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## Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

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Based on the motivation we have generated we can now engage in meditation practice.

[Meditation]

For receiving the teachings, we can generate our motivation along these lines: in order to benefit all sentient beings I need to achieve enlightenment, so for this purpose I will listen to this Mahayana teaching, and by studying and understanding it, I will put it into practice well.

### 2.2.3.1.1.2. They generate boundless suffering (cont.)

The two verses under this heading read as follows:

30. *Even if all the gods and demi gods  
Arise against me as enemy,  
They are not able to guide me into  
The fire without respite.*
31. *This enemy of the powerful afflictions  
Throws me in an instant into  
Where even the ashes of Mount Meru  
Do not remain upon contact.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains these verses.

Even if all the gods and demi gods arise as my enemies, if I do not fall under the control of the mental afflictions, then they are not able to guide and place me into the fire without respite.

But this powerful enemy of the afflictions in my continuum throws me in an instant into the fire without respite, where even the ashes of Mount Meru do not remain upon contact.

Therefore one should strive to destroy the enemy of the afflictions.

The verses explain that the afflictions which are within oneself are extremely powerful, more so than any kind of external enemy or entity. Powerful enemies could include gods, such as Brahma, who is said to be extremely powerful in terms of might and ability; also demigods and their retinues who have extremely powerful means to engage in combat. Even within humans, there are certain individuals known to be very brave and skilled in combat. There are stories of how one human being was capable of killing thousands of people. So there are definitely powerful humans who could be our enemies.

What is being explained here is that even if all of these powerful enemies: gods, demigods and powerful humans, were all combined together and simultaneously rose up as one's enemy, they cannot place one in the hot hell realms, such as the fire without respite. It is, of course a given that if from one's own side one does not allow the afflictions to overpower oneself, then all those powerful external enemies cannot place us in the hell realms from their side.

Note here that if someone were to kill another living being, then just through the act of taking the other's life they are not placing them in the lower realms. Rather through the negative act of killing, they are creating the karma to go to lower realms themselves.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary on the next verse begins with, *But this powerful enemy of the afflictions in my continuum.*

The main point one needs to reflect upon here is that the powerful enemy of the afflictions are within one's own mental continuum and it is none other than these internal afflictions that lead one to the lower realms. The main instruction here is that the afflictions are not random categories of phenomena that lie outside of oneself. If one thinks 'Yes there is anger, there is attachment, there are delusions' - relating to them as a mere categorical list, then that doesn't help one to identify the delusions within oneself. Even if one is able to list many afflictions and describe them in detail, if one doesn't recognise the afflictions within oneself, one will not be able to take any initiative to overcome them. The emphasis here is that one must look within one's own mental continuum to identify the delusions within oneself, so that one can take the initiative to overcome them.

As mentioned previously, the first step to overcoming the delusions is to identify them, and then to contemplate the causes and the disadvantages etc. As Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains, it is these *afflictions* within one's mental *continuum* that throw me *in an instant into the fire without respite*, which is the hot hell realms. Even Mount Meru, the most grandiose of mountains, will be rendered to ashes upon mere contact with the intensity of the heat in the fire without respite. Thus the consequences of being born in such a place of unimaginable suffering is the result of the afflictions. Here, Gyaltsab Je highlights that one must destroy the enemy of the afflictions.

To take on board what is being explained here, it is by engaging in personal reflection to identify the afflictions or delusions within oneself, recognising their causes and particularly their faults, that one can slowly and gradually take the initiative to overcome them. Even the process of identifying them is a gradual process—the afflictions are not something that we are able to recognise right away.

Of course it is easier to recognise delusions in others! It is easy to identify the faults of someone else's anger, attachment and so forth. However, when it comes to one's own faults of anger and so forth, we always have good excuses thinking, 'I am OK, there is no problem.' If we are not able to identify the anger within oneself, then that is a real problem. Even if one recognises it, but rationalises it, and thinks that there is no problem, then that will prolong the process of taking the initiative to abandon it. So one really needs to take to heart the need to recognise the shortcomings of the afflictions within oneself, and that one's own anger and attachment etc. have been the cause of all of then one's problems.

I am not referring to those of you who don't have any delusions. But for those who are able to identify the delusions within yourself, then you need to take careful consideration in recognising how the delusions affect

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your wellbeing. Harboursing the delusions in one's mind causes turmoil and an unsubdued mind.

The very function of a delusion is to make one's mind unsettled and troubled. Therefore if one aspires to achieve a subdued mind, one definitely needs to take the initiative to recognise and really acknowledge the afflictions within oneself, then one can gradually take the initiative to overcome them. We need to take a gradual approach, the afflictions are not something which can be abandoned quickly. Even the study and understanding of them takes time and needs to be a gradual process. We need to ensure that the study and understanding of Dharma becomes integrated with our mind-set, slowly but steadily transforming our minds.

When studying texts which identify the delusions, the main point is not to treat it as a mere list that one goes over, as if they are not related to oneself. Rather we need to use these explanations as way to identify the delusions within oneself. Having identified and clearly seen the faults of the delusions, one can then take the initiative to slowly abandon them. As Dharma practitioners we need to ensure that whatever we do becomes the means to subdue the mind and overcome the delusions. The great Kadampa master Geshe Potawa said that regardless of whether one is engaged in the Dharma or worldly activities, if the activity becomes an antidote for overcoming the delusions, then it has served its purpose well. This is the kind of advice that the great Kadampa masters give; not many words but really to the point.

If one does not ensure that our so-called Dharma practice is an antidote for overcoming delusions, then the very aspect of the Dharma practice can become a worldly concern. This is because one has not protected one's practice to ensure that it overcomes delusions.

The Lam Rim teachings explain that the way to measure one's progress in studying and practising the Dharma is that if one's practices actually help one to gain more and more confidence, and more faith, and one's mind gradually becomes more subdued, then one can feel confident that one's practice is working (whatever form it may take). However if we find that certain practices or study are making one more and more agitated, more and more deluded, and one is losing one's faith in the Dharma, then that is a sign that it is not making a positive effect within oneself.

In relation to developing love and compassion, particularly in the section of how to develop the superior intention, the Great Lam Rim text explains that meditating just once in a while is not sufficient to develop this mind. Rather one must meditate on love and compassion again and again for the superior intention to develop in one's mind. Quoting from another text the Lam Rim uses an analogy to illustrate this point—it would be like attempting to sweeten a big sour tree with just a few drops of a sweetener. If one wishes to transform a sour tree into a sweet one, one needs to put many, many drops of a sweet substance over a long period of time. Then eventually it is possible for a sour tree to actually become sweet. His Holiness the Dalai Lama uses this analogy in his teachings regularly. The delusions within our mind are like a sour taste which is hard to transform into a sweet taste. If one meditates on

love and compassion just once in a while we cannot expect to transform the afflictions in our mind and develop superior intention; we cannot expect a positive outcome from just a few attempts. Rather we need to make a consistent effort in identifying the delusions, seeing their disadvantages, and applying the antidote, whereby we will gradually overcome the delusions within oneself.

It will be good for you to refer to that quotation by reading the section in the Lam Rim that explains how to develop the superior intention. These are important points for us to reflect upon and as way to improve our practice.

We need to consider the fact that we are not deprived of the means—we do know how to engage in Dharma practices. What we need to keep in mind, is that if we leave aside certain practices that we already know how to engage in now, and try to adopt other practices that may well be beyond our reach, then that would be completely missing the mark. It is far more productive to actually implement the practices that we are familiar with now. Lama Tsong Khapa mentions that we do not have the fault of not knowing the practices, but rather we might be incurring the fault of not implementing the practices that we do know. The point is that we need to take the initiative to actually apply the practices with which we are already familiar. Then a gradual but true transformation takes place.

To summarise Shantideva's main points, what he is advising us in simple terms is this:

The trouble maker for all your problems is not something which lies outside, but rather within yourself which are called the afflictions. When you recognise them within yourself, you can then take measures to apply the antidote and abandon them. So, you need to apply effort in doing just that.

If one really uses one's study and practice as a means to combat the real troublemaker within oneself by taking that initiative at the very outset, that motivation can make a tremendous difference in our approach to the study or practice of the Dharma. I am not implying that I have gained great insight or developed realisation from my attempts, but what I can assure you is that I have definitely had a proper motivation from the very outset. Early on when I was studying in the monastery, studying the texts and engaging in the debates, my intention was always, 'When I finish my studies, I definitely want to put what I have learnt into practice by spending time in meditation and doing retreats'. This was definitely my intention. That has not become a reality because I have come to a foreign country to teach instead, so I have not had the opportunities to do long-term retreats. However because the studies were done with that intention, I can definitely say that they have had a positive effect on my mind. What I am sharing here is that if from the very outset one has the proper motivation for doing the studies and practice, then to that extent there will definitely be a positive effect.

#### **2.2.3.1.1.3. They harm over an infinite amount of time**

The afflictions are unlike external enemies, which no matter how powerful and mighty they might be, will

eventually disintegrate of their own accord, even without us taking many measures to try to vanquish them. Over time that is what will occur. However with the internal enemy, by leaving delusions as they are they will not just disintegrate by themselves. Even after a long period of time they remain intact. If we don't take any measures to apply the antidotes and just leave them as they are, they can become even more powerful rather than disintegrating.

This point is explained in the following verse:

32. *No other enemy has  
Such long term ability  
Like the enemy of my afflictions,  
With extensive time, without beginning or end.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains the meaning of the verse:

Another drawback of the afflictions to contemplate:

No other worldly enemy has such an ability to live for a long time like the enemy of my afflictions, who abide for extensive time, without beginning or end.

Since meditating on the antidote to the afflictions only for one session at a time does not do anything, one should strive to have an uninterrupted stream of effort in destroying the afflictions.

As the commentary clearly explains here, *no other worldly enemy has such an ability to live for a long time like the enemy of my afflictions, who abides for extensive time without beginning or end*. Unlike the external enemy which won't live for long, the inner enemy of afflictions abides much longer and harms one to greater extent. The external enemy can give us a certain amount of harm periodically, but because it cannot take us to the lower realms it cannot give us extensive sufferings. However the internal enemy of afflictions is the one that can lead us to the most extreme sort of sufferings.

Following that is, *Since meditating on the antidote to the afflictions only for one session at the time, does not do anything, one should strive to have an uninterrupted stream of effort in destroying the afflictions*. In relation to the earlier analogy, a big sour tree cannot be expected to become sweet by pouring just one drop of sweetener a few times. But if one were to constantly apply sweeteners then there is a possibility to transform it into a sweet tree. Similarly with the afflictions within oneself: we cannot expect to subdue them by meditating on the antidote just once, or periodically, rather we need to constantly apply vigilance over one's state of mind and apply the antidote whenever the afflictions arise. It should not be as if one aims to go out and have a good time outside, and doing one or two meditation sessions when one feels like it. Otherwise one could spend all the time just going around and having a good time. That sort of attitude will not overcome the delusions.

The analogy also shows that *one should strive to have an uninterrupted stream*. The Tibetan word actually refers to a stream of water. In the same way as a small stream of water can be consistent and run for a long period of time, our practice should be like that. Even though we might not be able to apply great measures of practice right away, whatever practice we can apply with uninterrupted effort, continuously will have an effect. Where we have a burst of energy and get excited about a

certain practice, that is something which we need to be a wary of because it may not last too long and might actually cause discouragement afterwards.

#### 2.2.3.1.1.4. The reason why it is unsuitable to befriend the afflictions

This heading explains that one may attempt to befriend external enemies by being kind to them or generous to them, and with this it is possible that they will start to become friendly to us. However with the internal enemy of afflictions, one cannot expect that by befriendng the delusions they will not harm us; the more we befriend the delusions, the more powerful they become in harming us. This is explained in the next verse and commentary.

33. *When agreeably and respectfully relied upon  
Then everybody acts beneficial and causes  
happiness,  
But if one relies on the afflictions  
They will retaliate and cause harm.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains the meaning:

When one relies on the outer enemy after having honoured them agreeably by serving them food, drink and so forth, then they will benefit us and help us to have happiness.

But if we rely on the enemy of the afflictions and act agreeably to them, then they will increase in strength, retaliate and cause us harm. To destroy them is the only method to attain happiness.

I have summarised this earlier, but to reflect again upon the main point. If you relate to an individual external enemy kindly, followed by giving gifts, food and so forth then it is possible that someone who was once disagreeable to one, or who considered you an enemy, can turn around and actually become a friend. With an external enemy, if we keep our distance and show an attitude of antagonism then that will only cause the rift to become bigger and the dislike greater. Then there is no possibility of befriendng them. It is a very significant point that if we don't want enemies we should take the initiative ourselves. The great beings will act in ways that show gratitude and repay harm with kindness, whereas ordinary worldly beings will return harm for harm. Returning kindness for harm inflicted upon oneself is an act of a great being who takes the initiative to engage in this way.

Unlike the external enemy, if one acts kindly to the internal enemy of afflictions, as though they are our masters. By saying 'yes' to whatever the delusion wants, bowing down and not doing anything to confront them or combat them from within oneself, they will increase in strength, retaliate and cause us harm. You will notice through your own experience that certain delusions or afflictions act like adding fuel. If we harbour them and keep contemplating on them, the stronger they become. So if you find yourself in a situation now where the delusions are occurring like a stream of water, continuously affecting you one after another, then that is because we have not applied the antidotes previously and we are not making any attempts to apply them now. If we make an attempt to apply the antidote to whatever extent we are able, during the time we apply it, the delusions will actually stop. In this way one can see that it is possible to begin to overcome an otherwise

continuous stream of delusions. If we don't apply the antidotes then the afflictions won't subside naturally by themselves. If destroying the delusions within oneself is the only method to experience genuine happiness and wellbeing, then we have no choice but to apply the antidotes.

#### 2.2.3.1.2. How it is unsuitable to meditate on patience for the afflictions

This has two sub-headings

2.2.3.1.2.1. Contemplating how they harm the mind

2.2.3.1.2.2. Contemplating how they harm the body

##### 2.2.3.1.2.1. Contemplating how they harm the mind

The root text states:

34. *Therefore, if this continual long time enemy,  
The singular cause for the increase of the  
accumulation of harm,  
Takes up permanent residence in my heart,  
How can cyclic existence be fearless and joyful*

The commentary on this verse reads as follows:

Therefore, if this continual long time enemy, who is the singular unrivalled cause for the strong increase of the accumulation of all harm, takes up permanent residence in my heart, then how can cyclic existence be fearless and joyful?

Since there is no chance for happiness, strive in destroying the afflictions.

Gyalsab Je's commentary states that *if this continual long-term enemy* (the afflictions), identified here as *the singular unrivalled cause for the strong increase of the accumulation of all harm, takes up permanent residence in my heart* (meaning that if we don't do anything to overcome the afflictions and therefore maintain them in our heart), then while we abide in *cyclic existence*, how can we be *fearless* and how can we be *joyful*? We need to take this as real personal advice on how to overcome the causes for our own unhappiness. What is being explained here is that the real cause for one's unhappiness, whatever the situation, are the afflictions within one's own mind. So regardless of the external situation, the actual causes of mental agony lie within oneself. If we fail to identify this and constantly try look outside for external causes and so forth, we are completely missing the point.

Harbouring the enemy within, and looking for solutions outside to overcome them will not bring real joy and fearlessness to one's life. Again, one needs to reflect that if we make a genuine attempt to slowly identify the real enemy (the afflictions within) and make genuine attempt to gradually apply the antidote and overcome them, then it is possible for one to gradually experience a real sense of joy regardless of external situations. Wherever one goes, one will be able to maintain some inner sense of tranquillity within one's mind which can definitely have a positive effect upon one's physical body. There are clear signs that a joyful and happy mind can contribute to good health. Take this into considerations for your own benefit.

Practical measures that assist one to develop the inclination to overcome the delusions really rely upon identifying the negative effects the delusions have within oneself. One can reflect upon one's own state of being and ask oneself, 'Would I want to be in a very angry state,

or would I rather be free of anger? Would I like to be feeling completely attached, and upset with attachment or would I rather be in a state free from the pangs of attachment?' Likewise with jealousy, would you like to harbour jealousy in your mind, or would you rather be appeased and not have jealousy? Likewise with pride and so forth. By having an internal dialogue with oneself, and clearly and honestly answering that one would rather be free of these negative states of mind (the afflictions), then knowing there is a means to overcome them, one needs to apply the antidotes.

Equally and naturally we would all like to have mental and physical happiness. There might be other measures presented by other traditions, or even worldly means to gain some happiness, but these may or may not contribute to genuine happiness.

We are in the category of people who look internally to attempt to resolve afflictions to develop genuine mental and physical happiness. To recap, to do this one must identify the causes for mental agony and physical suffering which are the result of afflictions. As we can consider ourselves as beings who look internally to deal with our internal world, we might as well actually make that attempt now and put this understanding into practice. This is how to take this explanation as personal instruction.

We can assume that you coming here is a rare opportunity and you can take pride in yourself for coming here. In a normal worldly situation, after work people might say, 'I have gone to work. I have been busy all day so I am tired now, and I'd just like to lie down and relax and take it easy'. So while many of you have gone to work during the day, and are busy and tired, you have still taken the initiative to come to a teaching here and listened to it. So having sacrificed relaxation time at home don't feel that it is a waste of time. Making an attempt here will definitely have a positive effect and will help overcome hardships and difficulties. On a practical level, if you were to stay home, you may not really have a full opportunity to relax and have a good time anyway. You might get into an argument with your partner, or be annoyed by the children, and not have a very relaxed time at home. So you might as well come here to have a genuine relaxing time.

Some have confided in me that even before they leave work, they already feel anxious about what they have to face at home. Some lament saying, 'I have a headache when I think of what I have to do when I get back home.' I tell them, not to worry about the next job before finishing the first one. This is giving oneself extra worries and agony. Some seem to see going home to cook, and do the washing up, and take care of the children as an extra burden. If one thinks about these as a chore then it does present itself in that way, so try to have a proper attitude. It often seems that causes for conflict and argument are based on who is trying to do what in the household. Indeed the outside work may seem harder and more difficult in comparison to someone who is staying home, but I would think that the work involved with staying at home and cleaning up, looking after children etc. is not easy work either. It is very important to look after the wellbeing of children. For example someone that I know

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has a family of three children, and the mum said 'If I have another child I might go crazy' and she related how difficult it was to care for the young one's. I can relate to that.

Again, I acknowledge you coming here to the teachings. I definitely admire it and am happy about it and appreciate that you take the initiative and sacrifice some time to do the study. While that is incredible and such a fortunate occasion for you, what I am attempting to add on to what you learn here, is to encourage you to try to implement it in your life. Try to put the teachings into practice a bit and that will be really worthwhile and beneficial for you. Even though I am not able to practise extensively, as I mentioned earlier, I do feel there is definitely great benefit to be achieved as a result of practice.

In the material you have already studied, for example the previous text *Precious Garland* by Nagarjuna, recall how precise and practical the advice was; one verse after another on how to engage in practice. We went through the extensive explanations according to that text: first of all what causes us to achieve high status, then how to achieve the definite goodness. Prior to that was Aryadeva's *400 Verses* text which explained the path based on the conventional truth as well the ultimate truth, again these were presented very precisely. We have studied these, we have all heard them and we have created a very, very positive imprint in our mind by going through these texts.

Prior to that we studied Chandrakirti's *Madhyamakavatara*, where again explanations of the five paths and ten grounds were very clearly presented.

Having the opportunity to study these texts and reflect upon them is a great fortune. We need to acknowledge that, then and now, as we can still derive benefit from these teachings every time we rejoice, and dedicate the merits of the attempts we have made, to the study and practice. Rejoicing helps to increase the virtue, then we can dedicate the virtue we derive, and benefit from that.

Before this was the teaching *Liberation on the Palm of your Hand*. You indicated that you didn't care how long it took and we actually spent about six years on it. With all this time spent, we were able to go into great detail on this Lam Rim teaching and actually many of you have been able to use it as a basis for presenting and teaching to others. This again is a significant point to recollect as a way to generate joy in one's mind, and to acknowledge the great fortune one has had to be able to study these texts. However one should also make prayers to be able to continuously meet with the conditions to study and practice these teachings, from life to life, in all one's future lifetimes.

Up until now we may all equally assume that we have not had much opportunity to accumulate much external wealth, however we have definitely spent time and energy acquiring some inner wealth. We have obtained something that is indestructible. No matter how much external wealth we might have accumulated, it is not something that we can take with us—not one single dollar can we take with us to our next life. However with the internal wealth of the studies and the practices, and good positive imprints in our mind is something that we

can all confidently take with us to our future life. In making a choice between external wealth and internal wealth, we have made the choice to spend more time and energy acquiring internal wealth. So we have definitely made the right choice.

However, I have also regularly said that we do need external means. While we are making attempts to acquire internal wealth, we also need access to external wealth as for our survival, for ongoing, good conditions for our life. It is a reality that without adequate external conditions we will not be able to practise the Dharma.

I recall when I escaped from Tibet, on the route there were certain occasions where we passed some really beautiful areas, like beautiful valleys. When you looked up there were mountainous regions and I could even detect that there might be a cave up there. On a few occasions I definitely thought, 'Oh how nice if I could just go up to the cave and stay there to meditate. Wouldn't that be wonderful?' And even though there was a strong intention to want to do that, immediately the next thought was 'Who would feed me?' 'How would I get anything up there?' There were no villages around, and it was doubtful whether there would be any natural plants that I could eat. In the winter especially there is hardly anything growing in that remote area, up so high. So that was the practical aspect which prevented an otherwise noble thought of wanting to go into the little cave.

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

*Transcript prepared by Su Lan Foo*  
*Edit 1 by Jill Lancashire*  
*Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe*  
*Edited Version*  
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