
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 that we have already generated during the recitation, we can now engage in the meditation practice. (*pause for meditation*)

We can generate the motivation for receiving the teachings along these lines:

In order to benefit all sentient beings I need to achieve enlightenment, so for that purpose I will listen to the teachings and put them into practice well.

When one generates this motivation, even as an aspiration, we can see how incredible and expansive the thought: "in order to benefit all sentient beings, I, myself, will need to achieve enlightenment" actually is. One individual being thinking of all sentient beings and meditating for their wellbeing is really wonderful, and a powerful means to accumulate extensive merit.

From our last session we are at the point where it states:

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

All the practices of the bodhisattvas can be subsumed into the six perfections. In other words, there is no practice which does not fit into the category of the six perfections.

The six perfections are the definite number from the point of view of higher status.

The six perfections serve as a means for obtaining higher status. If one were to ask: "why do bodhisattvas need to obtain higher status?", then it is because engaging in the bodhisattva's deeds to perfect their practices can take up to many lifetimes. So, in order to be able to practice continuously with the conducive conditions in all future lifetimes, the excellence of high status is needed. There are four excellences of high status: excellent body; excellent resources; excellent entourage; and excellent activities or actions.

The practices of the six perfections serving as causes to obtain these excellences are also referred to in the early parts of the *Extensive Lam Rim*:

In particular, to obtain complete leisure and opportunity requires many roots of virtue, such as having a foundation of pure ethical discipline, augmenting it with generosity and the like, and when dying making a connection with your next lifetime through stainless aspirational prayers.

For bodhisattvas to continuously train in the practices to achieve enlightenment, they need to have a good basis (sound body) in all successive life times. While we may not yet be able to engage in the practices of the six perfections to the extent of a bodhisattva, we can however practise a similitude of the six perfections. So, as

explained in the teachings the specific cause for obtaining a *good body* is the practice of *morality*.

Just having the excellent base of a sound body is not sufficient, one also needs *good resources* to sustain one's body. So, *generosity* is a specific cause for obtaining good resources such as wealth and so forth.

Furthermore, it is not sufficient just to have good resources, if one lacks good companions. Thus, a good *entourage* (excellent companions) are also required as a necessary condition to engage in the practices. The specific cause for obtaining excellent companions is the practice of *patience*.

Finally, in order to obtain what one wishes to achieve, one needs to have the excellence of *activities*. Because reaping the fruit of any activity is dependent on the completion of that activity, one needs to conduct excellent activities. The cause which for excellence of activities is *joyous effort* or enthusiasm.

Thus, these four are called the four excellences. Having acquired them one needs to ensure they do not become causes for afflictions to arise, so the next two perfections are presented as a means to prevent that. This is an essential point because for us in our situation, we will find that whenever we acquire these excellences they can very readily become a cause for afflictions to manifest. For a practitioner aspiring to achieve enlightenment, if the excellences become a cause for afflictions to arise, then it will defeat the very purpose of one's endeavours to achieve that state. So the next two perfections, concentration and wisdom become the specific causes that prevent the excellences or good conditions from becoming a cause for afflictions to arise. *Concentration* is the means to control or subdue the mind and will prevent manifest afflictions from arising. *Wisdom* (which encompasses analytical wisdom) allows one to recognise and distinguish between what is to be adopted and what is to be discarded and so stops afflictions from developing further; ultimately removing them from their very root.

Each of the six perfections has a specific result. If one were to ask "what is the result of having practiced morality?" the positive result is explained precisely. Likewise this is the case with generosity, patience etc. The specific results to be reaped by engaging in the six perfections are explained in detail in the teachings.

The point here is that we need to be mindful that our practices (e.g. meditation) do not become the means to escalate the afflictions in our mind. A practitioner such as a bodhisattva uses the practice of concentration as the supreme means to overcome the delusions and afflictions in their mind. In our situation, if we are not mindful of our practice of (for example) meditation, it is very easy the delusions, such as pride, competitiveness, jealousy and so forth to escalate. Rather than the practice becoming a means to subdue the mind it becomes the means to further strengthen the delusions, which is a disgrace. This is an important point to bear in mind. Of course if we don't pay heed to this cautionary advice, then it is mere words and we would not get any benefit.

So, if it is possible for practices such as meditation to serve as means to further enhance the eight worldly

concerns, then one needs to be really mindful. From when I was quite young I have paid particular attention to the practice of meditation. When I analyse and look back now, I notice that there were definitely taints of worldly concerns in the early years. However these days I can assure you I am quite free from that. I'm declaring to you openly what I feel is true for myself, which is what His Holiness the Dalai Lama has repeatedly encouraged us to do.

Explanations on the six perfections are clearly and extensively explained in Lama Tsong Khapa's *Extensive Lam Rim*, so please take the initiative to read the text. It specifically covers the way each perfection serves as a specific cause to acquire a specific result, and serves as a good condition to further enhance our practice. It also explains that if one were to be missing any of these good conditions, then that becomes an obstacle for one's practice.

The six perfections are the definite number from the point of view of the two purposes

Bodhisattvas have made the pledge to work for the welfare of all sentient beings, and aspire to achieve enlightenment for that purpose. The bodhisattvas' purpose for engaging in practice is two-fold: to fully actualise one's own ultimate potential and to benefit other sentient beings.

Generosity becomes a most important practice to benefit others. The first means of fulfilling others' purposes is to benefit others by providing material wealth, including food and clothing; then grant them with the wealth of dharma knowledge. Providing material assistance will make them more receptive to receiving the ultimate help of the Dharma. If one is generous to others but harms them at the same time, then while some benefit may remain from the generosity, most of it will be nullified. So while engaging in the practices of generosity, one must refrain from harming the beings to whom one has been generous by using the practice of morality—this is the most essential element for accomplishing pure benefit without harm.

While one may successfully refrain from harming others, they may cause us harm; but if one retaliates, then again, one will be harming them. Even if initially one didn't have any intention to harm them, when one retaliates they will be harmed. So, to prevent oneself from retaliating and bear harms upon oneself, one needs to practise *patience*. As such the practice of patience is most essential in order to willingly accept harms inflicted by others.

The text explains one must acquire *wisdom* to obtain liberation and freedom. For wisdom to assist one achieve liberation, one has to be free from a distracted mind because if one is distracted one will not be able to utilise wisdom. The practice which serves as an aid to free oneself from distractions is *concentration*, which refers here to the concentration of being able to focus on an object for as long as one wishes, i.e. the state of calm abiding. Thus, this level of single-pointed concentration supported by the wisdom realising emptiness becomes the supreme means to achieve liberation.

One cannot possibly develop concentration and cultivate wisdom if one is affected by laziness. So the optimum means to overcome laziness is to practice *joyous effort* or enthusiasm. This is how the practices of the six perfections are meticulously presented as the means to fulfil both purposes.

The six perfections are the definite number from the point of view of complete achievement of the welfare of others.

The *Extensive Lam Rim* presents:

You first relieve others' poverty by giving away material goods. Then you do no harm to any living being and, in addition, are patient with harm done to you. Without becoming dispirited you joyously persevere at helping those who harm you. You depend on meditative stabilisation and inspire them through displaying supernormal powers and so forth. When they become suitable vessels for the teachings, you rely on wisdom and give good explanations, cut through their doubts and thereby bring them to liberation. Because you do all this, the perfections are fixed as six in number.

As explained, to relieve others from the suffering of poverty one first helps others with the practice of *generosity*, by providing them with material goods. To prevent oneself from harming them one needs to practise *morality*. That which serves as the means to protect oneself from other's harm is *patience*. As there is the danger of losing one's patience if one feels daunted or overwhelmed when facing the harm by others, one needs to practise *joyous effort* so that one doesn't give up benefiting others.

When one obtains the ability to perform miraculous feats which is depended on the practice of *concentration*, one can then enchant others and draw them close to you. Thus when others become the perfect recipients for receiving Dharma teachings, by relying on *wisdom*, the bodhisattva can then provide the clear explanations that completely eliminates all doubts and leads them to the state of liberation.

This, then, is how the six perfections serve as a means for the complete achievement of the welfare of others.

The six perfections are the definite number from the point of view of containing all the Mahayana

As further presented in the *Extensive Lam Rim*:

You are indifferent to resources because you are not attached to those you have and do not pursue those you lack. Since you then have the ability to safeguard precepts, you adopt and respect ethical discipline. You are patient with the suffering that comes from living beings and inanimate things, and you are enthusiastic about whatever virtue you set out to cultivate, so you do not get dispirited by either of these. You cultivate a non-discursive yoga of meditative serenity and a non-discursive yoga of insight. These six comprise all the Mahayana practices through which you advance by the six perfections, for you accomplish these practices in stages by means of the six perfections and you do not need any more than these six perfections.

The text explains that when one practices supreme *generosity*, one can become detached from the resources one already has and will not engage in pursuing resources which one lacks. In other words, one is content

with what one has. With that ability one can safeguard one's practices of *morality* so they become purer. Basically, it becomes a supreme practice for having less desire and being content, hence one becomes an object of respect. Based on the achievements of the earlier practices, when one engages in *patience* one is able to endure the suffering caused by other sentient beings or inanimate objects. Because one is able to endure these sufferings, that is be *enthusiastic* or joyous in one's virtues, that is how the practice of patience induces joyous effort.

As explained in the text:

You are enthusiastic about whatever virtue you set out to cultivate so you do not become dispirited by either of these.

Furthermore, you cultivate a non-discursive yoga of meditative *concentration*, which is the state of clam abiding, and the *wisdom* of special insight. These six then comprise all the Mahayana practices, through which you advance by the six perfections.

The six perfections are the definite number from the point of view of the complete path or method

The *Extensive Lam Rim* presents:

The path—i.e., method—for not being attached to the resources that are your possessions is generosity, because you become free from attachment to your things by becoming habituated to giving them away.

The text explains meticulously that the supreme means to overcome attachment to one's own possessions is by actually giving them away. When you are *generous* with your own possessions it becomes the method for overcoming attachment to them.

The text continues:

The method for restraining yourself from the distraction of trying to possess what you do not possess is ethical discipline, for when you maintain a monk's vows, you do not have all the distractions of making a living.

What is being explained here is that ethics or *morality* is the best basis for preventing one from having distractions in one's mind.

As mentioned earlier, within the three trainings the first is morality because by engaging in the practice of morality it will reduce the gross levels of our distractions. Then when one is free from the gross distractions, through the practice of *concentration* one can then further enhance the ability in one's mind, overcoming more subtle distractions.

The text continues:

The method for not abandoning living beings is patience, because you do not despair at the suffering caused by the harm others inflict.

The reason we would feel discouraged and abandon working for the benefit of sentient beings is when we lose our patience. When we are unable to endure hardships, either when others harm us or due to our own sufferings, then that experience may cause us to give up helping beings. So, the practice of *patience* protects one from this.

The text continues:

The method to increase virtues is joyous perseverance, because you increase them when you joyously persevere at what you undertake.

If someone were to state "I really want to practice meditation", or "I really want to study. How can I best do that? What is the best method?", then the text explains that the best method is to develop *joyous effort* or enthusiasm, which becomes the supreme method to increase one's ability to practice and study.

The text continues:

The methods for clearing away obscurations are the final two perfections, because meditative stabilisation clears away the afflictions and wisdom clears away the cognitive obscurations. Thus the perfections are fixed as six in number.

As explained, *meditative stabilisation* clears away the afflictions and *wisdom* clears away the cognitive obscurations or the obscuration to omniscience. Thus as the text states, the perfections are fixed as six in numbers.

The six perfections are the definite number from the point of view of the three higher trainings

The *Extensive Lam Rim* explains:

The nature of the training in ethical discipline [the first of the three trainings] is the practice of ethical discipline.

The precondition of the training in ethical discipline is generosity, because once you have generosity that is indifferent to resources, you can properly adopt an ethical discipline.

This is similar to what was explained earlier: through *generosity*, when one has less attachments and more contentment, it becomes easier for one to actually practice discipline or *morality*.

The Lam Rim text continues:

The aid to the training in ethical discipline is patience, because the patience of not retaliating when scolded, etc. safeguards your properly adopted ethical discipline.

Patience here refers to an aid to training in ethical discipline. The verse explains how they are all interrelated—to practice one needs the base of the others as well.

The Lam Rim text continues:

Meditative stabilisation is the training of mind [the second training, the training of meditative concentration], and *wisdom* is the training in wisdom [the third training]. As for *joyous perseverance*, it is included in all three trainings, so the perfections are fixed at six in number.

This concurs with Gyaltsab Je's commentary of the *Bodhicharyavatara* which lists the six reasons of why the six perfections are definite in number and we have covered all of them.

CAUSE, NATURE, DIVISION, MEANING OF THE NAME AND RESULT OF THE SIX PERFECTIONS

Gyaltsab Je's commentary presents the six perfections under the headings: Cause, Nature, Division, Meaning of the Name, Result of the Six Perfections. Again, the actual practices of the six perfections are those that only a

bodhisattva or true Mahayana practitioners will possess as they are practices which have to be combined with bodhicitta (as explained later). However at our level, even though we have not actually developed bodhicitta, and our practice may not be an actual practice of the perfection of generosity etc., to whatever extent we can engage in the practices, we can say that we have a similitude of the practice of the six perfections within ourselves now.

CAUSE

Under this heading Gyaltsab Je states:

It is bodhicitta that is held by method and wisdom and focuses on the three baskets of the Mahayana teachings and depends on the special Mahayana lineage and the condition of a Mahayana teacher.

Bodhicitta is the cause for the practices of the six perfections. Take the example of generosity, whether our level of generosity becomes a practice of the perfection of generosity or not is dependent on whether we have the conditions in ourselves or not. So if we find that we lack the condition, then of course our practice of generosity will not be an actual perfection of generosity.

NATURE

Gyaltsab Je's commentary states:

The nature of generosity is the virtuous mind of giving and all the actions of body and speech that arise from it.

The definition of generosity is the virtuous mind that wishes to give.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary continues:

Morality is contained in the thought of abandoning harm to others and abandoning sole personal liberation.

Harm here refers to the ten non-virtuous actions. The first seven of these encompass the three of the body (killing, stealing and sexual misconduct), the fourth is speech (allowing harmful or divisive speech and idle gossip), all of which cause direct harm to others. The basis is in the three non-virtues of the mind (covetousness, harmful intent and wrong views).

Morality contains the actual deeds, and the causes of those negative deeds towards others, as well as abandoning sole personal liberation. While sole liberation is not an abandonment for those following the lower vehicle, for a bodhisattva sole liberation is definitely something which has to be abandoned. If bodhisattvas do not protect themselves from the thought of self-liberation they will degenerate their bodhicitta. Therefore protecting themselves from sole liberation is part of their ethical practice.

In brief, *the definition of morality is the mind that restrains from harming others.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary continues:

Patience is a mind that abides in its natural state, unaffected by harm and suffering and also strongly abides in the dharma.

Patience as a mind that abides in its natural state refers to being able to remain in a natural or calm state in the face of harm or suffering. Other texts define patience as a mind which does not become troubled in the face of harm and

sufferings. Patience has three types: not being disturbed in the face of harm; or sufferings; and strongly, i.e. definitely, abiding in the Dharma.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary continues:

Enthusiasm is the joy of accumulating virtue and achieving the purpose of sentient beings and the actions of the three doors which arise from it.

Enthusiasm or joyous effort is the state of mind which takes joy in accumulating virtue. Thus when one derives joy from accumulating virtue, then naturally the actions that arise from the three doors (mainly body, speech and mind) are in accordance with benefitting others and overcoming negativities.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary continues:

Mental stabilisation is the single pointed abiding on a virtuous object.

To the statement *mental stabilisation is the single-pointed abiding on a virtuous object* some texts add *from its own side*, meaning through its own power. This carries more weight.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary continues:

Wisdom is the discerning that occurs upon analysing ultimate and conventional objects.

DIVISIONS

Generosity has [three sub-divisions:] generosity of the Dharma; material generosity; and generosity of fearlessness.

The generosity of fearlessness refers to protecting the lives of other beings.

Morality has [three sub-divisions:] the morality of vows (observing vows); accumulating virtue and achieving the welfare of others.

There are actually eleven ways of achieving the welfare of others as the divisions of morality encompass all the virtuous deeds of a bodhisattva. The *morality of the vows* and the *morality of accumulating virtue* relates to fulfilling one's own ultimate purpose while the morality of achieving the welfare of others is fulfilling the purpose of other beings. As Lama Tsong Khapa mentions in the prayer *Foundation Of All Good Qualities*:

Even if I develop bodhicitta, but don't practice the three types of morality,
I will not achieve enlightenment.
With the clear recognition of this,
Please bless me to practice the bodhisattva vows with great energy.

These are really essential points to keep in mind. The morality of vows is also presented as the morality of restraining from faults.

Patience has [three subdivisions:] the patience of thinking nothing of being harmed by others; tolerating one's suffering; and definitely abiding in the Dharma.

In the first division of patience, what is being emphasised is not allowing one's mind to be disturbed when others harm oneself. This implies willingly enduring or willingly accepting harm from others; when one is able to do this then it does not cause one's mind to become disturbed, and thus harm others by retaliating.

In the second division, tolerating one's suffering, again being able to willingly bear or accept the sufferings becomes a means for one's mind not to become disturbed. These are important points for one's practice. Indeed, for whatever one wishes to achieve because whatever one's endeavours, there are bound to be hardships and difficulties, and if one is not able to endure them or accept them, then it can cause the mind to become daunted and the mind can start to get upset and angry.

Enthusiasm has [three divisions:] armour-like enthusiasm; enthusiasm in accumulating virtue; and enthusiasm in achieving the welfare of sentient beings.

Mental stabilisation has [three divisions:] mental stabilisation to abide in happiness in this life; for achieving qualities; and for accomplishing the welfare of sentient beings.

Wisdom has [three divisions:] the wisdom which realises the ultimate; the conventional; and the actions for the benefit of sentient beings.

THE MEANING OF THE NAME

In Sanskrit the word for generosity is *dhana*. You will notice some temples have *dhana* written on the donation box as a way to encourage generosity when making offerings. Here:

Dhana means to willingly give up that which is to be offered, hence generosity.

Shila means to cool the heat and misery of the afflictions, hence morality.

Patience because of being patient with aggression. In Tibetan the term *sopa* has the connotation of bearing or to tolerate aggression.

Enthusiasm because of training for the highest.

Mental stabilisation because of mentally holding.

Wisdom because of knowing the ultimate.

RESULTS

As explained in *Precious Garland*:

From giving there arises wealth, from ethics happiness,
From patience a good appearance, from joyous effort
[effort in] virtue, brilliance,
From concentration peace, from wisdom liberation,
From compassion all aims are achieved.

The result of *generosity* is that one will obtain wealth, and the result of *morality* is that one will obtain the happiness of the high status.

As a result of *patience*, one will obtain a good complexion,
As a result of practising patience, one obtains lustre and a good appearance.

As a result of joyous effort one obtains virtuous brilliance.

As a result of practising *concentration*, one obtains a subdued mind.

As a result of practising *wisdom*, one obtains liberation or a liberated mind.

With compassion one obtains the two purposes which encompass one's own purpose and the purpose of benefitting others.

Having explained how the six perfections serve as a means for obtaining all these excellences, if we were to ask ourselves, "would I like to have these good

conditions?", our answer would definitely be "Yes! I would like to have these good conditions, all these excellences".

Again, we might not yet be capable of engaging in the actual perfections of these practices, but we do have the capacity to practice a similitude of them to the best of our ability, so to that extent it is most meaningful and most worthwhile for oneself. When it is accompanied by the right (altruistic) motivation then it definitely becomes a really meaningful practice.

As Gyalsab Je's commentary presents:

The nature, division and so forth of the six perfections should be ascertained more extensively from the *Small* and *Great Stages of the Path*. The way of practising them is explained extensively here in this text.

To understand a more extensive presentation of the nature, division and so forth one would need to refer to the *Extensive Lam Rim* teachings. However as the commentary states, the way to practice is presented in this very text in the following verses.

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

Transcript prepared by Bernii Wright
Edit 1 by Jill Lancashire
Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe
Edited Version

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