

Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

བྱང་ཆུབ་སེམས་དཔའི་སྡོད་པ་ལ་འཇུག་པ་བཞུགས་སོ།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

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17 June 2014

Based on the motivation we have just generated we can now engage in our meditation practice. [meditation]

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

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

Generating this motivation to the best of our ability is really worthwhile.

1.1.3. Striving in guarding the mind

This section of the text is divided into two:

1.1.3.1. Showing, or the presentation

1.1.3.1. Explaining

1.1.3.1. SHOWING

18. *This mind of mine, therefore
I shall hold it well, I shall guard it well.
Apart from the discipline of guarding the mind
What shall one do with many disciplines?*

In his commentary Gyaltzab Je presents the meaning of this verse with the following:

Abandoning faults and achieving qualities depends on the mind. Therefore I shall hold this mind of mine well with mindfulness and introspection, and guard it well, so as to not let it degenerate.

Apart from the discipline of guarding the mind, what shall one do with the many other disciplines of prayers and so forth that don't guard the mind? They are unnecessary.

I have explained the meaning of the line, *abandoning faults and achieving qualities depends on the mind* many times over in the past. It's a point that I regularly emphasise in my teachings. Abandoning every fault and achieving all qualities depends on none other than one's own mind. Here, faults includes all non-virtues as well as all the delusions, and qualities can range from the simplest qualities up to the greatest qualities that can be achieved. That all of these faults and qualities are dependent on one's own mind is an incisive point, showing that the responsibility for overcoming faults lies with ourselves and that we cannot rely upon others to overcome them for us. Likewise, we cannot rely on someone else to develop qualities for us because they depend solely on our own mind, and thus we need to develop good qualities for ourselves.

Having presented that abandoning faults and achieving good qualities depends on the mind, the commentary goes on to say, *I shall hold this mind of mine well, with mindfulness and introspection*. This point indicates that the way to abandon faults and achieve qualities is to apply mindfulness and introspection. As mentioned previously, mindfulness in this context relates to constantly keeping in mind what is to be adopted and what is to be discarded. Introspection refers to keeping constant vigilance over the three doors of our body, speech and mind, checking whether one is adequately

adopting things that need to be adopted, and discarding what has to be discarded.

Guarding the mind *so that it does not degenerate* relates to not allowing the virtuous mind to degenerate. In order to protect the qualities of kindness, love and compassion and so forth, so that they don't degenerate, we need to always guard the mind with mindfulness and introspection. This also relates to whatever vows and commitments we have undertaken—we have to guard them so that they don't degenerate. To take that further, when the commentary asks, *apart from the discipline of guarding the mind what shall one do with other disciplines and prayers and so forth that don't guard the mind?*, it is saying that if one does not apply the discipline of guarding the mind, then practices such as doing prayers and so forth will have minimal effect. That is the main point.

What we need to derive as a personal instruction here is that the main discipline that one needs to apply is to guard the mind from non-virtue and negativities. If our practices such as reciting prayers and mantras are done with mindfulness as a way to create virtue, then they will have a positive effect. But if we don't apply mindfulness then they won't really have much positive effect. This explanation should encourage us to remember this crucial advice and to try to apply mindfulness whenever we engage in our regular commitments and practices. In this way our practice will be intact and we will gradually gain positive effects from it.

What we really need to understand from this presentation is that if we do our prayers and normal commitments with a mind that is distracted by the objects of delusions, then our practices will not have much effect. If we wonder why we are not obtaining any significant result from our practices, then we need to check whether we are applying mindfulness during those practices. We all know from experience that when we engage in practices with a distracted mind we don't derive many results from our practice.

So, as much as we can, we need to apply mindfulness while doing our practice. As I regularly emphasise, it is important to try to ensure that our practices are intact and that we fully utilise our time in practice. It is only by engaging in practices fully with mindfulness that they will bring about significant positive effects. This is exactly the point that is being emphasised here. It is a really significant point and it is appropriate to pay heed to it.

1.1.3.2. EXPLAINING

The previous verse showed that one needs to apply mindfulness. This section explains how to do that in four subdivisions.

1.1.3.2.1. The way of guarding the mind

1.1.3.2.2. The reason why it is necessary to guard the mind

1.1.3.2.3. The benefits of guarding it

1.1.3.2.4. Generating mindfulness to guard the mind wholeheartedly

¹The outline shows us how meticulously the text is presented. The logical and systematic presentation addresses the topic in a way that is suitable for those who wish to follow this practise. Gyaltzab Je's outlines highlight the

¹ Here there was a pause as the heating was adjusted. Geshe Doga then explained in English that the underfloor heating was installed over the concrete floor for health reasons, and that it was funded by a donation from a student called Radim, who had offered Geshe Doga two gold bars. Geshe Doga said that he could not accept them, so Radim gave them to Tara Institute. They were sold for around \$12,000, which paid for the underfloor heating. Later, when Radim became ill, the Centre paid for his trip back home.

systematic manner in which Shantideva composed his text. First it shows that it is necessary to guard the mind. We then naturally wonder how we do that, which he explains under these four headings. The way to guard the mind is presented first. That is followed by the reasons why it is necessary to guard the mind. Then, if one wonders what the benefits would be, the benefits are presented. Finally, there is a presentation of how to actually generate mindfulness to guard the mind wholeheartedly. So Gyaltsab Je's commentary shows us how Shantideva very meticulously, and very logically and systematically, presents advice for us to incorporate into our practice.

You can see the significance of this presentation by relating it to taking an interest in meditation. Do we really consider why we need to apply mindfulness? Do we know the manner of actually applying it and the benefits of applying it? Do we really contemplate these points? Probably not. These initiatives don't come about easily. We can see how Shantideva presents his material here in a very systematic way so that we can really understand the significance and take the practice to heart.

1.1.3.2.1. *The way of guarding the mind*

19. *If one is in the midst of a restless crowd,
One will focus and be conscientious of one's
wound.
Similarly, in the midst of unruly people,
One guards continuously the wound of the
mind.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

A person with a wound on his body who is in the midst of a restless crowd will apply himself very strongly to protect the wound. Similarly, if one is in the midst of unruly people, who could serve as a condition for afflictions to arise in one's mind, then one needs to continuously guard the wound of one's mind.

If one does not guard one's mind, then it will be the condition that cuts off the life of one's higher status and liberation.

This presentation is quite clear. The essential point is made with an analogy: when a person with a wound goes into a hustling, bustling crowd they would be very vigilant about protecting their wound, so that it isn't further damaged, thus causing more pain. *If one is in the midst of unruly people who could serve as a condition for afflictions to arise in one's mind*, refers to the way in which others can easily influence us in such a way that we generate delusions in our minds. In such an environment, one needs to continuously guard one's mind, just like the earlier analogy of protecting a wound in a crowd. One needs to pay particular attention to guarding the mind at such times.

Furthermore, *if one does not guard one's mind then that would be the condition that cuts off the life of one's higher status and liberation*. This means that not guarding the mind will prevent one from achieving one's higher goals. This is a very clear explanation that we really need to take to heart and carefully contemplate in our practice.

It is when one meets with the conditions for afflictions to arise that one needs to pay particular attention to guarding the mind. This is the essential point that is being presented here. Our minds are so easily influenced by the delusions, so we need to always be on guard. We need to guard our wound-like mind against any conditions that will cause delusions to be generated. If we find that delusions such as

anger and attachment arise from even the slightest conditions, then that is a sign that we need to pay particular attention to guarding the mind. These are significant points.

If we are easily influenced by objects of delusion, then even minor conditions will cause the delusions to arise. That is a clear sign of a mind that needs to be guarded well. Some people actually get very upset when they can't find an object of delusion, such as an object of attachment. They actively seek out objects of attachment and experience misery and suffering when they can't find them. Craving objects of delusion shows how habituated the mind actually is with the delusions.

On a further note, paying particular attention to guarding the mind applies in all forms of practice. Many of you would have heard the story of the person who was meditating and when asked what they were meditating on they responded, 'I am meditating on patience'. But when some critical remarks were made, they immediately became upset. That is a sign of not guarding the mind. While generally assuming that they were meditating on patience, they failed to guard their mind, lost their temper and were not able to practise patience in that moment. These are examples in the teachings that show how we need to be constantly vigilant. I also remember an instance where someone came up to me and said that he wanted to become a monk. I questioned whether he should consider it more deeply and he said, 'Oh no! I am really adamant about this! I am very sure that I really want to become a monk'. Then two weeks later he found a partner, and moved in with them!

The main point here is to be extremely careful about guarding one's mind when the conditions for the delusions to arise are present. The teachings tell us that when there are no apparent conditions for delusions to arise someone may look like a real Dharma practitioner, but as soon as particular conditions arise they may act as a very ordinary person.

1.1.3.2.2. *The reason why it is necessary to guard the mind*

This is again a very important point that we need to keep in mind. The reason is presented in the next verse along with an example.

20. *If one is afraid of even the small suffering
Of a wound and guards it,
Then why does one not guard, frightened by the
catcher
And crusher mountains, the wound of the mind?*

Again, this is explained quite clearly in the commentary, but the main point here is the need to take it to heart.

If it is suitable to guard a wound due to fearing slight physical pain, then why does one not guard the wound of the mind from negativity and downfalls due to fearing the sufferings of being crushed by the mountains of the Catcher Mountain Hell and the Crusher Mountain Hell? Both of these would be the result of mental degeneration.

One should guard one's mind with the thought: 'It would be a great mistake not to guard it'.

As presented in the commentary, because of the fear of *physical pain* from further injuring a wound, *it is* considered reasonable or *suitable to guard any wound* one may have so that it does not come into contact with anything that would cause physical pain. We pay so much attention to guarding a wound, because of fear about experiencing physical pain, so why do we not guard the wound of the mind from

negativity and downfalls out of fear of the suffering of the hells of mass destruction, where, some of you might recall from the teachings, beings are crushed between two giant masses of mountains? These hellish experiences and great suffering are none other than the result of not guarding the mind from negativities and downfalls. So they are the ultimate result of allowing the mind to degenerate. The conclusion, as explained in the commentary, is that *one should guard one's mind with the thought that it would be a great mistake not to guard it.*

Here it is good to relate this to our understanding of karma, knowing that when one creates negativity the result will be the undesirable result of experiencing suffering. Therefore, if one does not wish to experience suffering it is appropriate that we prevent the cause of suffering, which is guarding the mind from negativity and downfalls.

When we really contemplate the reasons why we need to guard the mind we will be encouraged to actually apply the methods to do so. So contemplating these reasons is a very significant point.

1.1.3.2.3. *The benefits of guarding it*

This is similar to the very reason why we practise Dharma—simply put, we want happiness and we don't want to experience suffering.

The verse relating to this heading is:

21. *If one lives by such a conduct
One is suitable to abide amongst unruly people
Or amongst women.
The stability of striving in the vows will not degenerate.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

If one continually practises stopping the afflictions, the stability of the mind striving in the vows will not degenerate, regardless of whether one abides in the midst of unruly people with much anger, or whether one abides in the vicinity of women with much attachment.

The point, *if one continually practises preventing the afflictions from arising*, is something that we can apply to ourselves. If we find that the afflictions are arising quite readily, then perhaps we are not applying the antidotes on a continuous basis. If we apply them sometimes, and relax at other times, then, of course, that will have little effect on the delusions. The point here is that we need to continuously practise preventing the afflictions from arising, and then *the stability of the mind striving in the vows will not degenerate.*

This is how we protect self-liberation vows, bodhisattva vows, tantric vows, and whatever other vows or commitments we may have made. The way to protect vows is, as mentioned previously, to apply the antidotes to the afflictions on a continuous basis. Then, regardless of whether one abides in the midst of unruly, angry people, or whether one abides in the vicinity of beautiful goddesses, it will not affect one's mind.

Here we need to recall that Shantideva was giving this advice to fully ordained monks, so we need to understand his examples and illustrations in this context. Nevertheless Shantideva's advice applies to all who are striving to guard their mind and practise the Dharma.

The point here concerns guarding the vows and commitments one has taken. Of course, if those who have taken ordination do not guard their minds against the afflictions, then the vows will be given up at a later stage—in

some cases very quickly. However, in a broader sense, the point relates to any vows; the layperson's vows, the self-ordination vows, the bodhisattva vows and the tantric vows many of you have taken. The best method to guard and protect these vows from degenerating is to continually practise mindfulness to stop the afflictions, and to apply antidotes to the afflictions when they arise. That will help to stabilise the mind so that the vows do not degenerate.

1.1.3.2.4. *Generating mindfulness to guard the mind wholeheartedly*

Having mentioned its benefits, we need to use mindfulness to guard the mind wholeheartedly. Therefore mindfulness is specifically presented as a very important element of our practice. The verse relating to that is:

22. *It is easy not to have gain, or praise,
A body, or livelihood.
It is also alright for other virtues to degenerate,
But do not let the mind degenerate at all.*

Here, Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

Although one gains no food, clothing and the like, receives no praise such as veneration, and has no livelihood to support body and life, that is easy.

To lose virtue unprotected by the mind is easy as well, but the mind of the Great Vehicle should not be allowed to degenerate under any circumstances.

Again, this is not too difficult to understand. *Although one gains no food, clothing and the like, receives no praise such as veneration, and has no livelihood to support body and life, that is easy*, refers to the fact that these conditions are not really all that important.

When the commentary states that *to lose virtue unprotected by the mind is easy as well*, it is referring to virtues that are stained by worldly concerns. While on one hand they are classified as virtues, on the other hand they are stained because they are not protected from the stains of the worldly concerns, or self-interest. So if these virtues were to decline or degenerate, then that is not so important. This relative unimportance is measured in comparison to losing *the mind of the Great Vehicle*, which is bodhicitta, which *should not be allowed to degenerate under any circumstances.*

Compared with bodhicitta, virtues that are stained by worldly concerns or self-interest and other basic needs in relation to our immediate needs are quite insignificant. But the bodhicitta mind must be protected under all circumstances, and one should never allow it to degenerate.

While we may not yet have developed bodhicitta, any level of kindness, particularly the mind wishing to benefit others, is, as I regularly emphasise, a really precious mind. When that is further developed, we develop love and compassion, which serves as a cause to develop bodhicitta. The greater the wish to benefit others, the greater the conditions for bodhicitta will be. Once developed, of course, the bodhicitta attitude will be sustained by the continuing wish to benefit others. Therefore, one should not under any circumstances underestimate this state of mind of kindness and wishing to benefit others.

We can develop that wish to benefit others to a certain extent, and the instruction here is to always protect that mind and never lose that wish to benefit others, because that is the most valuable asset that we can ever have. It should be the centrepiece of our practice, like a fortress, and then all of the remaining practices will enhance that bodhicitta. That is the significance of this instruction.

As I have shared before, at our level a substitute for the actual bodhicitta attitude would be generating the attitude, 'I will not harm any living being, even slightly, and I will endeavour to benefit others to the best of my ability'. We can definitely manage to generate such a highly beneficial state of mind on a regular basis. As it is a substitute for bodhicitta for us, it is a highly significant state of mind.

1.2. Guarding mindfulness and introspection, which are the methods for guarding the mind

This section is explained in two subdivisions:

1.2.1. Showing, or the presentation

1.2.2. Explaining

1.2.1. Showing

The relevant verse is:

23. *You who wish to protect your mind,
Guard with wholehearted effort
Mindfulness and introspection,
I request with hands folded.*

The commentary explaining this verse reads.

You, who wish to guard your mind, since one cannot guard one's mind if one is separated from mindfulness and introspection, do not let the mindfulness that does not forget the virtuous object, and the introspection that analyses the situation of the three doors, degenerate, I, called Shantideva, request this with my hands folded.

What is being presented here very clearly is an exhortation. Shantideva is pleading with us, saying, 'You want to *guard your mind*, but it cannot be guarded without *mindfulness* or *introspection*. Therefore you must definitely *not let mindfulness*, which *does not forget the virtuous object*, and *introspection*, which *analyses the three doors, degenerate*. Having *folded hands* is a gesture showing that Shantideva is imploring us to adopt mindfulness and introspection. We can see this in everyday life. When we make a specific request to someone there are gestures like putting one's palms together and saying, 'Please do this'. Referring to this gesture is a way of showing the importance of mindfulness and introspection as a method of guarding the mind.

I have already explained the significance of mindfulness, and the actual explanations of what mindfulness is in detail, so we can leave the explanation of this verse at that.

1.2.2. Explaining

This is subdivided into two:

1.2.2.1. The faults of lacking introspection

1.2.2.2. Guarding mindfulness as the method for guarding introspection

1.2.2.1. THE FAULTS OF LACKING INTROSPECTION

This heading is further sub-divided into five:

1.2.2.1.1. Any action devoid of introspection lacks power

1.2.2.1.2. One does not generate pure wisdom

1.2.2.1.3. One does not generate pure morality

1.2.2.1.4. Earlier accumulated virtue is destroyed

1.2.2.1.5. It obstructs the achievement of virtue not accumulated earlier

1.2.2.1.1. Any action devoid of introspection lacks power

Here, *action* refers specifically to virtuous actions. What is explained under this heading is that when introspection is not applied to any virtuous action then the power of that virtuous action is reduced.

The verse that relates to this is:

24. *A person that is wracked by illness
Does not have energy for any work.
Similarly, a mind disturbed by ignorance
Does not have energy for any work.*

As clearly explained clearly in the commentary:

A person who is wracked by strong illness does not have the ability to work in the fields. Similarly, a mind that is wracked by the ignorance of not knowing what needs to be practised and what needs to be abandoned does not have strength for any type of virtuous action.

The analogy used here is that someone who is weighed down with heavy illness won't have the physical energy to be *able to work in the fields* of the farm, and so forth. *Similarly, a mind that is riddled or wracked with the ignorance of not knowing what needs to be practised and what is to be abandoned, will not have the strength for any virtuous actions.*

While wisdom is specifically emphasised in the next verse, this verse refers to the fact that a mind that is dominated by the ignorance of not knowing what is to be practised and what is to be abandoned will not have sufficient strength for any type of virtuous action. If, through ignorance, you don't know what is to be abandoned and what is to be adopted, you won't understand the significance of any virtuous action you may create. So your virtuous activities won't carry as much weight as they would if you understood their significance.

Basically, when the introspection that is particularly vigilant about one's actions of body, speech and mind, is not applied, then whatever virtuous actions one engages in, such as listening, will not have much effect. This even applies to listening to the Dharma. Further, the proper means to contemplate will be affected by the lack of introspection, and thus not carry much weight. As well as this, meditation will not carry much weight if introspection is lacking. That is the point being made in this verse.

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

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