

Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

བྱུང་ལྷན་སེམས་དཔའི་སྡོད་པ་ལ་འཇུག་པ་བཞུགས་སོ།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

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As usual we can spend some time in meditation.

[meditation]

Generate the motivation for receiving the teachings along these lines:

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

1.3.1.2.1. Protecting the training of the body from degeneration

1.3.1.2.1.3. Analysing the motivation at the time of the action (cont.)

1.3.1.2.1.3.2. Explaining

This has five sub-divisions which we listed last week.

1.3.1.2.1.3.2.1. What to do when one wishes to generate afflictions

This heading refers to the actions to take when afflictions are about to be generated. The relevant verse reads:

48. *When one's mind wants to be attached
Or when it wants to be angry
Do not move and do not speak,
Abide like a tree.*

Gyalsab Je's commentary on the verse is quite clear:

When the mind wishes to get attached or wishes to become angry, do not engage in a physical action and do not speak. Rather, abide like a tree and be able to hold the antidote.

As the commentary explains, the moment the mind generates that thought of attachment or anger, one should avoid engaging in any physical or verbal actions. Rather, as the analogy explains, one should *abide like a tree*. The analogy is referring to a big tree, which cannot be moved by gusts of wind. Thus, one needs to remain unshakeable like a tree, being able to hold the antidote in the face of afflictions arising in the mind, not engaging in anything but remaining firm and stable.

The analogy of remaining unshakeable like a tree refers particularly to the times when afflictions such as attachment and anger are prevalent. One knows from one's own experience that when strong attachment or anger are prevalent any physical actions will be inappropriate actions. So at those times one's actions could not be virtuous actions. This is obviously the case with anger. We all know that any physical actions during a moment of anger cannot be a constructive or virtuous one. Likewise, we all know through experience that when our mind is influenced by strong anger our speech will not be appropriate. Likewise, any words uttered when strong attachment is arising will be flawed and inappropriate, and not virtuous speech. So, as presented here, the moment one notices the afflictions arising one should remain firm and steady, and temporarily not engage in any activity.

This is really very practical and personal advice that we need to take on board. From our own experiences, we know that whenever we have acted out of moments of intense anger our physical actions have not been appropriate; likewise, our speech has been hurtful and inappropriate. The consequence of acting either physically or verbally in moments of intense anger is clearly undesirable, and we can all easily relate to that. It may be a little bit harder for you to accept and understand that physical actions and verbal speech in moments of intense attachment are also inappropriate. Nevertheless the fact remains that when one acts out of strong attachment those actions also become tainted and faulty.

However, as indicated previously, some of the advice about avoiding some inappropriate actions out of attachment is intended for those who have ordination vows. So you also need to understand this advice in its proper context.

1.3.1.2.1.3.2.2. What to do at the time of mental excitement

The verses relating to this heading read:

49. *Having mental excitement or mocking,
Having pride or conceit,
Or thinking about criticising,
Being cunning or thinking about deceit,*
50. *When being ready to praise oneself
And belittle others,
Telling others off or being argumentative,
Then one should remain like a tree.*

[The English commentary we have presents the following explanation in point form, although it reads as straight text in the Tibetan version.]

- When there is mental excitement with an object;
- When mocking others in jest;
- When full of pride due to qualities;
- When being conceited due to youth and other reasons;
- When thinking about criticising others;
- When one is cunning, and wants profit out of discontentment;
- When one thinks about deceiving others with pretension and dishonesty;
- When one praises oneself wholeheartedly by expressing one's qualities, and puts others down by mentioning their faults;
- When scolding others and being argumentative and quarrelling.

At these times one should remain unshakeable like a tree while being self-supporting with the antidote.

First is *mental excitement with an object*. You will recall that one of the main obstacles during meditation is excitement, which is when the mind waivers away from the meditation object and starts to focus on another object. Thus, diverting one's focus from the object of meditation to another object is called excitement.

Next is *mocking others in jest*. This refers to ridiculing someone for the amusement of others. Putting down someone else in this form is a fault. Again we are being given practical advice about what to avoid.

Third is how to counteract *pride due to* being puffed up about certain *qualities* one may have. Such pride manifests itself in the form of feeling pompous, thinking 'I know better than others. I have more knowledge than they do'. With an attitude like that, one is putting down others while making

oneself seem more important. We have discussed this delusion in detail in the past.

As mentioned previously, we should be really careful that whatever knowledge we gain from the Dharma, or from the teachings we study, does not become a cause to further strengthen one's pride. One needs to remember that all of the Buddha's teachings were intended to overcome pride, and not strengthen it. Bearing that in mind, if one is feeling a bit pompous about knowing more than others, and has the tendency to look down upon others, one should immediately remember that the purpose of having knowledge of the Dharma is to overcome one's own pride.

We need to take these verses as personal advice, remembering that Shantideva is giving this kind of advice for our benefit. When excitement occurs we can remember his advice to apply an antidote for overcoming excitement. If one finds oneself mocking or making fun of others, one should again remember, 'Shantideva has cautioned me against this negative tendency, so I need to counteract it'. And it is the same with pride and so forth.

Fourth is *when being conceited due to youth and other reasons*. [Some translations use the word, *haughtiness*, for the translation of the Tibetan word *gyakpa*.]

There are five conditions that can lead to conceit or haughtiness. These are youth, having a good form or physique, wealth, status or a good lineage, and an abundance of hearing.

There is a distinction between haughtiness and pride. When we studied Nagarjuna's *Precious Garland*¹, we went into detail about the different kinds of pride, so we won't go over that again. In relation to the earlier mentioned five conditions i.e. being youthful, having a good physique, having sufficient wealth, being from a good family and having good knowledge, pride is a state of mind that has the tendency to look down upon others because one has these conditions and they don't. Whereas conceit or haughtiness² entails a sense of satisfaction about having these good conditions. So conceit or haughtiness has an element of attachment to one's good conditions and feeling a sense of joy or satisfaction about that.

Nagarjuna also highlighted the significant point that haughtiness is the root of a lack of conscientiousness. Feeling conceit about having these good conditions can lead to a lack of conscientiousness about one's Dharma practice. Nagarjuna supported this significant point with a quote from the sutras.

The sense of conceit in relation to an abundance of hearing refers to the knowledge one may have gained from hearing, which can lead to thinking 'I have a significant amount of knowledge now'. In relation to wealth, there is both material wealth and the wealth of knowledge. So here it refers to being conceited about the wealth of knowledge one has. One must be wary about that.

So we can clearly see how being conceited over having these five conditions is related to attachment. It is because of strong attachment to these favourable conditions that one generates that sense of conceit about having obtained them. Hence the teachings say that conceit fits into the realm of attachment.

Fifth is *thinking about criticising others*. This may easily come about when we are dealing with others, so we need to be very mindful about that.

Next is *when one is cunning and wants profit out of discontentment*. This refers to being discontented and because of that discontentment seeking to profit from others. The advice here is to apply an antidote to overcome and counteract that discontentment, which basically means practising less desire and more contentment. As I mention regularly, I can personally vouch for the fact that anyone who practises less desire and has more contentment will not have any real worries. The person who practises having less desire and contentment is the person who has no worries!

This is really the prime practice for ordained Sangha. As His Holiness the Dalai Lama has indicated, monks from other traditions such as Christianity definitely adopt this practice, and show clear signs of their success with it.

If there is no contentment with whatever wealth one has, then that will naturally give rise to worry, being constantly anxious and wanting to acquire more profit and more gain. When one practises contentment with whatever one has, the mind will naturally be more subdued, and definitely less anxious. However, practising contentment needs to be understood in the proper way. It doesn't necessarily mean to avoid having possessions and wealth entirely, and that one should give away everything. Practising poverty and having nothing is not necessarily practising contentment.

The real meaning of practising contentment is to have less attachment to one's wealth and so forth. The main thing one needs to understand here is that being content, or not, is a mental state related to attachment to one's wealth.

Indeed, without strong attachment one can actually utilise one's wealth to better one's conditions, and really enjoy them. With strong attachment, on the other hand, there's always that thought of, 'oh I am spending too much!' so there is always that sense of unease. Despite using one's wealth in trying to improve one's conditions, there is always a little bit of unease. However, although such miserliness has many faults, one of its qualities could be that it does contribute to saving money.

Geshe-la speaks in English: People save money but not happy. Same job, same money, but always 'I no get money ... I no get money, I no get job... Money is hidden away.

There are similar stories among the Tibetans about people having hidden money somewhere!

Seventh is *when one thinks about deceiving others with pretention and dishonesty*. As the teachings explain, the two ways to deceive others are pretence and dishonesty. Pretence refers to pretending that one actually has certain qualities in order to impress others, when in fact one lacks those qualities. Dishonesty is trying to hide one's faults, so that one is not seen in a bad light by others. As I regularly emphasise, one needs to be really mindful of the danger that one's own Dharma practices, such as meditation and so forth, don't become a means for pretence and dishonesty.

Next is *praising oneself wholeheartedly by expressing one's qualities, and putting others down by mentioning their faults*. This immoral practice is a breach of one of the bodhisattvas' commitments, and counted as one of the downfalls. We need to really take this to heart and see how easily our actions can become tainted with our views about our qualities. Whenever one talks about one's practice, one needs to be constantly mindful that one is not boasting about it. We must also be just as mindful about not putting others down.

¹ See teaching of 26 June 2012.

² See teaching of 19 June 2012

There's a particular word in Tibetan *kurdep*, which has the connotation of uttering things that are not true, such as proclaiming that one has qualities when one does not have them. Another example of an untrue proclamation is to hide the qualities of others, ridiculing and finding fault in them.

Lastly, *scolding others and being argumentative and quarrelling*.

Gyaltsab Je concludes his commentary on this section of the text with:

At these times one should remain unshakeable like a tree, while being self-supporting with the antidotes

With respect to *at these times*, it is said that whenever one finds oneself engaging in one of these eight activities, then, in order to counteract them, one should remain firm and stable like a tree, *while applying the self-supporting antidotes*. Then one will not be influenced by these negative tendencies, and one will be able to remain steadfast.

1.3.1.2.1.3.2.3. What to do at the time of praise and so forth

The verse relating to this heading is:

51. *When wishing for gain, honour and fame
Wishing for servants and entourage,
If one's mind wishes for service,
At these times remain like a tree.*

Here Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

- When wishing for gain of wealth and so forth.
- When seeking the honour for others to put down one's mat and so forth.
- Wishing for a good reputation.
- Wishing to acquire servants and entourage.
- If one's mind wishes for service such as treatments for the body and so forth.

Also at these times one should remain like a tree, while having the power of the antidote.

This is a clear presentation of what to do about wishes such as wanting material *gain* such as *wealth and so forth*. The Tibetan word *kurte* can read as either honour or service, indicated here with the example of *others putting down one's mat and so forth*. One might also wish *for a good reputation* so that others talk well about one and so forth, or *to acquire servants and entourage*.

Wishing for service such as treatments for the body and so forth includes massages and so forth. The advice here is to avoid seeking such treatments merely out of attachment. The *Vinaya* text indicates that with some physical ailments it is necessary to apply oil to the body and to massage it in order to restore one's vitality, in which case it is permissible and accepted. This advice also needs to be understood in its proper context.

We need to take this as practical advice. If one completely immerses oneself in wishing for gain or wealth, seeking honour and a good reputation and so forth, then one's whole life can be preoccupied with trying to achieve this. We can spend a whole lifetime being completely immersed just thinking about how to gain these things. We may not actually put much effort into really doing anything practical to achieve our wishes, but we just go around thinking about it over and over again. That sort of daydreaming can be a distraction that wastes your life. So the advice here is to *remain like a tree*, referring back to the earlier analogy of an unshakeable tree, *while having the power of the antidote*.

1.3.1.2.1.3.2.4. What to do when one thinks about the welfare of others

The verse relating to this is:

52. *When casting aside the welfare of others,
And desiring one's selfish aims,
And having a mind wishing to speak,
At these times remain like a tree.*

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je explains:

When one considers the welfare of self and others, ...

This refers to the bodhisattva training, the aspiration to benefit others. Having made that aspiration,

... if one casts aside the welfare of others, wishes to work only for one's own welfare, and has a mind wishing to speak, such a person should remain like a tree.

If one casts aside the welfare of others, and wishes to work only for one's own welfare, at that time if one has a mind wishing to speak, then it is better not to speak or act. Such a person should remain like a tree.

When someone who is committed to working for the welfare of others actually casts aside the welfare of others then that is, without doubt, a grave fault. While that aspiration to benefit others remains in one's mind, if the wish to work only for one's own welfare occurs, then whatever one says will be tainted with a desire to gain something for oneself. Thus, whatever words one utters will not have the effect of benefitting others. Therefore the advice here is that when one has selfish motives, or is thinking about only one's own welfare, then it is better not to speak and remain like a tree.

From the perspective of an ordinary person, the normal way of thinking is to cast aside the welfare of others and think only about one's own welfare. So this is what one needs to avoid. If we really think about how we normally conduct ourselves, and do a thorough self-evaluation of how we normally think, it will become quite apparent that we neglect others by default, because we think only about our own achievements and accomplishments. This is only apparent when we actually stop to think about it. This is how we begin to transform ourselves, noticing how our normal habituated mind thinks. Understanding that leaves room for real transformation, and then we can actually change.

1.3.1.2.1.3.2.5. What to do when one wishes to generate belligerence or despondency

The verse relating to that is as follows:

53. *When being impatient, lazy and afraid,
Likewise, when stubbornness, incoherence
And a partisan attitude arise,
At these times remain like a tree.*

This section relates counteracting belligerence and despondency when they occur.

The commentary reads:

- When being impatient due to belligerence or suffering;
- When being afraid of practising virtue and so forth, due to laziness that is not joyful about virtue;
- When one is stubborn because of being unrestrained or incoherent;
- When the mind favours one's own side, friends and so forth.

At these times one should remain like a tree while practising the antidote.

In Tibetan the words for anger and belligerence are similar. As presented previously, belligerence is one of the secondary mental factors. As you will recall, there is a difference between anger and belligerence. Anger is one of the root afflictions, while belligerence is listed as a proximate or secondary affliction. When anger targeted towards a living being becomes more intense, it then turns into belligerence. So belligerence is a more intense form of anger.

The object of belligerence, as presented previously, is an animate object, not inanimate objects, whereas anger can be focussed on any object. There are the three types of objects of anger: suffering, sentient beings and inanimate objects. You can generate anger towards all three objects, whereas belligerence is targeted only towards living beings.

Thus the first situation is *being impatient due to belligerence or suffering*.

Next is *being afraid of practising virtue and so forth due to laziness that is not joyful about virtue*. When the mind is in a heightened state, one is more prone to feeling belligerent. When the mind is feeling despondent then that is when laziness occurs. Therefore, as presented here in the commentary, *being impatient due to belligerence or suffering*, and *being afraid of practising virtue and so forth due to laziness that is not joyful about virtue* are at the opposite ends of the spectrum. At one end, if one's mind is feeling very heightened, then it is more likely that belligerence will arise, and at the other, laziness can occur when the mind is feeling despondent.

In relation to feeling despondent with a sense of, 'I can't do it, I can't manage', on a recent visit to the Drolkar centre, Carol came up to me and conveyed, 'I don't really have a strong inclination to go to the Kalachakra. I feel hesitant to taking a lot of commitments. If I am not able to observe them, then that will be a cause for me to go to the lower realms and I wouldn't wish that for myself. I would rather stay here with you Geshe Doga and be on a safer plain'. She was teary when she relayed that to me.

However she had already organised to travel with Geshe Sonam, who was encouraging her to go. Of course I wouldn't stop Carol from going—after all, she had decided to go anyway. Therefore I encouraged her to go and receive the blessing 'and take on as much as you can do'. However, her intention of taking the commitments seriously was a good sign.

Carol was expressing her hesitation even in taking the lay-person's vows, saying that 'I might not be able to keep them'. Of course, the way to take vows is to first establish the basis by taking the self-liberation vows. Then based on that, one can take the bodhisattva vows and later the tantric vows. That is the sequence of how one takes these vows.

The next situation is *when one is stubborn because of being unrestrained or incoherent*. The Tibetan term *chetol* has the connotation of someone who is not able to really think things out clearly, and just does things randomly. It is used to refer to someone who doesn't really have many values, and who does anything they want. Even in the everyday world such a person would not be considered as reliable or trustworthy, because they just do whatever they want. Incoherence refers to the lack of a relationship between what is said earlier and what is said later.

The final example is *when the mind favours one's own side, friends and so forth*, which means to favour taking the side of one's friends and colleagues and so forth, and abandoning all others.

In summary, the commentary states:

At these times one should remain like a tree, while practising the antidote.

1.3.1.2.1.2.4. Summary

The verse relating to the summary reads as follows:

54. *Having thus analysed the strong afflictions
And the mind striving in meaninglessness,
The brave person will then guard
The mind steadfastly with antidotes.*

Here Gyaltsab Je explains:

Thus, having investigated the mind that strives in the afflictions and meaninglessness, one should not allow this mind to engage in negative actions with the antidote that is like a powerful hero, but keep it steady.

Having presented all of the conditions where one needs to practice applying the antidotes appropriately, and having investigated the mind that wishes to engage in the afflictions and meaningless activities, *one should not allow this mind to engage in negative actions with the antidote that is like a powerful hero*. Here, the antidote is likened to a very powerful person, who is not easily overcome by foes and so forth. One applies powerful antidotes against the delusions or afflictions and thus *keeps it steady*.

This summary verse encapsulates all of the earlier points about afflictions, and summarises how to actually apply the antidotes.

At the conclusion of our regular prayers, we can do the *Eight Verses of Mind Training* which we also did last week. Mary-Lou's father passed away yesterday, so we can dedicate the practice for her late dad.

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

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