

Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

བྱང་ཆུབ་སེམས་དཔའི་སློབ་པ་ལ་འཇུག་པ་བལྟགས་སོ་

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

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8 July 2014

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

Aim to receive the teachings with a bodhicitta motivation such as:

For the sake of all mother sentient beings, in order to free them from all sufferings and lead them to the ultimate state of happiness, I need to achieve enlightenment myself. For that purpose I will listen to the teachings and put them into practice well.

Such a motivation is crucial for ensuring that your approach is a proper practice.

We have explained the headings How To Act When One Rests and Relating It To Other Actions. Recall how those explanations gave very practical advice about how to conduct oneself in such situations. In relation to protecting oneself from dangers after resting, when one starts to move about, the advice was about how to be cautious: look behind to make sure no possessions have been left behind; ensure you are not in danger; look in front and make sure there is no precipice or danger points around and then move with caution. This was very practical advice.

This line from Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains what is meant by *relating it to other actions* and serves as a summary that relates to all of our actions.

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

Whatever actions we engage in, physical or verbal, in all instances first check whether there is a benefit for oneself or a benefit for others. Having thoroughly checked, if one finds there is a benefit for oneself and/or others then engage in the actions. Again, this is immaculate advice as it encourages us to use our own wisdom to assess our actions.

1.3.1.1.4. Investigating the action of abiding

The verse reads:

39. *Initiate your actions thinking:
'I shall abide with my body like this.'
From time to time check
How your body is abiding.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

After having had the thought, 'I shall remain in this position', stop the actions of the body and place it for the time being in the planned position.

Look in the explained way, from time to time to check how the body is abiding, and strive to act without fault.

When engaging in a virtuous deed on a physical level (it can relate to body, speech and mind but here it relates to the physical), and *after having the thought 'I shall remain in this position,'* an example of an action may be if you decided to engage in a focused meditation. You would think 'Now I will position myself in the seven-point posture of Buddha

Vairochana, and having taken this initiative you would adopt the appropriate posture. Then, having adopted the posture you would strive to maintain it for the duration. You would periodically check how your body is abiding, and whether you have adopted the correct posture or not. This applies to any physical action; sitting, standing or moving about—adopt the physical posture and strive to act without fault. The succinct advice here is to constantly be aware of one's actions, whether physical, verbal or mental state, and be vigilant in checking 'how am I conducting myself?' This ensures that you are conducting yourself without fault and in line with creating virtue. If you find yourself at fault, immediately try to overcome it. This is the main advice. Having given detailed advice on how to conduct oneself physically, next is investigating the state, or conduct, of the mind.

1.3.1.1.2. Investigating the mind

This is subdivided into two

1.3.1.1.2.1. Fastening the mind to the virtuous object

1.3.1.1.2.2. Analyse whether it is single-pointedly focused on virtue or not

1.3.1.1.2.1. Fastening the mind to the virtuous object

The verse reads:

40. *Check with all your effort
That the crazy elephant mind
Does not lose the great Dharma pillar
The way it was fastened to it.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

Check with all your effort that the unsubdued and crazy elephant mind does not lose the great pillar of the Dharma object that one accepted to contemplate single-pointedly, the way one fastened the mind to it.

The main point of the explanation here is how to ensure that one's mind is fastened to a virtuous object. The mind here is likened to an unsubdued and crazy elephant which would cause havoc due to its completely wild nature. Firstly, it is untamed, and on top of that it is crazed, so an elephant like that would go on a rampage and cause huge destruction, unless it was secured tightly to a strong pillar.

This analogy illustrates our state of mind, which is untamed from the three poisons of attachment, anger and ignorance, and crazed with different delusions. Such an untamed and crazed mind, if it is not fastened to a pillar like a Dharma object, can cause so much damage and destruction. Therefore the advice here is, in order to prevent one's mind from causing so much damage and destruction, *check with all your effort that the unsubdued and crazy elephant mind does not lose the great pillar of the Dharma object.* For us, the pillar or object must be a virtuous object, and just as one would tie an elephant to a pillar, one ties the focus of one's mind to the virtuous object, or what the commentary calls *the Dharma object that one accepted to contemplate single-pointedly the way one fastened the mind to it.* This line indicates that as one has previously determined to contemplate on a chosen object, one needs to constantly ensure one does not lose focus on that virtuous object.

1.3.1.1.2.2. Analyse whether it is single-pointedly focused on virtue or not

After one has fastened one's mind to a virtuous Dharma object (pillar), next one needs to analyse whether it is single-pointedly focused on it or not. This is very succinct advice on how to conduct oneself on a mental level. One can derive

so much meaning from just going over the outline and relate to the significance of the meaning of the verse.

The verse reads:

41. *However I strive in concentration
I shall not let loose for even one moment.
'What does this mind of mine do?' I ask.
Analyse the mind in detail in this regard.*

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

I shall not even for one moment lose my concentration on the virtuous object and be distracted to something else. Analyse your mind repeatedly, saying: 'This mind of mine does suitable and unsuitable actions.'

The significant point here is that while the advice is to focus one's mind single-pointedly on the virtuous object to develop concentration, at the same time, internally in one's mind, one should also analyse one's state of mind checking what kind of thoughts are occurring, what kind of actions are being initiated. The mind has the ability to constantly initiate either suitable or unsuitable actions. So there is a need to check what kinds of thoughts are being manifested in one's mind. Note that from the very onset it is extremely crucial to train oneself in meditation, to develop not only calm abiding, but also special insight, because calm abiding, a state of single-pointed concentration on an object for as long as one wishes, in itself is not sufficient to further enhance one's progress along the path to enlightenment. The teachings constantly emphasise this point. So in addition to calm abiding, one needs to develop special insight, and it is with this combination of concentration and special insight that one can start to really engage in an actual meditation practice capable of removing the subtle afflictions and delusions in the mind. This is a crucial point: while engaging in meditation we should not allow ourselves to feel comfortable just focusing single-pointedly on a chosen object, and maintaining just that. Rather we must also constantly investigate our state of mind, which serves as the basis to develop special insight.

The analysis one employs to check one's state of mind is one which is done while maintaining one's focus on the object, not wavering away from it. So while maintaining this single-pointed focus on the object, one must also employ an analysis that investigates one's state of mind, i.e. what thoughts are occurring and whether they are virtuous states of mind or negative states of mind. Employing this sort of analysis enhances one's intelligence and wisdom, and further develops that wisdom, which can later become special insight.

Lama Tsong Khapa advocates abandoning mere single-pointed concentration, and striving to develop the union of calm abiding and special insight. This is a significant and unique point which we really need to understand. We need to make attempts to develop this training now in our meditation so it will leave a positive imprint in our mind. When we apply this technique it becomes a means to sharpen the mind and further enhance wisdom. Otherwise if one only develops single-pointed concentration, and it is not done in an appropriate manner, then there is a danger of the mind becoming duller and duller rather than sharper, clearer and more intelligent. It is crucial that we apply the proper technique.

1.3.1.1.3. Explaining the permitted and forbidden actions

First, to give an idea about what this heading means in relation to explaining the meaning of the verse: the Buddha

presented certain actions as being permitted and certain actions which are forbidden. Within those which were forbidden there are certain actions which may be temporarily relaxed a bit, as a way of adopting another practice. This is the meaning of practicing equanimity in this context. Thus here, equanimity means that with certain forbidden actions one may temporarily relax the rules a bit, as the means to adopt another virtuous practice.

The verse reads:

42. *If, in the context of dangers or prayer
You are unable, be as comfortable as you can.
In the same vein, at the time of generosity
Morality is treated with equanimity, it is taught.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains the verse:

If one is unable to perform certain extremely subtle actions of body and mind at the time of:

- Danger to one's life,
- Making offering to the Triple Gem with prayers,
- Actions for the superior purpose of others,

At such times it is permissible to relax one's state or being, even if one is not able to engage those subtle forbidden actions.

From the *Sutra Requested by Inexhaustible Wisdom*:

Thus, at the time of generosity, contain morality and practise equanimity.

The commentary explains that at a time when there is either danger to one's life, or when one is making extensive offerings to the Triple Gem, or particularly when one is engaging in superior actions of benefiting or helping other beings, if one is unable to perform certain extremely subtle actions of body and mind at that time, then '*one should practice equanimity and put one's mind at ease.*'

The citation to qualify this presentation is from the *Sutra Requested by Inexhaustible Wisdom*.

Thus, at the time of generosity, contain morality and practice equanimity.

This is saying that at a time when one is not able to practise both simultaneously, and it is the time for mainly practising generosity, then one should practice equanimity, and leave one's subtle practice of morality. The purpose is to be skilful in accomplishing the path sequentially.

Further down, the commentary explains:

This is to achieve the proper sequence of the path, because if one mistakes the sequence then one will not achieve the former or the latter.

The points of the path should be practised sequentially. In order to practise the points sequentially, first adopt those which are initially presented and relatively easy to practise before engaging in a more difficult practice. The quote from the sutra indicates this point.

The commentary presents a hypothetical doubt which may occur:

Query: How can one regard it with equanimity since morality is greater than generosity?

This is a reasonable doubt, for it is indeed a greater virtue to practise morality than generosity, because morality is harder to practise. Generosity can be practiced by lay as well as ordained practitioners, while certain practices of morality, like observing the self-liberation vows, can only be practised by ordained Sangha. Therefore morality is said to be harder to practise than generosity.

Thus, if we had to identify the main focus of the practice and who is appropriate to do those practices, lay people would focus mainly on generosity, and ordained Sangha would need to practise primarily on morality as their main practice.

So, as the query states, if morality is more virtuous, how can one leave that in equanimity, meaning how can one relax the practice of morality?

The next two verses serve as an answer to the query and read:

43. *After initiating the intended action
Do not think about anything else.
For the time being accomplish that very action
With your thoughts focused on it.*
44. *In this way all is accomplished well.
Otherwise neither will be accomplished.
The secondary afflictions, which are non-
introspection,
Will not increase in this way.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains exactly why:

One does not divert mentally from the first practice in a series that have to be practised sequentially. Generosity, which has to be practised first, is practised alone with a firm mind for the time being. This is to achieve the proper sequence of the path, because if one mistakes the sequence, then one will not achieve the former or the latter.

In relation to the first part - *One does not divert mentally from the first practice in a series that have to be practiced sequentially* - this highlights that some practices are presented in sequential order. When practices are presented in a sequential manner it is important to primarily focus on the first practice as a way to establish a firm basis to engage in the next practice of the sequence. As explained here, *This is to achieve the proper sequence of the path, because if one mistakes the sequence, then one will not achieve the former or the latter.*

Take the analogy of constructing a wall: the foundation must be firm and stable. If it is not stable, when you start building the wall and putting the next layer on top it can very easily topple over. The consequence is that you neither have a good foundation nor a wall which comes on top of it. With this analogy it is very clear that when a practice is presented sequentially one needs to focus on the first practice to serve as a basis to practise the rest.

Hence the commentary continues:

By knowing and following the stages of the path the secondary afflictions, which are not introspection and which do not know the sequence, will not increase. Hence, one should strive to become proficient in the sequence of the path.

So this is all very clear.

1.3.1.2. PROTECTING THE THREE DOORS FROM DEGENERATION

This is divided into two subdivisions:

1.3.1.2.1. Protecting the training of the body from degeneration

1.3.1.2.2. Protecting the training of the mind from degeneration

1.3.1.2.1. Protecting the training of the body from degeneration

This is further divided into three meticulously presented subdivisions:

1.3.1.2.1.1. Not letting the body fall under the control of distractions

1.3.1.2.1.2. Abandon meaningless activities

1.3.1.2.1.3. Analysing the motivation at the time of the action

1.3.1.2.1.1. Not letting the body fall under the control of distractions

45. *Various types of idle gossip
And many great plays,
If one becomes involved in any of these,
Abandon attachment to them.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains the verse:

Do not engage in meaningless talk, such as gossip about kings or robbers, and also do not engage in dance or one of the many other kinds of spectacular performances. If there is a purpose or if it is to harmonise with someone, then one should abandon attachment for the action.

This succinct and practical advice is good for us, as it explains how to conduct ourselves in our daily life. The advice is that, whenever possible, one should not engage in meaningless talk such as idle gossip. The text cites gossip about kings or robbers, however for us it would be like gossiping about politics etc. There are sayings that express sentiments like, 'when one engages in gossip the whole day can just pass by', and one has just squandered a whole day gossiping. Engaging in gossip can increase delusions such as anger or attachment. According to the ten non-virtuous actions, by nature gossip is said to pose the least heavy negative karma. But if one is not mindful, it can end up being the worst as it wastes one's time. Because one may not perceive it to be very severe, one thinks it is OK to gossip. But if in fact one spends most of one's time just gossiping, then this will deprive you of your precious time to engage in other practices. So, while by nature gossiping is said to be the least heavy in negative karma, by doing it habitually we can actually waste our whole life. Furthermore, the advice extends to not engaging in dance or one of the many other kinds of spectacular performances, which would include watching movies etc. Again, such performances can cause delusions to arise in one's mind.

An exception is presented: *If there is a purpose or if it is to harmonise with someone one may engage in an action.* Here *harmonise* means 'if it is in accordance with someone else's wishes'. For example if someone said 'Please come to the movies with me. You definitely have to come with me', if you had a choice you would not go because you wouldn't want to waste your time. However, in order to please the other, and not to go against their wishes, you may find yourself sometimes having to comply and say, 'OK, I will go with you'. In situations like this, the advice is to do so without strong attachment—one should abandon attachment to the action.

There are certain categories within the Vinaya vows which are forbidden actions, but which are, under certain circumstances, permitted. For example, singing is actually a forbidden action for ordained Sangha because it can create attachment and distraction. However, if it seems necessary to sing to benefit others, then under those circumstances it is permitted. There are also other categories of actions which a Sangha member maybe permitted to engage in, if it is for the sole purpose of benefiting others. This shows the great kindness of the Buddha in presenting the vows in a way where, under certain circumstances, if it is beneficial to sentient beings, the actions are allowed. In summary, we can see how meticulously the Buddha presented vows which

say: 'avoid such actions normally but if there is a benefit for others then you can engage in it'.

1.3.1.2.1.2. Abandon meaningless activities

The next verse provides advice on how to conduct appropriate physical actions.

The verse reads:

46. *Meaningless digging, cutting of grass,
And drawing in dirt: if one does these,
Upon remembering the trainings of the
Tathagata,
Out of fear, abandon them immediately.*

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

Even if one is not a bhikhu, when one is engaged in meaningless activities such as digging, cutting grass, drawing in the dirt etc., then one should remember the trainings of the Tathagata and, being afraid of the shortcomings of one's actions, stop them right there.

The definitions of meaningless activities are contained within the vows of a fully ordained monk, and they are not to engage in them. For example, digging, cutting grass and drawing in the dirt. However, the commentary indicates that even if you are not a bhikhu or a fully ordained monk—not all bodhisattva trainees are ordained—you should also avoid engaging in meaningless activities such as digging, cutting grass or drawing in the dirt. By remembering why the Buddha actually presented these activities as needing to be avoided, and being afraid of the shortcomings of one's actions, one needs to refrain from such activities. Activities are meaningless not just because they don't have any specific purpose. Some can harm other beings, such as cutting grass. At certain times of the year there are lots of bugs on the grass so by cutting grass, you would actually harm the lives of many insects.

1.3.1.2.1.3. Analysing the motivation at the time of the action

Similar advice was presented earlier. Basically, whatever action one engages in, really check and investigate one's motivation for engaging in the activity first.

This point has three subdivisions:

- 1.3.1.2.1.3.1. Showing
- 1.3.1.2.1.3.2. Explaining
- 1.3.1.2.1.3.4. Summary

1.3.1.2.1.3.1. Showing

The verse reads:

47 *If you wish to move
Or wish to speak
First analyse your mind
And then be smart through steadfastness.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

At the time when one wishes to move one's body or wishes to speak, one should first investigate one's mind to make sure it has not fallen under the control of the afflictions or self-cherishing, and then engage accordingly in what has to be practiced and what has to be abandoned.

While the explanation is quite clear, the commentary further explains that at all times *when one wishes to move one's body, or wishes to speak* (i.e. any physical or verbal actions), one should first check one's state of mind to ensure that it is not influenced by delusions, particularly the self-cherishing mind. Then when one is sure that it is not influenced by any of these negative states of mind, one can engage in the action

according to what is to be practised, and what is to be abandoned.

1.3.1.2.1.3.2. Explaining

This is subdivided into five categories:

- 1.3.1.2.1.3.2.1. What to do when one wishes to generate afflictions
- 1.3.1.2.1.3.2.2. What to do at the time of mental excitement
- 1.3.1.2.1.3.2.3. What to do at the time of praise and so forth
- 1.3.1.2.1.3.2.4. What to do when one thinks about the welfare of others
- 1.3.1.2.1.3.2.5. What to do when one wishes to generate anger or sadness

If there is a wish for anger to be generated, or if sadness occurs, then what can we do at that time? We can notice the manner of how to conduct oneself in such circumstances will be presented very meticulously and succinctly. So we can leave the explanations for our next session.

I would like to thank those who organised the lunch for His Holiness' birthday last Sunday again. Everyone really enjoyed and appreciated the lunch, and I feel that our requesting prayers for His Holiness' long life was fruitful. So, our efforts have been really worthwhile. On a personal note, that night I had a very auspicious dream with His Holiness. His Holiness was present at an offering ceremony, so after some conversations I took the initiative to go up to him to offer a *khatag*, but he indicated that it was not necessary. He then proceeded to consecrate a big jug full of inner-offering nectar, and afterwards indicated that I could have some. When I presented a small container in which I normally keep my inner-offering, he commented 'Oh, that is such a small container, while my jug is really big'. However, when he poured some nectar into my small container, miraculously a really tiny flow of nectar came down to fill my container just to the brim.

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

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