migrator* implies how then could one ascend to higher and more fortunate realms? One would not. Having incurred the negativity of deceiving all beings one is certain to take rebirth in the lower realms. It is commonly accepted in all religions traditions that lying and deceiving others is a non-virtuous act, and that is what is being explained here.

2.1.2.1.2. Stating supporting evidence

5. *If one will become a hungry ghost
When one does not give to the person
Even the common objects
That one already offered in one's mind,*

In explaining the meaning of this verse, the commentary reads:

Regarding not giving the object of offering that one has already given in one's mind, even if it is just one morsel of food, it states in the *Sutra of Close Placement by Mindfulness*:

The sutra presents the faults of this mind using a particular example, the fault of not giving something that one has already promised to give. The fault relates to not giving even to one being something as small as a *morsel of food*. In relation to pledges made to provide happiness to all the sentient beings invited as one's guests; in the presence of all buddhas and bodhisattvas, one has made the pledge to offer them the temporary happiness of high status of humans and gods, and ultimate happiness which is the definite goodness of liberation and enlightenment. That is what one has promised to do for all sentient beings in the presence of all buddhas and bodhisattvas. The commentary next gives explanations from the sutras about the fault of not giving even a small object, such as a morsel of food.

The quote here from the *Sutra of Close Placement by Mindfulness* reads:

If they do not give even the little they intended, they will take rebirth as a migrator in the hungry ghost realm. If they do not give what they promised, then the sentient being will go to the hell realm.

The *Sutra Dividing Migrators* also states:

Whichever person, by not giving the rice and vegetables, the roots and fruits they intended to, they will experience the hungry ghost world and terrifying suffering.

The meaning of the sutra is quite easy to understand. It states quite clearly that for *whichever person, by not giving the rice and vegetables, i.e. the roots and fruits they intended to give*, but does not give it afterwards, the consequence is that *they will experience the hungry ghost world and terrifying suffering*.

The next verse in relates to this same subheading:

6. *Then how could one go to a happy migration
If one deceives all sentient beings
Concerning the highest happiness
To which one invited them from the depths of
one's mind*

The commentary explains the meaning of this verse:

If this is regarded as a cause to be reborn in the hungry ghost realm, then if one deceives all sentient beings with regards to the highest happiness and the temporary happiness of gods and humans, to which one invited all sentient beings, not just in mere words, but respectfully from the depth of one heart with a loud and clear voice, by discarding them, then how can one migrate to the happy realms? One will not.

The commentary clearly explains that when one makes a pledge and then does not give one's own food to others as intended, it creates the cause to be born in the hungry ghost realm.

If one deceives all sentient beings with regards to the highest happiness and temporary happiness of gods and humans, to which one invited all sentient beings, not just in mere words but respectfully from the depth of one's heart with a loud and clear voice: One has actually made a pledge, analysed the benefits and seen the purpose, so *the decision is made from the depth of one's heart* and one is not taking it lightly. One has considered the vows in all seriousness, not just mumbled them barely audible, but made the pledge in a clear loud voice. This relates to when we took the bodhisattva vows, when we all knelt down and put our palms together respectfully and we repeated the vows quite loudly after the master.

This point relates to those of us who have taken the vows and made those promises. We have followed in these footsteps, so while there are benefits in having taken the vows we also need be mindful of the faults of not upholding them.

2.1.2.1.3. Refuting Objections

As the text explained that the fault of giving up bodhicitta is that one will go to lower realms, an objection is raised:

The commentary first states the objection:

Question: The superior Shariputra, after having previously generated bodhicitta, was engaged in the practice of the perfections when he was asked by a demon for his right hand. Shariputra cut off his right hand and gave it to the demon with his left hand. Because of this he was severely abused by the demon and so Shariputra became sad and gave up bodhicitta. Yet he later attained the state of an Arhat. Does this not contradict what is taught in the quotes?

The objection here is that Shariputra apparently had given up bodhicitta, so Shariputra should have gone to the lower realms instead of attaining liberation.

The commentary explains that Shariputra, having previously generated bodhicitta, was engaged in the practice of perfections. When a demon disguised as Brahmin asked for his right hand and then abused him for giving it him with his left hand, Shariputra became disheartened thinking, 'I can't even help or please one sentient being', and that is when Shariputra gave up bodhicitta. So, we need to take notice that if one gives up the intention to benefit even one sentient being, one is giving up bodhicitta. From this account, we need to understand that giving up on one sentient being becomes a cause for giving up bodhicitta.

The objection here is how could Shariputra later attain the state of an arhat? *Does that not contradict what is taught in the sutras?*

The verse explains:

7. *Whichever person who gave up bodhicitta,
Their striving for liberation
Is karmic beyond thought,
And only known to the omniscient.*

In explaining the meaning of this verse, which refutes that objection, it explains that

Answer: When Shariputra, or anybody else for that matter, attains Arhatship despite having abandoned bodhicitta, then that is a karma that is beyond the knowledge of ordinary beings and can only be

understood by an all knowing Buddha. It cannot be understood by anybody else.

The point here is that despite having given up bodhicitta, Shariputra attained arhatship. This is actually a result of previous karma, but it is an aspect of karma that is beyond the knowledge of ordinary beings. Only a Buddha with an omniscient mind is able to see the subtlety of the karma which became the particular cause for him to attain arhatship. It is generally explained in the teachings that the subtleties of karma are known only by an omniscient mind.

The subtleties of karma are inconceivable in relation to the time a particular karma was created, the individual who created it, and particular circumstances under which it was created. These details are said to be known only by an omniscient mind, the all-knowing Buddha. Consider a contemporary example such as a glass. It is a fact that glass is a combination of many billions of atoms. How many atoms make up this glass and where they came from? It is not something that we are not able to know. It is only something that the mind of a Buddha would know. Likewise, karma with subtleties of time, duration, manner and location, details of previous karmas committed a long time ago, is only known by an omniscient mind. I recall one of the previous masters in Sera monastery, Gyalrong Khensur Rinpoche often used to mention the quote 'karma is unconceivable' is something.

Despite Shariputra having given up bodhicitta at a particular time, and later obtaining the state of arhatship, he not only obtained that state of arhatship as a personal liberation but also to benefit many others who had particular karmic connection with him. They definitely benefited from Shariputra after he had obtained arhatship. So these factors then, the karma that Shariputra would have created in the past to obtain those results is really something which is said to be inconceivable, something which just cannot be known and conceived by ordinary minds.

There are various other explanations as to why, rather than falling to lower realms, Shariputra actually obtained liberation. One explanation is that when Shariputra gave up bodhicitta it was only the conventional bodhicitta he gave up and he did not give up the ultimate bodhicitta which is the realisation of emptiness. And so because he did not give up the realisation of emptiness that is what caused him to obtain the state of liberation. Another explanation is that even though he had given up bodhicitta, it actually became the cause for him to obtain liberation because he hadn't given up his determination to obtain liberation. Both explanations are valid. The first explanation, that is because Shariputra didn't give up ultimate bodhicitta (the realisation of emptiness), is in accordance to Gyaltsab Rinpoche, the author of this commentary. It actually has a profound meaning.

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

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