
Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

བྱང་ལྷན་མེས་མཆོག་གི་སྤྱོད་པ་ལ་འཇུག་པ་བཞུགས་སོ།

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Based on the motivation that we generated during our recitation of the refuge and bodhicitta prayer, we can now engage in the meditation practice. If we ensure our mind is focused on the object of refuge with strong faith, and then generate bodhicitta in relation to all sentient beings, then these two elements will ensure that our practice, even if it is for only a few minutes, will be really meaningful. We need to keep that in mind while engaging in the practice.

[meditation]

As a motivation for receiving the teaching, we can strengthen the earlier bodhicitta motivation by generating this thought:

In order to benefit all sentient beings, to liberate them from all suffering and lead them to the ultimate state of happiness, I need to achieve enlightenment myself. So for that purpose I will listen to the teaching, and put it into practice well.

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

2.2.3.1.2.1. Contemplating how they harm the mind (cont.)

In the text we are up to the section that explains the faults of afflictions and so forth. Rather than treating it as some intellectual understanding, we need to really pay careful attention to these explanations and relate them to our own mental continuum. In this way we will ensure that what we understand from these teachings serves its purpose, which is to reduce the afflictions in one's own mind. Conversely, if our study of the teachings serves to increase afflictions, then it completely defeats the purpose of our study.

We need to pay careful attention to our state of mind, so that our study does not increase the afflictions in our mind, specifically the delusion of pride. If, having understood some points in the teachings, we start to feel pompous, thinking, 'Oh, now I have much better understanding and knowledge of the Dharma than others' and develop a puffed-up superior attitude, then our study has increased the delusion of pride.

Initially when we didn't have much understanding of the Dharma we might not have had much pride in relation to the teaching. But when we gain some understanding then a newly formed pride may arise. It is not that there was no pride to begin with, as the basis of pride is always there. Here we are referring to the pride in thinking, 'Now I have some understanding of the Dharma, I know it better than others'. That is a newly formed pride which comes about as a result of having studied the Dharma.

Likewise, one may not initially have much jealousy in relation to others who are studying the Dharma. In the beginning one didn't have much knowledge of the Dharma, but as one begins to study and gain some knowledge, then that is when a sense of jealousy may arise in relation to others who are also studying and trying to practise the Dharma. Likewise, a sense of competition may arise. This is the classic example of where the Dharma has been completely misused and turned into a poison. Now, of course that doesn't mean that the Dharma itself turns into poison, because the essence of Dharma can never turn into poison. But if the Dharma is completely misused, then it actually becomes a cause for afflictions to increase. In this case, rather than serving as medicine to subdue the mind the Dharma becomes a means to further escalate the poisons in the mind.

These are really important points we need to take into consideration so that whatever study, understanding and practice one has in the Dharma does not become a further means to strengthen the afflictions. That would defeat the whole purpose of studying and practising the Dharma, which would be a disgrace. In sharing this point with you I am not implying that I'm skilled in Dharma practice myself, however I really do feel that these are important points that we need to keep in mind. I share this with you out of a genuine concern for you and your Dharma practice, so that your attempts to study and understand the Dharma do not go astray, and that the Dharma actually fulfils its intended purpose.

It is when the Dharma nourishes the afflictions in the mind rather than benefiting the mind that followers of a tradition will start to squabble and come into conflict. That is a mark of real degeneration. It is not the fault of the Dharma or the religion, but it is the fault of those who follow the religion or the Dharma having not utilised the teachings to really subdue their minds. When that happens amongst the followers of any particular religion or tradition it becomes a disgrace to the religion itself.

It is really important that we relate the faults of the delusions to our own mind and not use them as a means to judge others. The faults of the delusions that are described in the teachings should relate to one's own state of mind. If one is not careful, situations such as those that have occurred in our very own study group can arise. Several times in the past people have brought to my attention that some students who were quite new to the study group had a sense that they were being looked down upon by those who had a little more understanding, and they felt that they were being put down. This problem has now subsided, but there may be occasions where it can happen again. So we need to be really mindful and careful that this doesn't occur.

The faults of the delusions are described in the teachings very meticulously, and the best way to validate this is by relating the teachings to the delusions that we find within ourselves. Seeing the faults of our own delusions is the best reference point to test the truth of the Dharma.

The great master Shantideva mentioned that we need to really protect ourselves against the attitude of jealousy towards those who are higher than oneself, against pride and contempt towards those who are lower than oneself,

and competitiveness with those who are on the same level as oneself. When we think about it, these three attitudes are the cause of a lot of distress and turmoil in any society. As Shantideva mentioned, it is very hard to please worldly beings who are completely engrossed with these types of attitudes, for as long as they maintain these attitudes in their mind they will not be able to relate to the truth of the Dharma.

It is not sufficient to merely recognise the faults of the delusions, but rather, having recognised the faults, we need to apply the antidotes to overcome the delusions. That is what we really need to take on board. The process of identifying the delusions and seeing the faults of the delusions is something we need to do on a regular basis in our everyday life. Although we don't have the ability to recollect the faults of delusions that we have committed in previous lifetimes, we can, in our everyday life, do a thorough analysis of the delusions that are affecting us now on a daily basis. If our day begins with feeling unsettled and a particular delusion becomes manifest and prevalent, then we can notice how it affects the rest of the day. We might feel unsettled throughout the day and become prone to even more delusions manifesting in our mind. That is what occurs when we have not really paid attention to the delusions that lie within, and made genuine attempts to apply the antidotes. Whereas if we check our state of mind every morning, and ensure that it is not affected by any strong delusions, and if it is, then make genuine attempts to apply an antidote, then we will find the rest of the day will be quite fine, that there will be no big drama or upheaval taking place. Towards evening we can feel quite content and happy that we've had a good day, a day where we have not been completely overpowered and consumed by negative states of mind. That is how we can feel content and happy that we have had a worthwhile day. We can then rejoice and dedicate our good virtues and merits of the day.

As explained earlier, we need to combat the delusions by applying an antidote, making sure that we don't allow them to overpower us. We need to follow the examples of Kadampa masters such as Geshe Bayen Gun-gyal, who used to have dialogues with the delusions saying, 'If you become relaxed then I will be relaxed too, but if you start becoming powerful then I am going to use force to overcome you'. You will find these quotes in the Lam Rim teachings, and it would be good for you to refer to them. This is the sort of measures that earlier practitioners used as a way of combatting the delusions in their mind; applying the antidote the moment the delusions arise.

If we don't take the initiative to recognise the delusions and apply an antidote, then it is most likely that we will become completely overwhelmed and overpowered by the delusions as they arise. As beginners, even just recognising a delusion for what it is when it manifests will reduce its intensity and strong hold on our mind. It is to that extent that we gain the benefit of recognising the delusions within oneself. That is the measure of how we need to apply our practice on a daily basis. It will take some time before we actually get to the point of being able to apply an antidote to overcome the delusions

completely. However we need to begin the process by gradually taking these steps in our everyday life.

The Lam Rim teachings, and indeed all the Buddha's teachings, explain that the purpose of overcoming the delusions and afflictions is to subdue our mind. So we need to ensure that we are taking that onboard, and that we are applying the teachings at a level within our capability. That is where we begin. If we leave that aside and start thinking that there are grander practices that we should be doing, then that is again missing the point. We need to begin with the basis and develop a strong foundation. I am sharing this as a way of reminding you of the essential point of the whole study and practice of the Dharma, so that it benefits you and that you don't miss the point.

There is no way to become a real practitioner without paying attention to death and impermanence. Through logic you will be able to find that this is true, because the focus of all the activities of a person who does not recollect death and impermanence will be merely on the benefits and affairs of this life. Thus they cannot become a true practitioner. Without recollecting death and impermanence, our activities will be those that are focused on staying in this world rather than moving on to the next. We need to be prepared for our inevitable onward journey, rather than thinking that we will remain here for ever.

The last line of verse 34 asks:

How can cyclic existence be fearless and joyful?

There are different interpretations of the meaning of this line. Gyaltsab Je's explanation implies that if one does not combat the afflictions in one's mind, then how could remaining in cyclic existence be fearless and joyful? Other commentaries explain that if one does not have a fear of cyclic existence then one may regard cyclic existence as being joyful. However, regarding cyclic existence as being joyful is completely contrary to how we need to regard cyclic existence. That joy arises because one lacks any fear of cyclic existence. That is a slightly more profound explanation.

2.2.3.1.2.2. Contemplating how they harm the body

The relevant verse is:

35. *If this guardian of the prison of cyclic existence,
Who becomes the executioner and torturer in
hell,
Abides within the net of attachment in my
mind,
Then how can I have happiness?*

Here Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

These afflictions do not grant freedom from cyclic existence. Rather they become the guardians of the prison of cyclic existence and the hell realms. They also become the executioners killing in the upper and lower realms.

If these afflictions abide within the net of the mistaken conception, within the net of attachment in my mind, then how can one have a chance for happiness?

There is no chance for mental or physical happiness

These afflictions do not grant freedom from cyclic existence, this identifies the specific cause that imprisons us in cyclic existence, which is none other than the afflictions

themselves. It is afflictions that prevent one from being free from cyclic existence. Further, the afflictions *become the guardians of the prison of cyclic existence*. That which guards us in cyclic existence and keeps us there is none other than the afflictions. Also the torturers in the hell realms that inflict the harms in the hell realms are none other than manifestations of one's own afflictions.

Furthermore *they also become the executioners killing in the upper and lower realms*. In hell realms, as you would have heard, after the body has been torn apart in every direction the body regenerates itself and has to experience the sufferings all over again, and if one faints one is revived and has to experience the sufferings again. The cause of that is none other the afflictions. Even in the upper realms such as the human realm, as we all know, there are many who take their own life, which is caused none other than the afflictions. As Shantideva mentions in another text, the afflictions in the mind, such as anger, can cause someone to take their own life. With this understanding we can understand the point about the afflictions being like executioners.

The main cause for all the sufferings that will be experienced, regardless of whether one is of higher status or lower status, is none other than the afflictions. What is being implied here in simple terms is that for as long as the afflictions are not abandoned no one is spared by them. *The net of mistaken conceptions* can apply, on a broader sense, to any kind of delusion that manifests itself in the mind, but more specifically it is applied to self-grasping. So the root of the delusions, grasping at a truly existent self, is the primary root of all our mistaken conceptions. Thus, held within the net of mistaken conceptions we are trapped in samsara. Here *net* is analogous to the net of a bird cage that prevents the bird from escaping.

How can one have a chance of happiness, implies that for as long as the afflictions abide in one's mind *there is no chance at all for mental or physical happiness*.

Mistaken conceptions also relates to the inappropriate attention that we place on objects when we perceive them. As I have already explained this in detail previously, we need not elaborate on it again here.

2.2.3.1.3. Generating courage to destroy them

Merely acknowledging the afflictions as being harmful, and seeing their faults is not sufficient. Just thinking about these faults could be overwhelming unless one also thinks about the possibility of overcoming them. Therefore this heading is saying that we need to develop the courage to destroy the delusions.

The verse relating to this outline reads:

36. *Thus, as long as I do not destroy this enemy directly
For that long I shall not give up striving here.
The very proud ones that become angry even due to small harm,
Sleep will elude them until they have destroyed it.*

Here Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

Since everything unwished for is generated by the afflictions, for as long as I have not definitely destroyed this terrifying enemy directly, it is

appropriate that I shall not give up even for one moment striving in the antidote to the afflictions while I am here in this migration.

If the very proud worldly people get angry at even small harms such as harsh words, they will be very vengeful, sleep will elude them and they will not rest until they have destroyed their enemy.

Therefore it is appropriate to strive in destroying the enemy of the afflictions.

The commentary begins with *since everything unwished for is generated by the afflictions*, so we need to apply that understanding to any unwanted or unpleasant experience. These experiences don't occur randomly without any reason or without any causes. Rather, as stated here, every unwanted experience is caused by delusions.

For as long as I have not definitely destroyed this terrifying enemy directly implies that having understood that the cause of unwanted or unwished for experiences is generated by the afflictions will not be sufficient to overcome the manifest level of delusions. Rather, one needs to strive to overcome them from their very root. Here, *directly* has the connotation of *from its very root*. Thus what is being explained here is that until and unless one overcomes the afflictions from their very root, *it is appropriate that I should not give up for one moment striving in the antidote to the afflictions while I am in this migration*. What is being implied here is that one will not experience any real happiness until the afflictions have been completely uprooted.

The intent to *not give up even for one moment striving in the antidote* explains that having generated the antidote, one should not give up applying that antidote.

When the commentary mentions *if the very proud worldly people get angry*, it is referring more specifically to the mental factor of spite. Very proud worldly people can become very spiteful. As explained previously, spite is a specific state of anger that escalates to the point where you do not give up on the intention of harming the person who harms you. As stated here, even with *small harms, such as harsh words, sleep will elude them and they will not rest until they have destroyed their enemy*. Some individuals cannot rest until they have taken revenge on someone who has harmed them, either with actual words or by harbouring ill-will and thinking, 'I have to get back at them'. As mentioned here, they may not even be able to go to sleep until they have been able to take revenge. Some individuals are affected by such strong pride that they are not able to endure even small harms.

This example of very proud individuals who constantly think about how to get back at those who have inflicted even trivial harms is used to indicate how it is far more appropriate to strive to destroy the enemy of the afflictions, who harm us on a constant basis. For as long as we harbour the afflictions in our mind, they constantly harm us and affect us in a negative way. It is far more appropriate and worthwhile to apply the antidote for overcoming the delusions at all times, rather than wasting time trying to take revenge on external enemies. Therefore, day and night, we should be concerned with applying the antidotes to overcome the afflictions.

2.2.3.2. HOW IT IS UNSUITABLE TO TIRE OF THE DIFFICULTY OF ABANDONING THE AFFLICTIONS

Having recognised the afflictions and seen the need to abandon them, one might become discouraged and give up striving to overcome them. This section is explaining why one should not tire in this endeavour.

What is implied here is that abandoning the afflictions is not going to be an easy task. The delusions are powerful and they are very persistent in harming us. When we apply some antidote and reach a point where we may have some control over the delusions, they very sneakily arise in another guise. So the delusions find so many different ways to harm us. We are not dealing with an easy enemy here, so abandoning the afflictions will require farsighted endurance from our side. But we should not tire of the difficulty. As outlined in the heading this is exactly what the following verses encourage us to do.

This heading has three sub-divisions:

2.2.3.2.1. Donning the armour that will enable one to destroy the afflictions, it is unsuitable to tire of the difficulties

2.2.3.2.2. The benefits of striving to destroy the afflictions

2.2.3.2.3. It is appropriate to strive in the trainings that destroy the afflictions

2.2.3.2.1. Donning the armour that will enable one to destroy the afflictions, it is unsuitable to tire of the difficulties

There are two verses under this heading.

37 *The afflicted ones, who suffer anyway due to dying naturally,
At the height of battle, deeply wishing to destroy,
They disregard sufferings inflicted by weaponry, arrows and spears,
And will not retreat until their purpose is achieved.*

38 *What need is there to mention that they who strive
In destroying the natural enemy, which is the continual
Cause for all suffering, strive without despondence or laziness,
Despite hundredfold sufferings.*

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

The afflicted ones, whose nature it is anyway to transform into the suffering of death, even without being killed, are the object of compassion.

When they are doing battle with the strong will to fight and to overcome the enemy, they will disregard the suffering inflicted by weapons such as arrows, spears and so forth, and will not retreat until their aim is achieved.

What need is there to mention that it is appropriate for me, who has taken up austerity, wishing to destroy the enemy of the afflictions, who has treated me as an enemy from the day of my birth, to not give up striving to destroy this enemy, and to not give in to despondency and laziness despite hundredfold sufferings such as cold, hunger and thirst.

As the commentary explains, *the afflicted ones* refers to the worldly enemies, who are afflicted by the delusions.

Because they are afflicted by the delusions they will naturally experience the consequences of their afflictions in the form of suffering, in particular the suffering of death. In other words, these external enemies, who are afflicted by the delusions, will naturally be vanquished by death, even without someone taking measures to destroy them. So, because they are afflicted by the delusions and will consequently experience the suffering of being completely destroyed by death, they *are* in fact *an object of compassion*.

When these afflicted worldly beings try to destroy others, they go into *battle with a strong will to fight and to overcome the enemy*. With the intention of overcoming their enemy, who will naturally be consumed by death anyway, they will have to experience *the suffering inflicted by the enemy's weapons such as arrows, spears and so forth*. Yet despite all of the harms inflicted on them by their sworn enemy, they are intent on fighting until the end, and *will not retreat until their aim is achieved*.

As the commentary explains, those intent on destroying external enemies generate great willpower and thus endure the harms inflicted on them. Despite all the harm inflicted on them, they still face the enemy with the intent of destroying them. That is the measure that worldly beings take. That being the case, the main point being emphasised here is, *what need is there to mention that it is appropriate for me, who has taken up austerity, (i.e. one has willingly taken up austerity practices) wishing to destroy the enemy of the afflictions who has treated me as an enemy from the day of my birth*. It is not as if the delusions became our enemy later in life, because from the very moment we were born the delusions were there to harm us. That being the case, we should *not give up striving to destroy this enemy, and not give in to despondency and laziness despite hundredfold sufferings such as cold, hunger and thirst*.

As explained here, based on having seen the faults of the delusions, and understanding how they have harmed us since we were born into this life, we need to develop the courage to not give up striving to destroy this enemy and not give in to despondency. This implies that there are some who, having made few attempts to overcome afflictions, resort to thinking, 'Oh, this is hopeless! I can't overcome the delusions'. Once one makes that decision one falls into despondency and laziness, and will no longer strive to apply the antidote. Lest one falls into despondency, we are urged that despite the sufferings of cold, hunger and thirst that will naturally accompany one's practices of austerity, one should not give up the intent to destroy the enemy of the afflictions.

As the outline presents, we need to don the armour of joyous effort to maintain our enthusiasm. Just as those who go into battle put on armour so that they are not harmed by their enemies' weapons, one needs to put on the armour of joyous effort in order to engage in austerity practices, and overcome the delusions. The *Guru Yoga Puja* also refers to donning the armour of joyous effort.

So the main point being emphasised here is that we need to apply joyous effort as a way of combatting the delusions.

2.2.3.2.2. *The benefits of striving to destroy the afflictions*

This is subdivided into three

2.2.3.2.2.1. Being the cause for one's welfare austerities are suitable to bear

2.2.3.2.2.2. Being the cause for other's welfare, austerities are suitable to bear

2.2.3.2.2.3. Why one needs to complete the earlier given promise

2.2.3.2.2.1. **Being the cause for one's welfare austerities are suitable to bear**

The verse from the root text reads:

39. *They sustain scars from the enemy for no purpose
And wear them on their body like ornaments.
If I strive stridently to achieve the great purpose
Why should sufferings be something that harms me?*

Gyalsab Je's commentary on this verse reads:

Worldly beings sustain scars for no purpose at all and wear them like ornaments, saying: 'this scar I got at such and such a time'.

As the commentary explains, *worldly beings sustain scars for no purpose at all and wear them like ornaments*. The scars received in a fight become something to show off to others as a mark of bravery. They take great pride in those scars, saying, 'I got these scars in my fight'. That is how some worldly beings view their scars.

That being the case:

Why would one then be harmed by the sufferings endured while striving stridently in the austerities? They are to achieve the great purpose of complete enlightenment!

Since they are only of benefit one should rely on them.

What is being implied here is that it is worthwhile to endure the hardships of austerity practices to overcome the afflictions, since these practices are a cause to achieve the great purpose of complete enlightenment. *Since they are of only benefit* for oneself and they cause no harm, *one should* definitely *rely* on these practices.

The main point being emphasised here is that when ordinary, worldly people take great pride in their scars and so forth for even small meaningless purposes, one, who has committed to overcome the afflictions, which serves the great purpose of achieving enlightenment, need not be overwhelmed by the difficulties and hardships that one may incur. That is because the hardships serve as the means to achieve a great purpose.

The main point is that it is definitely worthwhile to bear those austerities as a way to obtain one's ultimate welfare. The ultimate result is to achieve the excellence of one's own purpose, which is enlightenment. When one achieves enlightenment, then that fulfils the purpose of obtaining the excellence of one's own welfare.

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

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