
Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

བྱང་ལྷན་མེས་པོ་འཇམ་དཔལ་ལྷོ་ལ་འཇམ་པ་བཞུགས་སོ་

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

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1 July 2014

As usual we can spend some time in meditation practice.
[Meditation]

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

For the benefit of all sentient beings I need to achieve enlightenment. Therefore I will listen to the teachings, and put them into practice well.

I regularly emphasise the importance of the motivation and this is exactly the point which is presented in the next verses. These verses are very poignant explanations about the significance of our state of mind and so forth, so we really need to pay attention to them.

1.2.2.2.3. How to generate the inner conditions of mindfulness and introspection

This has two subdivisions:

1.2.2.2.3.1. How to generate mindfulness

1.2.2.2.3.2. How to generate introspection from mindfulness

1.2.2.2.3.1. How to generate mindfulness

Here, there are two lines:

*32cd. They also repeatedly generate
Recollection of the Buddha.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary on these lines reads

A person who thinks in this way will also recollect the qualities of the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. Because this happens repeatedly, they will easily generate mindfulness of the Three Jewels.

This explanation follows last week's presentation in that *a person who thinks in this way* refers to using shame and embarrassment to apply mindfulness. An individual who conducts themselves with shame and embarrassment in mind will recollect the qualities of the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha, which are three of the six recollections. In addition to the recollection of the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, the six recollections also include recollection of the downfalls, recollection of morality and recollection of the deities.

As presented here, the qualities of the Three Jewels are interrelated in the sense that the more one reflects on the enlightened activities of the Buddha, the greater the admiration and faith in the Buddha's words, i.e. the Dharma. Generating strong faith in the Dharma will then naturally bring about a keen admiration and faith in those who actually practise the Dharma, i.e. the Sangha. So in this way one recollects the qualities of the Three Jewels, the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha.

Furthermore the more one recollects the qualities of the Three Jewels, the more mindful one will be about not

creating the downfalls, and the recollection of morality and so forth will come about as well. Constantly bringing to mind an awareness that one is in the presence of the buddhas and the deities at all times will help one to generate a sense of shame about breaching any vows one has taken, and then through that shame there is a hesitation about incurring the negativities or the downfalls. The same applies to embarrassment with respect to others. So the recollection of the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha helps to generate a sense of shame and embarrassment about incurring the downfalls and so forth.

1.2.2.2.3.2. How to generate introspection from mindfulness

Here again, we take note of the way mindfulness and introspection are interconnected. If one applies mindfulness well, then that will help to generate introspection as well. The verse relating to this is:

*33. When mindfulness remains at the door
Of the mind for the purpose of protection,
At that time introspection is born
And the one that left returns.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains the meaning of this verse thus:

At the time when one, through mindfulness, remains alert to protect oneself from the afflictions, then introspection, which analyses which action is suitable and which is unsuitable, comes into existence, and that which has degenerated at a time will return.

Since the skill in practice depends on mindfulness and introspection, one should become adept in this.

As the commentary explains, by applying *mindfulness one remains alert to protect oneself from the afflictions*. Here mindfulness relates to being either mindful of a virtuous object, or mindful of what is to be adopted and what is to be discarded. So mindfulness means being alert to the possibility of afflictions arising and thus protecting oneself from them. This is really the most significant point about applying mindfulness.

Here we can recall one of the great Kadampa masters Geshe Byel Kunkyen who said, 'I always guard my three doors, lest I fall victim to the afflictions'. One really needs to apply mindfulness in this manner, as a means to guard the mind against the afflictions, and thus ensure that they do not take root. That is the positive outcome of applying mindfulness.

As the commentary further explains, the consequence of following the practice of maintaining mindfulness to protect oneself from the afflictions, is that introspection, which analyses *what actions are suitable and what are unsuitable*, comes into existence. This presentation is systematically showing us how introspection arises by virtue of applying mindfulness. When one applies mindfulness appropriately, and maintains it, then introspection will naturally arise, which in this context is a mind that vigilantly analyses and checks what actions are to be adopted and what actions need to be discarded.

I regularly stress the importance of maintaining mindfulness of one's virtuous object while in meditation. When we have mindfulness of the object, then the introspection that checks whether the mind has become distracted or not will arise naturally. The same applies to

mindfulness and introspection about what actions are to be adopted and what are to be abandoned. This is a very systematic explanation that clearly shows how mindfulness and introspection support each other.

When the commentary says, *that which is unsuitable comes into existence and that which has degenerated at a time will return*, it is referring to the fact that if mindfulness or introspection start to weaken, they can easily be restored. The more one maintains mindfulness about one's activities and actions, the more it will help the development of introspection. In the event that mindfulness or introspection start to degenerate or lapse, then, because of the earlier application, they will easily be able to return. So that is the point being explained here.

Furthermore, as the commentary explains, *since the skill in meditation and practice depends on mindfulness and introspection, one should become adept in this*. The point here is that becoming skilled in meditation and practice depends on how much mindfulness and introspection is being applied, and held without degeneration.

1.3. The practice of guarding the mind with mindfulness and introspection

Having explained the necessity of applying mindfulness and introspection, the next part of the text deals with the actual practice of guarding the mind with mindfulness.

This is subdivided into three:

- 1.3.1. Training in the morality of restraint
- 1.3.2. The way of training in the morality of accumulating virtuous dharmas
- 1.3.3. Training in the morality that accomplishes the welfare of sentient beings

1.3.1. Training in the morality of restraint

This has two subdivisions:

- 1.3.1.1. Striving to purify the actions of the three doors
- 1.3.1.2. Protecting the three doors from degeneration

1.3.1.1. STRIVING TO PURIFY THE ACTIONS OF THE THREE DOORS

Here there are three sub-headings

- 1.3.1.1.1. Investigating the actions of body and speech
- 1.3.1.1.2. Investigating the actions of the mind
- 1.3.1.1.3. Explaining the permitted and forbidden actions

1.3.1.1.1. Investigating the actions of body and speech

This is subdivided into four:

- 1.3.1.1.1.1. Investigating the motivation before a physical action
- 1.3.1.1.1.2. Advice related to looking and so forth
- 1.3.1.1.1.3. Relating it to other actions
- 1.3.1.1.1.4. Investigating the action of abiding

These are important points that I regularly emphasise. This part of the presentation is also very suitable for beginners, as they will find it systematic and very logical. They are able to relate to this explanation very well, because it relates to normal, everyday activities.

Investigating the motivation before a physical action relates to the fact that the mind is paramount in all our actions. The mind is the forerunner of all physical and verbal activities. Whether we conduct a positive physical activity, or whether it is harmful depends on our

motivation prior to engaging in that action. Likewise whatever speech we utter, whether it is positive and beneficial, or harmful or negative, is also dependent on the motivation that precedes the speech. This presentation shows how the mind is the forerunner of all activities.

1.3.1.1.1. Investigating the motivation before a physical action

The verse that relates to this heading is:

- 34. *Initially investigate
Whether this mind is flawed.
At the time I shall remain
Steady like wood.*

Gyalsab Je's commentary explains:

Before engaging in any physical action, such as walking, investigate this mind of yours to see whether the motivation for the action is flawed or not.

In case a flawed motivation has arisen, then, while remembering the antidote against the afflictions, remain steady like wood, and not be moved by the motivation.

As the commentary explains, *before engaging in any action such as walking*, first check or *investigate this mind of yours to see whether the motivation for the action is flawed or not*. As explained here, prior to engaging in any action such as walking or going about, one checks one's state of mind to see what is motivating this action. 'Is the motivation a positive one? Is it an appropriate motivation for the action I am about to engage in? Or is it tainted with some negativity?' This is how to check one's motivation prior to engaging in the action itself.

As the commentary further explains, if one finds that a *flawed motivation has arisen* or taken root, then, the moment one notices that the motivation is stained, by *remembering the antidote to the affliction*, one *remains steady like wood*.

To understand this analogy it is necessary to know that the Tibetan term *shing* applies to wood in general, and it is also the term for trees. In this case, as some other commentaries indicate, the example relates to a massive tree that remains steady during a storm and is not moved by gusts of wind. This example is used to illustrate how one needs to apply the antidote to remain steady and not be moved by the afflictions.

When one notices that one's motivation is tainted and applies the antidote to the afflictions, then one will be able to remain steady and not be moved by that tainted motivation or superstitious thoughts and so forth. So the mind itself remains steady and not moved by a faulty motivation or the afflictions.

As I regularly emphasise, whatever the practice we do, particularly with meditation, we need to be mindful that the practice serves its purpose of overcoming the afflictions in one's mind. As I have related to you in the past, I spent a significant amount of time in my youth attempting to meditate. As I have confided in you in the past, despite my earnest efforts to apply the meditation practice, trying to lead a modest life, being content with whatever I had and not concerned about nice clothing and food, these efforts could, at times, have been tainted with some worldly concern, wondering how others

would view me and so forth. Nevertheless the attempts I made at that time have definitely had a positive effect on my wellbeing now that I am older. Judging by the positive effects that I experience now, the earlier attempts to meditate and so forth have not been in vain, and may have been focused in the right direction. At this stage in my life I can confidently say that my meditation practice is pure, without the stains of worldly concerns.

Geshe-la in English: When I was 20 years old, 21 years old, 22 years old, 23 years old, at that time when there is good food and bad one, I chose bad one! If there is good cloth and not good one, I choose not good one. At time very, very good learning—now I no attach food, no attach cloth, no attach reputation! That time I learning, now beneficial for me! Normally I say I need small food, easy food, not need many different food; stomach full and good for health that is enough! Some people two hours cooking, eat ten minutes, finished! Important healthy food need, delicious or not delicious not really important, healthy need. Delicious only here [pointing to tongue]—afterwards gone! Some people eat rotten egg, rotten meat, not knowing, say 'yes, yes', then stomach pain and some dead. Most important health!

Coming back to the main point, our motivation is of paramount importance. Whatever activity we engage in we need to first check our motivation. Those of you who live with a partner know from experience how, if you do not check your state of mind and allow negative states of mind such as anger to become prevalent, you can easily engage in inappropriate gestures and behaviours that can upset your partner. Behaving in this way will not be received well, even by someone who is close to you. We see so many examples of the complications, harm and hostility that arise as a result of not having paid attention to one's state of mind, prior to engaging in the activities that affect your companion.

If you take this advice to heart, and really pay attention to your state of mind, then, having contemplated the faults of anger, when you notice anger arising you will know that it is not a really suitable state of mind with which to interact with others. By virtue of recognising that, you will be able to prevent yourselves from mishaps and harming others. This is the practical approach to protecting yourselves.

1.3.1.1.2. Advice related to looking and so forth

Here again we can notice the very practical advice Shantideva is giving to those listening to his teachings. His practical advice on how to conduct oneself and behave properly, just the same as the advice and care that a parent would give to their children.

Having mentioned the importance of checking the mind before engaging in physical actions, now comes advice about how to look with one's eyes.

This has four subdivisions:

- 1.3.1.1.2.1. The general conduct of looking with the eyes
- 1.3.1.1.2.2. How to look when tired
- 1.3.1.1.2.3. How to act when another person comes close
- 1.3.1.1.2.4. How to act after one has rested

1.3.1.1.2.1. The general conduct of looking with the eyes

The verse that relates to this is:

35. *I never allow myself to be distracted
And do not look around meaninglessly.
Rather, with a firm mind,
I always look with my eyes downcast.*

These are quite easy points to understand and the commentary is also quite clear.

I shall never allow myself to be distracted and look around meaninglessly, because this causes the mind to degenerate. With the virtuous object firmly in mind I shall always look with my eyes cast down the length of one yoke in front of me.

As the commentary explains one *should never allow oneself to be distracted and look around meaninglessly*. This means not looking around without any purpose. One should guard against that sort of conduct. If one were to look around meaninglessly then that would *cause the mind to degenerate*, through losing its focus on the virtuous object.

Then the commentary further explains that while maintaining *the virtuous object firmly in mind I shall always look with my eyes cast down the length of one yoke in front of me*. In some texts such as the *Vinaya Sutra*, the distance is described as the span of one arm's length.

The main point is that one maintains one's focus on the virtuous object, and that when one walks, one looks just at the space in front of oneself. That covers the general conduct of looking with the eyes.

1.3.1.1.2.2. How to look when tired

Next comes how to look when one is tired. This is covered in these two lines:

- 36ab. *To rest one's sight
One should occasionally look around.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

To refresh one's constitution, and if tired, one occasionally lifts one's gaze and looks around.

When one is tired or looking for a resting place, *one can occasionally lift one's gaze and look around*.

Holding one's gaze at a certain distance for too long might lead to physical discomfort, and mentally one may start to feel a bit tired. So, in order to refresh one's physical constitution, and to revive the mind, we are advised to occasionally lift up our gaze a bit and look around in order to refresh ourselves.

We know that whenever we are engaged in some sort of task, after a while we get a bit tired and we need to look up and stretch out our arms. This is how we normally refresh ourselves. However, this does not imply that we should forget the virtuous object and just look around meaninglessly. The purpose of looking up is just to refresh ourselves, and it should not be a means to become distracted again.

1.3.1.1.2.3. How to act when another person comes close

At this point we can again reflect upon the heart-warming nature of Shantideva's advice. I have heard people say, 'My parents never taught me how to receive guests and how to care for them!' Shantideva is showing us here how to relate to others in appropriate ways.

Some people become very shy when guests arrive, and are not really able to say much. This indicates that they are not really able to interact with and relate to people at a social level.

36cd. When someone appears in the field of your vision

Look up and say, "It is good you came".

37ab. To check whether there are dangers on the road

Look repeatedly in the four directions.

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je explains the meaning as follows:

If someone comes into one's field of vision, while we have our eyes downcast, once they are in front of us we smile at them and say 'How good you came'.

Also, while walking along a path one needs to repeatedly look around in the four directions to check whether there are any dangers or not.

As explained here in the commentary, if, while you are engaged in gazing downward, someone comes near you, then you look up and greet them with a smile. Even just a smile can make others feel at ease and comfortable. Following this pleasant facial gesture, one utters welcoming pleasant words. That is how to conduct oneself.

Furthermore *while walking along the path*, the conduct one needs to adopt *is to repeatedly look in the four directions*, to check whether there are any dangers or not. This is very practical advice. One should always be vigilant as one walks about, otherwise accidents will happen. We can see the very practical nature of this advice. It is also applicable to driving, isn't it? Basically, Shantideva is presenting, with reason and logic, the most suitable way to conduct ourselves virtuously in all our activities, much as parents give advice to their children.

1.3.1.1.1.2.4. How to act after one has rested

This of course is quite easy to understand. Having given advice on how to rest when one is tired, how does one conduct oneself after a rest?

The following four lines explain this:

37cd. Having directed your sight outwards during the break

Look behind your back.

38ab. Having checked in front and behind

Go or come.

The commentary explains the meaning as follows.

Further, after one has rested and set out again, direct your attention outwards and look also behind your back for your possessions. Having checked whether in front or behind are any cliffs and so forth, one either continues along one's path or goes back, as is appropriate.

Having applied the advice on resting, as one sets out again, we are next advised to *direct your attention outward, and also behind your back for your possessions*. This refers to making sure that there are no obstructions, or dangers, either behind or in front.

Having checked in front and behind that there aren't *any cliffs or so forth* refers to the fact that some routes can be treacherous, and very dangerous. So one needs to look carefully in front, to see if there are any cliffs or not, and

then, ensuring that there is no danger, one proceeds along the path.

Looking backward ensures that it is possible to turn back if needed, as well as ensuring one does not leave one's possessions behind. Again, this is very practical advice.

1.3.1.1.1.3. Relating it to other actions

The relevant two lines are:

38cd. Act in this way at all time

Upon understanding the purpose.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary states:

Having understood the need for the benefit of self and others, act like this with all your physical and verbal actions.

In summary, whatever one's actions, whether verbal or physical, one needs to first check their purpose, whether they benefit oneself or others, and then, if there is a benefit, engage in those actions.

We will recite the *King of Prayers* for Kim Foon's father who has just passed away in Malaysia. Kim, her sister Kim Yoke, and William are three of our more dedicated students, and it is good for us to do prayers for them at this time.

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

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Edited Version

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