

Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

བྱང་ཆུབ་སེམས་དཔའི་སྡོད་པ་ལ་འཇུག་པ་བལྟས་སོ་

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

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The *Refuge and Bodhicitta Prayer* that we have just recited will suffice as our motivation for engaging in our meditation practice. [meditation]

As mentioned many times in the past, prior to engaging in the Giving and Taking meditation practice one needs to first spend some time trying to cultivate a sense of love and compassion towards all beings who we visualise in front of ourselves. As a result of contemplating how beings lack true happiness, one develops a strong wish that they abide in happiness which is how one generates love for all beings. Then, by contemplating the various sufferings sentient beings are experiencing one generates the very strong wish that they be free from all those sufferings. That is where one generates the sense of compassion for all beings.

When one ensures that one has generated the mind of love and compassion for all beings, then to whatever degree one has developed these positive states of mind, to that extent the practice itself becomes really meaningful and fruitful. As a result of having spent some time focusing on these positive attitudes when we come out of the meditation practice we will be able to detect real transformation taking place in our minds. We will notice that the earlier chaotic and negative state of mind has been now replaced with a kinder and gentler state of mind which is a direct benefit of the practice. Generating love and compassion for other beings definitely has a positive effect on our mind, for when love and compassion is prevalent there is no room for any harmful intentions to arise. So, our mind will naturally be calmer and more peaceful because of the lack of harmful intent. It is important that we check whether our meditation practice is contributing to a positive change in our mind or not. It is not sufficient to merely focus on an object single-pointedly if it doesn't contribute to a positive change to one's mind.

As Lama Tsong Khapa said, one must abandon mere calm abiding and strive towards developing the union of calm abiding and special insight. This is a very significant point to bear in mind.

The main point here is that while we may have studied and have accumulated a great deal of knowledge, if we don't put that knowledge into practice it will not help to transform our mind. This point is emphasised at the end of this chapter.

2.2.3.3.2. If one makes an effort, they can be abandoned because they arise from a mistaken cause

The verse relating to this reads:

46. *The deluded afflictions are abandoned by the eye of wisdom
When cleared from the mind where will they go?
Where will they abide to gain strength and return?
The weak mind does not let me strive.*

Gyalsab Je's commentary on this verse reads:

Once the afflictions have been abandoned from their root they have no other base. Since the afflictions arise

from a faulty or mistaken root, one should strive to abandon them with the eye of wisdom that realises emptiness.

Once they are cleared, or what is called abandoned, from the mind, where will they go and find new strength to return and retaliate? It is impossible. Although it is like this, the weak mind does not let me strive to uproot them once and for all.

What is being explained here is that once the afflictions have been abandoned from the very root they will not return. When the manifest afflictions are overcome that does not mean that they will not return. So, the emphasis here is on *abandoning* the afflictions from their very *root* so that there is no other base on which they can abide. This also relates to the doubt raised earlier in the text, which says that once afflictions have been overcome wouldn't it be possible for them to return just like an enemy? If you vanquish an enemy temporarily they can regroup and return to harm one again in the future. So, this verse further clarifies the response to the earlier doubt.

When the commentary states, *since the afflictions arise from a faulty or mistaken root*, the *root* refers to the self-grasping ignorance that is a faulty state of mind. Some teachings relate this to the misconceptions that arise from inappropriate attention, as presented in the *Abhidharma*. However, the main root is the grasping at a truly existent self which is the basis for all misconceptions to arise. As explained in other texts as well, it is because of grasping at a truly existent self that all the afflictions manifest themselves.

With this understanding one can see how attachment actually arises from grasping at a truly existent self. It is because of this faulty state of mind which superimposes and causes objects to appear as being truly existent, and further grasps at them as being truly existent, that afflictions such as attachment manifest themselves. Even though self and other phenomena do not exist inherently, it is the misconception that perceives them as being truly existent and inherently existent that makes them appear in that way. So, it is this faulty and mistaken mind that has to be eliminated from its very root.

As mentioned in the commentary, *one should start to abandon them with the eye of wisdom that realises emptiness*. Having identified the root of the afflictions, the way to strive to abandon them is, as mentioned here, with the *eye of wisdom realising emptiness*. Just as eyes see things directly, it is the wisdom that realises emptiness directly that overcomes or abandons the afflictions. The implication here is that just as one sees objects nakedly with one's eye, one uses the wisdom that realises emptiness directly as an antidote to abandon the afflictions.

With respect to *once that has been cleared or what is called, abandoned from the mind*, the Tibetan word *sal* translated here as *cleared* has the connotation of separating them from one's mind. So, once they have been cleared or separated from one's mind, the rhetorical question is: *where will they go and find new strength and return and retaliate?* implies that once abandoned, the afflictions do not and cannot return. What is specifically being explained here is that it is the wisdom realising emptiness directly that serves as the antidote to abandon afflictions from their very root. This wisdom severs the continuum of the afflictions. Thus, because the very continuum of the afflictions has been completely severed, a similar affliction cannot arise in the next moment. Once the afflictions have been completely severed there is no continuity, i.e. they cannot produce the next moment of

afflictions. The very meaning of being uprooted means that it cannot produce any more results. Thus, once the afflictions have been completely uprooted there is no way for them to return, and there is no other place for them to *abide*. To give a contemporary analogy, it is like the Tasmanian tiger which is extinct. It is because there is no continuity of the Tasmanian tiger that it can never return.

However this is not the case with an external enemy. As mentioned previously, when an external enemy is expelled from a place it can regroup and return. When the Communist Chinese took over Tibet many Tibetans left Tibet and relocated in India, and from there into many other countries. At this point Tibetans cannot stand up and fight back because there is no might. However, the fact is that if there was enough might and power then some Tibetans might want to retaliate and try to fight the Communist Chinese and return to Tibet. And it is possible for Tibetans to return to Tibet because even though they have been expelled the continuum of Tibetans has not been severed.

Unlike this example, when the afflictions have been overcome by the wisdom realising emptiness (which is the ultimate method to completely uproot the afflictions) then where would they go and find new strength to return and retaliate? This rhetorical question implies that it is impossible for them to return. Like the earlier analogy with the Tasmanian tiger, they can never return. The wisdom realising emptiness serves as an optimum antidote for overcoming the afflictions at their very root. This point has been explained many times in the past and you have to relate it to those earlier explanations as well. The reason I explain this again and again is so that you can derive the real meaning and gain an unmistakable and clear understanding of emptiness. Though the teachings explain this in many different ways, it all comes down to the same essential point.

When we take this explanation at a personal level then we really need to acknowledge that we have been able to identify the afflictions, i.e. we have a good understanding of what afflictions are. We also have quite a good understanding of what the antidote, the wisdom realising emptiness, implies. So with this understanding we need to try to overcome the afflictions within ourselves to the best of our ability. We have gained some really precious and valuable understandings and it is now up to us to actually apply this by taking measures to overcome the afflictions, in particular the root affliction of grasping at a truly existent self. To the extent that we can recognise and apply some antidote to overcome the grasping at a truly existent self, the strength of the afflictions, such as attachment and anger and so forth, will also be naturally reduced. Conversely, the stronger our grasping at a truly existent self and the more rigidly we hold onto this misconception, the greater the strength of the afflictions will be. So, to the best of our ability we need to apply the antidote for overcoming that grasping at a truly existent self.

When the commentary states although *it is like this*, it is referring to the fact that it is impossible for the delusions to return once they have been uprooted. However, the *weak mind* (a mind that lacks wisdom), *does not allow one to strive to uproot the afflictions once and for all*. Unless and until one has completely uprooted the delusions, they will reoccur. So if we find that we are affected by the continuity of afflictions, it is none other than because we have not applied the antidote—we have not applied a sufficient amount of wisdom to actually uproot the delusions. If we had done that

previously, then we would not be affected by afflictions now.

An arhat or foe destroyer is no longer affected by the delusions because of the fact that they have uprooted the delusions through the wisdom realising emptiness. Furthermore, as explained in the teachings, those on the Great Vehicle path of seeing have reached the state where they have the direct realisation of emptiness. The power of that realisation will not allow the grasping at a self to strengthen and to become a means to create a newly formed throwing karma which would propel them into rebirth in cyclic existence once again. As explained in the teachings, what prevents beings on the path of seeing from creating a newly formed karma to be reborn again in cyclic existence is the wisdom realising emptiness directly. Of course, even though they do not create any new throwing karma due to the strength of their wisdom directly realising emptiness, that doesn't mean they are completely free from being reborn in cyclic existence.

When a being realises emptiness directly then, even though the grasping at a truly existent self has not been completely uprooted yet, it is nevertheless overpowered by the wisdom realising emptiness. Thus they do not create any new throwing karma. Likewise, even though we still have afflictions, they will be weakened with whatever wisdom we accumulate. So the more we increase our understanding of emptiness through study and practice, the more we will reduce grasping at a truly existent self. Conversely, the stronger our grasping at the self, the more likely it is that we will continuously create throwing karmas, which perpetuates our cycle in samsara. The stronger our grasping at a truly and inherently existent self, the stronger the notion of 'I' or 'me' will be. And the stronger that sense of 'I', the more likely it is that one will reject anything that opposes the 'I', and be attached to whatever pleases that 'I'. That is how we continuously create karma through aversion and attachment, and this is what we need to understand.

2.2.3.3.3. *If they are abandoned from the root, there are no other bases to abide. Thus they are suitable to abandon*

The explanation of the meaning of the next two lines of verse is preceded by this doubt:

If you say, the afflictions are also generated from one's own continuum and exist inherently and thus they cannot be abandoned.

In answer to that doubt the next two lines of verse are presented:

47ab. *Afflictions do not abide in the object, not in the faculties nor in-between.*
Since they are also nowhere else, where do they go to harm all sentient beings?

In his commentary Gyaltshab Je begins his explanation of the meaning of these lines thus:

Answer: The afflictions do not abide in objects such as form, otherwise arhats would also generate afflictions when they see forms and so forth.

The answer to the doubt is that the afflictions do not abide inherently. If they were to abide in an object such as form, then an arhat (who has in fact abandoned the afflictions) *would generate afflictions when they see forms*, because they still perceive forms. This implies that the arhats, as a consequence of having interacted with forms, would also generate afflictions. But that is not the case. Furthermore:

They also do not abide in the collections of the sense powers of the eyes and so forth, because when one

contemplates the actual mode of existence, the eyes exist, but the afflictions do not.

A being on the non-interrupted path of seeing who has the direct realisation of emptiness still has the sense powers of the eyes and so forth, but because they have the direct realisation of emptiness the afflictions are not manifest. If they were to *abide in the collections of the sense powers of the eyes and so forth*, then that would imply that afflictions are still manifest in the being on the uninterrupted path of seeing. The commentary further explains:

They also do not exist in-between or somewhere else.

Since it is like this, once abandoned where can the afflictions that were uprooted in this way, and which exist from their own side, go to inflict harm? They do not abide anywhere.

Then the next two lines of verse are presented.

47cd. Since they are like illusions, abandon fear in the heart and rely on striving for wisdom. Why harm myself meaninglessly with the hells and so forth?

The commentary explains the meaning of these two lines as follows:

These afflictions are like illusions. They are empty of inherent existence and yet appear as if they exist from their own side. Therefore, abandon the fear in your heart that they cannot be abandoned because of existing inherently.

Having generated the wisdom that realises emptiness it is suitable to strive in abandoning the mental afflictions. Since one has this ability, why would one create meaninglessly the harm of the lower realms of the hells and so forth? This is unsuitable.

This explanation is quite clear. It follows the earlier explanation that used this analogy of the afflictions being like illusions.

Summary

48. Strive to achieve the trainings, That were thus explained and contemplated. There is no medicine that can cure If one does not listen to the advice of the physician

Here Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

Contemplate in the above way repeatedly. Make an effort to strive with conscientiousness in how the Buddha earlier explained bodhicitta, and to protect the trainings. There are no sicknesses that can be cured only by medicine without listening to the instructions of the physician that contain many truths. Strive in abandoning the afflictions according to the instructions of the great physician.

Contemplate in the above way repeatedly refers to all the instructions that were given earlier as well as the advice given by the Buddha in his teachings. So the emphasis here is to *make an effort to strive with conscientiousness* to protect the trainings which serve as the basis for developing bodhicitta. This is really an exhortation to put into practice the instructions that were given earlier. The analogy which is used here is that *there are no sicknesses that can be cured only by medicine without listening to instructions of the physician*. The analogy is that when a sick patient goes to see a physician, a skilled physician would give the medicine along with specific instructions on how to take the medicine with possible dietary restrictions. If the patient doesn't take the medicine then they cannot be cured, but if they take it

without following the physician's specific instructions then again that will affect the chances of being cured. In this analogy Buddha Shakyamuni is like the skilled doctor, and the holy Dharma, which consists of the practices of hearing, thinking and meditating, is like the medicine. One is like the patient, and the afflictions in one's mind are analogous to sickness.

As mentioned earlier, the Dharma was presented by the Buddha on the basis of the three trainings—training in moral ethics, training in meditation and training in wisdom—and the various different teachings which have been precisely presented along with the unmistakable instruction, is the medicine itself. If we don't put these instructions into practice then there is no way that we can be cured of the sickness of the afflictions. More specifically, without putting these instructions into practice there is no way that we will be able to overcome the root affliction of grasping at the self.

Gyaltsab Je is exhorting us to *strive in abandoning the afflictions according to the instructions of the great physician*, the Buddha. So the emphasis here is to make every effort to apply conscientiousness to our training.

Then Gyaltsab Je concludes his commentary on this chapter with this verse:

Freedom from the quagmire of faults within one's own continuum,
Increasing virtues without degeneration,
These depend with certainty on meditation on conscientiousness.
Therefore those proficient should always rely on conscientiousness.

So with this verse Gyaltsab Je points out that being free from *the quagmire of faults and increasing virtues without degeneration, depends on meditating or maintaining conscientiousness*. Therefore, he exhorts the wise need to always depend on conscientiousness. As mentioned here, in order to increase virtue within ourselves and prevent it from degenerating we need to apply conscientiousness. As presented earlier, the definition of conscientiousness includes being constantly mindful of that which needs to be adopted.

Conscientiousness was explained at the very beginning of this chapter so one needs to relate it to that explanation, otherwise we would have to explain it each time it is mentioned again. I don't blame some geshe who seem to be a bit exasperated. Some have said that they put quite bit of effort into explaining things clearly, and at the time it seems that the students have understood it, but after a while they seem to have completely forgotten the points, and it has to be explained all over again.

The importance of remembering the instructions actually leads us into the next chapter, which covers mindfulness and introspection.

II. THE NAME OF THE CHAPTER

This is the fourth chapter of Introduction to the Actions of Bodhisattvas called Applying Conscientiousness

The commentary reads:

This is the commentary on *the fourth chapter of the Introduction to the Actions of Bodhisattvas*, called *Applying Conscientiousness*, from *The Entrance for the Children of the Conquerors*.

Now we come to the fifth chapter, Introspection.

To explain the context of this chapter we need to return to the subdivisions introduced in chapter 1.¹

2. THE ACTUAL EXPLANATION OF THE STAGES OF THE PATH

2.2. The method for taking the essence

2.2.2. Explaining the individual meanings²

2.2.2.2. THE WAY OF TRAINING IN THE PRACTICES OF GENERATING THE TWO MINDS

2.2.2.2.2. The Way of Training in the Actions, the Perfections

2.2.2.2.2.1. The way of meditating on conscientiousness, the limb preventing the degeneration of the training in the mind of enlightenment³

2.2.2.2.2.2. Explaining the way of training in morality, by relating it to introspection and mindfulness, the methods for keeping virtuous dharmas pure⁴

CHAPTER 5: EXPLAINING THE WAY OF TRAINING IN MORALITY BY RELATING IT TO INTROSPECTION AND MINDFULNESS, THE METHODS FOR KEEPING ALL VIRTUOUS DHARMAS PURE

The point here, as in other teachings, is that morality through pure conduct is the very basis for one to keep virtuous Dharma pure.

The importance of mindfulness and introspection is encapsulated in this verse which will come later in the text.

*Those who wish to guard their mind
Definitely need to adopt mindfulness and
Introspection and keep that,
I implore you to please keep the heart.*

So Shantideva, putting his palms at his heart, respectfully says, 'I implore you to adopt this'. He is pleading with us to guard and protect our mind with the optimum methods of mindfulness and introspection. So he is showing us the great importance of applying these methods in our practice.

The chapter is in two sections:

1. General Presentation
2. Individual presentation

GENERAL PRESENTATION

This has three parts:

1. Having generated the mind, why it is necessary to cultivate the trainings
2. Training in method and wisdom separately will not lead to enlightenment
3. The sequence of cultivating the trainings

1. HAVING GENERATED THE MIND, WHY IT IS NECESSARY TO CULTIVATE THE TRAININGS.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

Merely generating the wishing or aspiring mind has, of course, great benefits, but it is impossible to attain enlightenment without making the perfections the essence of one's practice.

Generating the wishing or aspiring mind to achieve enlightenment definitely has great benefits, and one gains an incredible amount of merit from just generating that aspiration to achieve enlightenment for the sake of all

sentient beings. However that aspiring mind in itself will not be sufficient to become a cause to achieve enlightenment unless it is accompanied by the commitment to engage in the practice of perfections.

Hence one should engage in the practice of the perfections.

Then Gyaltsab Je provides some quotes:

From the *King of Concentration Sutra* :

Youth, therefore, make practice the essence. I shall explain why: For someone that makes practice the essence, the attainment of highest enlightenment is not difficult.

Furthermore the *Initial or First Stage of Meditation* states:

Thus, bodhisattvas that have generated bodhicitta, after having understood the subdued and the unsubdued, need to strongly engage into the trainings of practicing generosity and so forth. Without practice they will not attain enlightenment.

Practice here refers solely to the training concerning the vows, after one has taken them.

This is a reference to the bodhisattva vows.

2. TRAINING IN METHOD AND WISDOM SEPARATELY WILL NOT LEAD TO ENLIGHTENMENT

Under this heading Gyaltsab Je states:

The method for attaining enlightenment that one engages in must be an unmistakable method. A mistaken method will not bring about the desired result although one engages in effort.

This very meticulous explanation is quite clear. *A mistaken method will not bring about the desired result although one engages in effort* is emphasising that one needs to adopt an unmistakable method from the very beginning.

Then the commentary continues:

One's effort will also not bring about a result if the engaged method is incomplete, even though it is unmistakable. Therefore one needs to train in a complete, unmistakable method.

This is a prelude to what will be presented as the unmistakable and complete method for training.

Next, Gyaltsab Je quotes from the text, *Purification of Vairochana*,

The transcendental wisdom that knows all, the keeper of the secret, arose from the root of compassion, arose from the cause of bodhicitta, is the culmination of method.

Gyaltsab Je then explains the meaning of that quote:

As quoted, one goes beyond through great compassion, conventional and ultimate bodhicitta, and the method of generosity and the other perfections.

In order to go completely beyond to the state of enlightenment, one first needs develop great compassion. Then one realises conventional bodhicitta, followed by the realisation of ultimate bodhicitta, which is the wisdom realising emptiness. So basically method and wisdom are presented here with conventional bodhicitta and ultimate bodhicitta, and the following methods or trainings of generosity and the other perfections.

3. THE SEQUENCE OF CULTIVATING THE TRAININGS

Having explained the trainings in brief, how does one engage in those trainings sequentially?

¹ See the teaching of 26 March 2013.

² Introduced in the teaching of 2 July 2013.

³ Covered in chapter 4.

⁴ Covered in chapter 5.

Gyaltsab Je explains that:

Upon taking the wishing bodhicitta, one trains in the aspiration to engage into the trainings. Following this, one takes the bodhisattva vows, and then practises the trainings accordingly.

One first develops a *wishing* or aspiring *bodhicitta*, and with that one develops the commitment *to engage in the trainings*. Following this, one takes the *bodhisattva* vows and practises the *trainings* accordingly. So having first generated aspirational bodhicitta, one develops the wish to engage in the trainings. That is followed by the development of engaging bodhicitta, where one actually makes a commitment and takes the vows to train in the practices of perfections. That is how the sequence is presented.

Then Gyaltsab Je explains:

If the different types of trainings are summed up in accordance with the *Ornament of Mahayana Sutras*, then they are the six perfections.

The various practices and the many trainings a bodhisattva engages in can be subsumed into the six perfections. As explained here, this is *in accordance with the Ornament of Mahayana Sutra*. There is also an extensive explanation of this in the *Extensive Lam Rim*. It would be good for you to refer to that because having quoted the *Ornament of Mahayana Sutra* the commentary gives only a general presentation of why the practices of bodhisattvas are subsumed into the six perfections.

Gyaltsab Je begins this brief explanation with:

Six perfections are the definite number from the point of view of:

- Higher status.
- The two purposes
- The complete achievement of the welfare of others
- Containing all the Mahayana
- Complete path or method
- The three higher trainings

So the practice of the six perfections suffices for obtaining higher status, the two purposes and so forth. I have presented this in detail many times in the past.

The commentary presents this classification but does not go into much detail. So it would be good to refer to the explanations in the *Extensive Lam Rim* which will help to develop a better understanding of these points. If we can relate these classifications to the explanation in the *Extensive Lam Rim* then they will be quite clear. Otherwise it would take a lot of time to explain them. So it would be beneficial to refer to a more extensive explanation to gain a better understanding of what is being presented here. Those of you who have the *Extensive Lam Rim* can bring your book to class next week.

Indeed, if the *Bodhisattva's Way of Life* were to be explained in conjunction with the explanations in the Lam Rim teachings, the Madhyamika text, the tenets (which will be explained in the ninth chapter) and the Prajnaparamita text we could spend our entire life studying it. The *Bodhisattva's Way of Life* really subsumes all of the other texts, and what is referred to here in passing is explained in greater detail in these other texts. Because it covers all the meaning of all of the other texts, one could spend a very long time going through this text in detail.

It is really good to read and develop a familiarity with the *Extensive Lam Rim*, which many of you have. It was composed with the intent of subduing the mind, and there is

no more supreme text for subduing the mind. If we read it and become familiar with its explanations it will definitely help to settle down and subdue our mind, and we will notice that any sort of upheaval in the mind will naturally subside.

Dr Tony Hammond, who used to come to study group, used to mention that without engaging in studying in this way we might be similar to a long life god. Do you recall why the long life gods are considered to be in a state without leisure? It is because they spend their entire existence absorbed in a worldly meditative concentration and don't have the time to practise Dharma. That is why they are an example of someone who does not have the leisure to practise Dharma.

This indicates that just engaging in some sort of gross or worldly concentration is not sufficient. It will not suffice as engaging in the real practice of holy Dharma as it does not help to subdue the mind. This is an important point.

Shantideva is really exhorting us to engage in the real practice of Dharma. I try to emphasise this essential point again and again, with the intention that you might actually pay heed to this advice and use your understanding and knowledge for the practice of subduing the mind. Otherwise, if we don't make any effort now when we have the opportunity, our mind will remain unruly and unsubdued for an infinite period of time. These are really important points that we need to keep in mind.

If being absorbed in some meditative concentration brings some sort of bliss then we cannot say that it has no benefit at all. It does have some temporary benefit, but it won't help to actually subdue the delusions. So it cannot be a cause for liberation; indeed, it enhances the conditions to remain in cyclic existence for a longer time. I am relating all this to you as a friend who has genuine concern for your wellbeing!

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 Adair Bunnett
Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe
Edited Version

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