

# Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

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

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Based on the motivation we generated in the *Refuge and Bodhicitta Prayer* that we have just recited we can now engage in the practice of meditation. [meditation]

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

For the sake of all mother sentient beings I need to achieve enlightenment, and so for that purpose I will listen to the teachings, and put them into practice well.

In our last session we covered a general presentation of the way of training in the six perfections. A lot of material was presented then, and it is good to keep it in mind as we cover the individual presentations of each of the perfections.

## INDIVIDUAL PRESENTATION

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

There are two parts to the chapter:

- I. Explaining the text of the chapter
- II. Explaining the name of the chapter

#### I. EXPLAINING THE TEXT OF THE CHAPTER

This has two subdivisions:

1. Explaining extensively how to practice
2. Concluding summary showing that one has to practice the meaning and not just the words

##### 1. EXPLAINING EXTENSIVELY HOW TO PRACTICE

This is subdivided into four sections.

- 1.1. Guarding the mind as a method for guarding the training
- 1.2. Guarding mindfulness and introspection as methods for guarding the mind.
- 1.3. Practice of guarding the mind with mindfulness and introspection
- 1.4. Method for perfecting the trainings

With these outlines, we need to take note of how meticulously the material is being presented. If we pay particular attention to this, we will notice that we are being presented with a supreme technique for meditation practice. We may assume that we are meditating, but if we fail to apply these points, we are not actually meditating properly.

##### 1.1. Guarding the mind as a method for guarding the training

As most of us have taken many vows and agreed to comply with certain commitments, this section presents the trainings on how to protect our vows and commitments.

There are three sub-divisions:

- 1.1.1. By protecting the mind all will be protected
- 1.1.2. The reason for this
- 1.1.3. Striving in guarding the mind

##### 1.1.1. By protecting the mind all will be protected.

This is again subdivided into three:

- 1.1.1.1. Showing in brief the necessity of protecting one's mind
- 1.1.1.2. The fault of degenerating the mind
- 1.1.1.3. The benefits of protecting the mind

##### 1.1.1.1. SHOWING IN BRIEF THE NECESSITY OF PROTECTING ONE'S MIND

This is presented in the first verse of the chapter:

1. *They who wish to protect the trainings  
Protect the mind after focusing it strongly.  
Without protecting this mind  
It is impossible to protect the trainings.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary on this verse reads:

They who wish to protect the trainings of generosity and the other perfections from degeneration must strongly focus their mind on the trainings, and then protect the mind from wandering off to mistaken objects.

This explanation is in fact a personal instruction. As mentioned here, those *who wish to protect the trainings of generosity and the other perfections from degeneration must strongly focus their mind on the trainings, and protect the mind from wandering off to mistaken objects.*

Basically, those who wish to engage in the trainings such as the six perfections—generosity and so forth—as well as the three higher trainings—the trainings of morality, training of concentration and the training of wisdom, need to protect their minds. For example, those who wish to train in morality must definitely protect their minds, likewise those who wish to train in concentration and wisdom also need to protect their minds.

One needs to understand what protecting the mind means in this context. Here it specifically relates to protecting the mind from being influenced by the delusions that obstruct one's training. With respect to the six perfections, if one's mind is influenced by the delusion of miserliness then there is no way one can practise generosity. If one's mind is influenced by corrupt ethics, then there is no way one can practise pure ethics or morality. If the mind is influenced by anger then one cannot practise patience. If one's mind is influenced by laziness then again there is no way that one can practise joyous effort. If the mind is influenced by distraction and excitement, then it cannot engage in the training of the perfection of concentration, and if the mind is influenced by corrupt wisdom then one is not able to practise wisdom properly.

This is how we need to understand the need to protect the mind from the delusions. You will have noticed that when I introduce the meditation technique I always emphasise that meditation is a method for protecting the mind, and why it is important to do that. Some of you might wonder why I emphasise this point again and again. The reasons that I share it with you are precisely as presented here. I place great importance on these points because, as explained here, it definitely relates to the core practice.

I have said many times that there is a difference between protecting the mind and restraining the mind. You might have taken notes, although if you just left it on the paper as notes then I don't know if you will recall it. Restraining the mind means to make the effort, from the very beginning, not to allow the mind to be influenced by the delusions. Protecting the mind means to take notice when the mind is being influenced by delusions, at which point one

immediately applies antidotes to turn the mind away from them.

As the commentary mentions, *if one does not focus the mind strongly on the trainings and protect the mind from wandering off to mistaken objects*, then it is impossible to engage in the trainings such as generosity and so forth. We should follow the example of the Kadampa masters who, as mentioned previously, practised protecting the mind in the form of a dialogue with the delusions. 'When you are strong, I will apply the antidote to combat you with great force. When you relax then I will also relax'. That is the scope of one's attack on the delusions. If one relaxes when the delusions are strong they will overpower the mind and, as one has not protected the mind, one will be unable to apply the actual training or practice.

This is a really succinct point about meditation as well as the practice of Dharma. As I have mentioned previously, meditation and the practice of Dharma really come down to the same point. Meditation, as I explain regularly, protects the mind from being influenced by the delusions, by keeping it focussed on a virtuous object. Likewise the practice of Dharma protects the mind from the delusions, by withholding the mind from negativities and mistaken conceptions. That measure of withholding the mind from following misconceptions and mistaken views is called the practice of Dharma. As you can see, my regular explanation on these points is similar to the very point that Shantideva is presenting here—if one does not protect the mind from wondering off and from focusing on mistaken objects then it is impossible to engage in the trainings.

This succinct point is an explanation of the meaning of training or practising Dharma, and the meaning of meditation.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary continues:

If one does not protect the mind from wandering off, then it becomes impossible to protect the trainings.

Here *wandering off* specifically implies that the mind is being influenced by the deluded distractions. If one does not protect the mind from this then the consequence is that it will be impossible to actually protect one's training, meaning that one will not be able to apply the trainings or the practices of the Dharma.

We should keep these explanations in mind whenever we refer to the text or read it, as a way to be mindful and contemplate the main points. The reason to contemplate these points is so that when the delusions arise we will be able to immediately recall that following these delusions will cause one to lapse from one's training and practice. It is when we notice the delusions arising that we need to apply particular attention and apply the methods for protecting one's mind.

The delusions that we need to protect ourselves from were explained in detail in the earlier chapter which identified the delusions, their faults and so forth.

#### **1.1.1.2. The fault of degenerating the mind**

This relates to the faults that arise from allowing the trainings to degenerate as a result of the influence of the delusions on the mind. The verse relating to this reads:

2. *Letting the elephant mind wander  
Creates harm beyond pain.  
The unsubdued crazed elephant  
Does not do as much damage here.*

Gyaltsab Je's explanation of this verse in his commentary reads:

Letting the crazed elephant mind wander off to mistaken objects creates the harm beyond pain of the *naraks* [hell realms]. The normal unsubdued and crazed elephant does not create as much suffering here in this world. Hence one should strive in protecting the mind.

The explanation here is quite clear. However to give some further clarification, the state of our mind is presented here as being analogous to a crazed, untamed elephant. If an untamed elephant is let loose it will cause a lot of havoc. Likewise, if we allow our mind to just wander off towards objects of delusion then that will create a lot of harm. The harm that it causes is, of course, not only the sufferings in this life, but also in our future existence, such as the sufferings in the hell realm. Some may think, 'What's wrong in allowing the mind to just wander off and become distracted? How could a distracted mind possibly harm oneself?' This presentation explains that the consequence of allowing the mind to wander off and be distracted by mistaken objects, or objects of delusions, is that it will cause great sufferings, in this life and future lives.

When the commentary states, *the normal unsubdued crazed elephant does not create as much suffering here in this world*, it is referring to stories about untamed elephants being given intoxicants like alcohol to make them even wilder, and then letting them loose in battle. They cause a lot of damage which can be used to overpower the enemy. In the analogy here, an elephant that is already untamed is given mind-altering substances such as alcohol or drugs. When an elephant in such a crazed state is let loose it can cause lot of damage.

The implication here is that the damage will at worst be physical damage to the environment, the buildings and people, who might be crushed and lose limbs, or even die. However such a crazed elephant cannot bring about the intense sufferings of the hell realm. In comparison, as mentioned previously, the consequences of allowing a mind to become distracted by the delusions are much more severe, not only in this life, but in the immeasurable sufferings of lower realms, such as the hell realm, in future lifetimes.

By reflecting on this illustration, and really thinking about the gravity of the consequences of having an unsubdued distracted mind, the conclusion, as presented here, is that *hence one should strive in protecting the mind*. We could elaborate on how the mind is like an untamed elephant, but this should be sufficient for now.

#### **1.1.1.3. The benefits of protecting the mind**

Having first explained the faults of not protecting the mind, one might wonder, 'Well, what is the benefit of protecting the mind? Does protecting the mind have any benefits?' So we can see that this is a very systematic and logical presentation which relates well to our normal state of mind, with its many queries and doubts. These doubts are being systematically addressed one after another. So we can see that this is a really marvellous presentation.

The benefits of protecting the mind is explained in two subdivisions:

- 1.1.1.3.1. In brief
- 1.1.1.3.2. Extensive

##### **1.1.1.3.1. In brief**

The relevant verse reads:

3. *If one tightly fastens the elephant of the mind  
Comprehensively with the rope of mindfulness,  
All dangers become completely non-existent  
And all virtues will come into one's hand.*

This explanation is similar to that in the *Essence of the Middle Way*.

As Gyaltsab Je explains in his commentary:

Through tying the crazed elephant mind to the virtuous object by tying all one's actions of body, speech and mind comprehensively with the rope of mindfulness, all the general dangers of this life and the next become non-existent, and all the virtues of the practices of the three types of beings of the graduated path to enlightenment fall naturally into one's hand.

Therefore, one should never let one's mindfulness of the virtuous object degenerate.

The mind is analogous to the crazed untamed elephant; The virtuous object is analogous to the pillar to which you would tie the elephant so that it does not cause havoc; The rope to tie the crazed elephant is analogous to mindfulness.

What one is binding to the pillar is one's mind as well the three doors of body, speech and mind.

If one were to apply mindfulness as a means to bind our crazed, untamed mind to a virtuous object then *all the general dangers of this life and the next become non-existent, and all the virtues of the practices of the three types of beings of the graduated path to enlightenment fall naturally into one's hand*. This is implying that one will naturally be able to engage in all of the practices of the three scopes.

So we can see how wonderful this text really is, as it presents the essential practices for meditation and Dharma practice.

One needs to take particular notice of the essential meaning of this presentation. The object to which one binds one's mind with mindfulness, is not any random object; as specified here it has to be a virtuous object. If it were possible to subdue our mind by being mindful of any object, there would be no need for the text to specify that it needs to be a virtuous object. So the essential point being presented here is that the meditation object has to be a virtuous object if it is to serve as an antidote to overcome negativities.

In summary, the commentary states, *therefore one should never let one's mindfulness on the virtuous object degenerate*. This is an essential instruction. I regularly emphasise when I introduce meditation that meditation is the optimum means to protect one's mind. The specific emphasis here is that one should never let one's mindfulness of the virtuous object degenerate or lapse. Applying mindfulness means that during the meditation session one will be able to protect one's mind from mistaken conceptions and views, and delusions. Then, through that familiarity with mindfulness during the meditation practice, one will be able to maintain that awareness of the virtuous object, even when one has come out of the formal meditation sessions.

As we familiarise ourselves with the virtuous object throughout the day, and the following days and weeks and months, then due to that familiarity we will naturally be able to recall the virtuous object at the end of our life when we come to our death. As explained in the teachings, if, at the time of death one's mind is in a virtuous state then there is no possibility of taking rebirth in the lower realms. This is how we need to see the way in which our everyday practices are related to the crucial juncture of passing on from this life to the next.

By engaging in practice through being mindful of the virtuous object we are able to take the essence of our precious human life and make it meaningful. Of course the optimum way to make our life meaningful is to create the causes for enlightenment, next best is liberation, and at the very least we take a good rebirth in our next lifetime with all the good conditions.

What we can derive from this explanation is that protecting our mind from delusions lies within our own hands. If we take the initiative to apply mindfulness then we can actually protect our mind from the influence of the negativities, delusions and so forth. Protecting one's mind protects one from immediate external dangers, as well as from future sufferings. That is what is being explained here.

#### 1.1.1.3.2. *Extensive*

The extensive explanation reads:

4. *Tigers, lions, elephants and evil spirits,  
Snakes and all other enemies,  
The guard of sentient beings in the hells,  
Evil mantras [or sorcerers] and likewise blood  
drinkers [or blood thirsty demons],*
5. *Simply by fastening this mind  
They all become controlled.  
Solely by subduing the mind  
They all become subdued.*

The commentary on this verse explains:

It is appropriate to fasten the mind to a virtuous object. By subduing the mind one overcomes all dangers such as tigers, lions, crazy elephants, evil spirits, snakes, and all human enemies. One also overcomes the looming danger of the guards of the sentient beings in hell, those that harm others with evil mantras such as sorcerers, as well as the harm of the different types of spirits called blood thirsty demons and the like. Stopping the cause for any threat in this way, solely by fastening the mind with the rope of mindfulness completely to a virtuous meditation object, equals binding all dangers, and one will not be harmed in the least.

Solely subduing the mind with mindfulness and introspection, and thus stopping engagement in negative actions, equals subduing all dangers. Therefore one should strive in subduing the mind.

While this presentation is quite clear, the point that we can derive here is that *stopping the cause for any threat in this way solely by fastening the mind with the rope of mindfulness completely to a virtuous meditation object, equals binding all dangers*. In other words, fastening our mind to a virtuous object will protect us from all the other dangers mentioned earlier, *and one will not be harmed in the least*.

Other texts explain that harms, like those mentioned earlier, will not befall upon someone who observes ethics purely. The concluding exhortation is that *subduing the mind solely by mindfulness and introspection, and thus stopping engagement in negative actions, equals subduing all dangers*. Therefore one should strive in subduing the mind.

#### 1.1.1.2. THE REASON FOR THIS

This is presented in two subdivisions:

- 1.1.1.2.1. Faults depend on the mind
- 1.1.1.2.2. Qualities depend on the mind

##### 1.1.1.2.1. *Faults depend on the mind*

This is a presentation showing that both faults and qualities are dependent on the mind itself. The way the faults are

dependent on the mind is presented under three subheadings:

#### 1.1.1.2.1.1 Quotes

These are unmistakable citations from the sutras, from the teacher himself

#### 1.1.1.2.1.2. Reason

#### 1.1.1.2.1.3. Summary

#### 1.1.1.2.1.1. Quotes

The verse that relates to this section is:

6. *That all dangers  
And the boundless sufferings  
Arise from the mind  
Is shown with faultless quotation.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

One's experiences of dangers and sufferings are created by one's own mind. The reason is because all dangers and the boundless suffering of this life and future lives arise from one's own negative mind; this is said by the Able One, who explained faultlessly and perfectly all objects of knowledge.

Gyaltsab Je first states that *one's experiences of dangers and sufferings are created by one's own mind. The reason is that all dangers and the boundless suffering of this life and future lives arise from one's own negative mind. All dangers and sufferings that we experience are created by one's mind, because all the dangers and boundless sufferings of this life and future lives arise from one's own negative mind. This was said by the Able One (Buddha Shakyamuni) who explained faultlessly the objects of knowledge.* Then the commentary gives a number of quotations:

As he said in the *Sutra of Clouds of Jewels*:

If one controls one's mind one controls all phenomena.

He also said:

Whether it is virtue or virtuous karma, it is accumulated by the mind.

He also said:

The mind precedes all phenomena. If one knows the mind well, one knows all phenomena well.

Also from the *Perfect Compendium of Phenomena*:

All phenomena depend on the mind.

The Buddha also said that a subdued mind is a happy mind.

#### 1.1.1.2.1.2. Reason

7. *The weapons of the hell beings,  
Who made them with purpose?  
Who made the burning iron ground?  
From whence did the burning inferno arise?*

8ab *All the likes of these  
Arose from negativity, taught the Able One.*

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je explains the meaning of these lines:

If the sufferings that are experienced by sentient beings in the hells, and elsewhere, do not arise from the person's own preceding negative mind, then who forged purposefully the weapons of the hell guardians, these swords, spears and so on? These were not made purposefully by a creator god, nor were they made purposefully by someone else. Who created the burning iron ground, who created the hosts of females that cause one to climb and fall off the crystal mountain? There is no other cause or creator.

The points at the beginning are quite easy to understand, the emphasis being that these *sufferings of the hell realms and elsewhere were not made purposely by a creator god, and nor were they made purposely by someone else.* If we were to take the example of this very building, it was created by someone else, and then we partake of the good conditions here. However, unlike the physical conditions that we experience in this world, the various types of hell realms are said to be created by none other than one's own mind. It is not as if someone specifically created the hell realms for someone else to take us there. It is actually the creation of our own mind. The point made in answer to the opening rhetorical question is that *there is no such god which created these sufferings realms, nor were they made by someone else.*

Then the commentary asks, *Who created the burning iron ground, who created the hosts of females that cause one to climb and fall off the crystal mountain?* Those of you who are familiar with the explanations presented in the Lam Rim teachings will recall the specific hellish state where, due to one's own negative actions in the past, in particular severe, lustful attachment to women resulting in sexual misconduct, one would have visions of women on top of a mountain calling out to you. As you hear the sirens beckoning, you try to climb up the mountain but there are downward facing swords that cut you. Then, having reached the top, you hear the sirens beckoning you from the ground, but when you try to go down, the swords are facing up at you, and again you are pierced by them.

These suffering experiences arise from a hallucination that there is someone calling you. It is due to familiarity with the object of attachment and, in particular, engaging in sexual misconduct that one really believes the sirens are calling out to you. In the process of listening to that, one experiences immense suffering. When we think about it, this is not too farfetched at all. Even in their dreams, someone who is really affected by strong, lustful desires can have all sorts of unimaginable experiences. This is explained extensively in the Lam Rim teachings, so you can refer to that. As Shantideva emphasises, *there is no other cause or creator* for such things, other than being the consequence of one's own state of mind.

Then Gyaltsab Je continues in his commentary:

Since it is also incorrect to say that they are generated without cause, the Able One taught in the *Close Placement with Mindfulness Sutra* and others that they are generated from one's own negative mind.

From *Close Placement with Mindfulness Sutra*:

The mind is the greatest among all enemies.  
There is no enemy like the mind.

We'll just read through the commentary as I have explained the points that are presented here when I taught the *Madhyamakavatara*.

An allegorical opponent: They were generated from the aggregation of fire, but this is a faulty parable.

An opponent without refined reasoning who wishes to deny karmic cause and effect poses this quailm: Where a pure water stream appears to humans, blood and pus appears to hungry ghosts. This is however only an appearance created by the ripening of previous negative karma, and the blood and pus cannot be used by hungry ghosts in the slightest. Because if it existed, then it would have to also appear to humans.

Answer: This is thoroughly mistaken. That something does not appear is possible of course, but if we accept

that it is necessarily non-existent, then also the fires of hell are only mere appearances due to previous negative karmas. If we have to say here also, “Fire does not exist”, then it would be the same up to the eons and finally we also say that the hells do not exist. The need to deny karma then arises.

That it is suitable to appear to humans is also not established. According to the view of the nihilists and you, there are no hot or cold sensations when suffering is generated.

As these are points which have been presented earlier you can refer back to those teachings.<sup>1</sup>

### 1.1.1.2.1.3. Summary

*8cd. Thus, in all the three realms  
There is nothing as dangerous as the mind*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

Since all faults arise from mind, all three realms are created by one's mind. There is no danger apart from this.

What, *since all faults arise from the mind, all three realms are created by one's own mind. There is no danger apart from this*, means that just as all qualities arise from the mind, all faults also rise from the mind. Therefore, in order to increase one's qualities, one needs to apply one's mind appropriately. To minimise and overcome all faults, one has to apply antidotes and so forth, which are generated within one's own mind. That is the main point.

That covers the verses that specifically explain how the faults depend on the mind.

The main point we need to understand as a personal instruction is that since we all have faults and many shortcomings, the best way to address that is to look within. While we might not be able to detect subtle faults or shortcomings, the grosser levels are not too obscure. At a manifest level we can detect some negative states of mind and the faults that arise from them, and it is up to us to take notice of that, and apply appropriate measures to overcome those shortcomings. That is the most practical approach, because if someone else were to point these faults out to us we might become very angry and defensive, rather than accepting what they say.

*Geshe-la says in English that a good mind, which is very pleasant and filled with compassion, does good actions, and is liked by everyone. There's also a bad mind that no-one likes. We need to see them as separate, enemies even, and make sure the good mind works to defeat the bad mind. I always say that a good mind is a good friend. My best friend is my mind of loving kindness and compassion—I don't have much bodhicitta though. I encourage the good mind and say 'go away' to the bad mind. I do this all the time and day-by-day my good mind wins.*

It is through applying these measures that we will then become accustomed to right ways of thinking. This is a point that is good for us in the western context to understand. It's good to make a distinction between yourself and the negative state of mind. Then it is more acceptable to point the finger at the fault, 'It's not me that's at fault. It's my negative state of mind that is at fault'.

The point here is that we need to make that distinction between oneself as an individual being who has qualities and good potential, and the faulty negative states of mind. When one is able acknowledge and accept that it is the

negative state of mind that is influencing one to engage, seemingly without control, in negative actions that are harmful, and which are not appreciated by others. When we recognise that within ourselves, then when we relate to others it will be easy to accept that it is not the person who is at fault but their negative state of mind that is compelling them to say, or do things that are inappropriate and so forth. Then one will protect oneself against becoming angry at the person. Rather one will feel compassion for them, knowing that they are influenced by their negative states of mind.

In this way we can see for ourselves that one way of looking at things will lead to compassion and love for the other, but a different kind of view of the same object can generate anger and hateful thoughts. Then we can understand how our own state of mind influences our attitudes and perceptions and so forth. When we can detect that for ourselves then we will reach the crucial point of understanding that when we have a wrong perception that causes us angst, and hatred and anger and so forth, then we need to transform and change that perception. These points are the crux of our practices, and are not to be taken lightly.

If two individuals living together are sincerely practising in this way, then there will be no reason to frown at each other—they will always be nice and smile at each other. So even in this life you can see that there are great practical benefits to be had from practising the Dharma.

Based on these mind training practices we can then reach a point where we are capable of feeling love and compassion for the enemy, rather than anger. By using correct ways of perceiving things we can see that there is no real enemy, and that there is no person out there aiming to get us. Rather, the harm that they are inflicting upon us doesn't come from the person themselves but from the influence of their delusions, and negative states of mind. So this is where we can develop real compassion for them, rather than becoming angry with them. When one trains in this way, it is definitely possible to see one's enemy as one's best teacher or best friend.

In fact, this way of training is the subject of the following verses presenting the practices on generosity, morality, patience and so forth.

### 1.1.1.2.2. Qualities depend on the mind

This relates to the practice of the six perfections, which we will cover in our following sessions.

Basically the presentation is that the six perfections depend on the mind: generosity depends on the mind; morality depends on the mind; patience depends on the mind; joyous effort depends on the mind; and concentration and wisdom depend on the mind.

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

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, the teaching of 30 September 2003.