
Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

བྱང་ལྷན་པའི་སྤྱོད་པ་ལ་འཇུག་པ་བཞུགས་སོ།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

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Based on the motivation that has been generated during the recitation of the *Refuge and Bodhicitta Prayer*, let us now engage in the practice of meditation.

[meditation]

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

In order to benefit all sentient beings I need to achieve enlightenment myself. So for that purpose I will listen to the teachings, and put them into practice well.

1.3.2.2. BEING SKILFUL IN PRACTISING VIRTUE

1.3.2.2.1. Making ordinary actions beautiful

1.3.2.2.1.3. Always perform actions in a courteous manner (cont.)¹

73cd. *Also, do not open the door roughly
And always delight in being quiet.*

74. *Water fowl, cats and thieves
Go quietly and are inconspicuous
Thus achieving their goals.*

The able ones always act in such a way.

These lines give us examples showing how, when we engage in any kind of activities we need to be courteous and mindful of the needs and space of others. Basically, the advice comes down to how to be polite with others.

In this and the following verses, Shantideva exhorts us to practise in a manner that is courteous and pleasing to others, and which will bring them joy. I regularly emphasise the importance of being considerate to others and the need to relate to others in a proper way. We can see here that Shantideva is presenting the very points that I regularly emphasise, so I have very good support from him.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains the last two lines of verse 72 in this way:

Because it harms those that are also at home, do not open doors roughly. Always delight in being quiet and in actions that make others happy.

As presented here, when you come in or leave a room be mindful about not shutting the door loudly, as it will disturb the person inside. This is particularly important when there are lamas, such as our own teachers and so forth, meditating and doing their practices. And, of course, shutting the door noisily will definitely upset ordinary people who are easily irritated. Therefore we need to be mindful about not disturbing others in this way.

When Gyaltsab Je states *Always delight in being quiet and in actions that make others happy*, he is exhorting us to have a

quiet demeanour, and to engage in actions that always make others happy.

Thus far the presentation has been on how to engage in actions out of consideration for others. Next comes a presentation of how acting in a gentle manner becomes a means to achieve one's own purpose. Gyaltsab Je gives us these examples:

Examples for achieving one's purpose with gentle actions: water fowl, cats and thieves go quietly and inconspicuously and in such a way achieve what they desire. The Able One, or otherwise the disciplined bodhisattvas always conduct themselves in this manner.

The literal translation uses the term 'water birds', referring to birds that rely on rivers and lakes to catch fish, such as storks. When they are hunting for fish they stand in the water very quietly and still so that they don't disturb the surroundings and frighten the fish. In this way they are able to catch any fish that come close to them.

Likewise when cats go about catching mice they are quietly inconspicuous and move in a very, very gentle and quiet manner. And, of course, in order to be successful, thieves have to move about quietly if they are to achieve their purpose.

Furthermore, the commentary explains, the Able One or bodhisattvas following the discipline always act in this way. When bodhisattvas engage in actions to benefit others they always do it in a very quiet, dignified manner. They are always gentle with their speech and actions, engaging with others in a very gentle and pleasing way.

This is how bodhisattvas, with their intention to benefit sentient beings, act in ways that are completely in accordance with the wishes of others, in order to please them and give them joy. By reflecting upon this, we need to be inspired to always act in the same manner. Even as an aspiration we need to generate thoughts such as, 'May I also be able to practise just like the bodhisattvas'. Thus, by appreciating the gentle ways and manners of bodhisattvas, we should aspire to be like them.

On a personal level we need to reflect upon the great significance of engaging in our everyday actions so that they don't affect others in a negative way. Of course there are times when we have a bad day, where we might act or speak in a less than courteous manner. While we might not have immediate control over our behaviour, in hindsight we can think, 'Oh, that was not proper'. Then, in order to prevent them from escalating further, we can remind ourselves, 'I have listened to Shantideva's advice from this precious text, so acting in this way is not at all appropriate for me now. As there is no benefit for me and it definitely harms others, I shall definitely overcome such behaviour'. When you remind yourself in this way, it will help to prevent negative behaviour from escalating

¹ Last week 'Achieve all in a quiet way' was used as the heading.
Chapter 5

1.3.2.2.2. *Be skilled in interacting with others, free of misdeeds*²

This refers to ensuring that, when we interact with others, we are not engaging in negative deeds. There are five sub-divisions:

1.3.2.2.2.1. How to act in relation to well-meant advice

1.3.2.2.2.2. How to act in relation to speaking the truth

1.3.2.2.2.3. How to act in relation to creating merit

1.3.2.2.2.4. How to act when the qualities of others are praised

1.3.2.2.2.5. The benefit of making others happy

Here we can see how Shantideva is presenting very practical advice relating to our normal, everyday actions. We often encounter others who offer well-meant advice with the best intentions, and we need to know how to respond to that. Likewise, when others speak the truth, we also need to know how to act in that situation. Another situation is how to react when one sees others creating merit. Then there is the situation of knowing how to act when the qualities of others are praised. This section of the text concludes with a discussion of the actual benefit of making others happy. These are very practical points of advice that we really need to take on-board and implement in our lives.

1.3.2.2.2.1 How to act in relation to well-meant advice

74. *Skilful in inducing others and,
Through placing unsought beneficial
Words respectfully on your crown
Become the student of all.*

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je explains:

Be skilful in inducing others to practising virtue.

Although one didn't ask for it, if someone gives well-meant unsolicited advice, one should place that advice joyfully and respectfully on one's crown. Without pride one should always become the student of all that have provided good advice.

The first point is to *be skilful in inducing others to practise virtue*. This has two elements.

- When one intends to present advice to others about accumulating virtue one should be skilled in knowing what is right and wrong. Then, based on that clear understanding, one should encourage others to practise virtue.
- The second element relates to receiving advice from others about engaging in virtue. One should have the discriminating wisdom to analyse what is correct and right, and then apply the advice according to that understanding. As the commentary clearly presents, when well-meant unsought advice is presented by others, one should take that *advice* joyfully and *respectfully place it on one's crown*. This means that when the advice is presented in accordance to the Dharma then, *without pride one should always become the student of all who have provided good advice*.

There might be situations where some may feel, 'I have much more knowledge than you. Who are you to give me that kind of advice?' Rather than accepting that advice one may be offended, thinking, with a sense of pride, 'I

know better than you'. That would be an inappropriate response to well-meant advice.

Here we are being presented with some very, very practical advice. As a matter of fact, advice may come from any of these three sources: someone who has greater knowledge than oneself, someone who one considers one's equal, or from someone normally considered to have less knowledge than oneself, such as a youngster. In any of these situations, the bodhisattva's practice is to really welcome well-meant advice, receiving it very graciously and without a sense of pride, generating the attitude of seeing all as one's teachers. Although these are specific instructions relating to receiving Dharma advice, we can also apply this to worldly affairs as well.

Normally the instruction is to really check and investigate whether the advice one receives is appropriate and whether one should accept it. This section, however, refers to well-meant advice, where the practice is to take and appreciate such advice. The implication is that one should willingly appreciate advice that is meaningful and useful and place it on top of one's crown with respect, and thus regard oneself as a student of all.

1.3.2.2.2.2. How to act in relation to speaking the truth

The first two lines from the next verse are presented here:

*75ab. Everything that is said well
Should be commented on as virtue.*

Here the commentary states:

Everything well said as the truth should be commented on as virtuous speech.

Of course the meaning of these lines and the following verses is quite clear. *Everything well said as the truth should be commented on as virtuous speech* refers particularly to all speech on the Dharma, which is of course based on truth and reality. Whenever others speak about the Dharma one should comment on that as being really wonderful and virtuous speech. So one should praise the well-spoken truth of Dharma words, and, in that way show appreciation, rather than scorn or ridicule. This also prevents jealousy from arising.

When others are presenting the Dharma, or sharing advice with others, we should rejoice, and praise them, saying, 'That is really wonderful virtuous speech'. Such comments are the opposite of comments one might make out of jealousy. If one's mind is affected by jealousy then one could not make such nice comments. So we need to take this advice on-board, and when others are presenting the words of truth of the Dharma, comment on that as being virtuous. It is said that when we praise others without any sense of jealousy, it is a really meritorious deed. So conducting ourselves in this manner is a way to accumulate virtue or merit.

We need to relate this point about speaking the truth without jealousy to the earlier heading which is to Being Skilled in Interacting With Others, Free Of Misdeeds.

² This subdivision was first mentioned on 22 July 2014, as Skillfully Acting with Others in a Virtuous Way.

1.3.2.2.3. How to act in relation to creating merit

This relates to witnessing others creating merit. The next two lines read:

*75cd. When seeing somebody being meritorious
Inspire joy through praise.*

Here Gyaltsab Je explains:

When seeing somebody being meritorious, making offerings and so forth to the Triple Gem, inspire joy and happiness in their minds by directly praising them.

Of course these points were explained extensively in the third chapter on the virtue that is accumulated from rejoicing in the deeds of others.

These lines of verse make the same point. When one sees others engaging in meritorious deeds, such as making offerings and so forth to the Three Jewels, then, if appropriate, one comments on what great deeds they are doing. And if it is not possible to do that, the main thing is to rejoice, and mentally praise them. That will prevent negative minds such as jealousy, pride and so forth from arising.

As presented earlier, when one rejoices in the good deeds of someone who has greater realisations than oneself, then one gets nearly half of that merit oneself. If the one who is generating that virtue and merit is of lower status than oneself, then one gains even more merit. This is how the teachings present the great benefits of rejoicing.

1.3.2.2.4. How to act when the qualities of others are praised

The verse from the text reads:

*76. Comment on qualities secretly,
When qualities are mentioned, agree.
If one's qualities are mentioned,
Check whether there are qualities.*

Here Gyaltsab Je explains:

As it may cause doubts of flattery if one expresses them directly, secretly praise the qualities of others. When others praise the qualities of a third then agree by saying, 'It is like that'.

If your qualities are praised, then without conceit analyse whether the mind really has these qualities or not. If you have, then simply recognise that you have that quality without becoming proud.

The first part of the explanation in the commentary is that if there is a doubt that one's praise might be perceived as flattery, then in order to prevent that possibility, one should practise praising others in secret. If one were to praise others just to flatter them, then that wouldn't be genuine praise, because one is expecting something in return.

If you are not mindful when you praise someone, it may cause them to feel, 'Oh, I wonder why they are praising me. Maybe they want something from me and are just saying that to make me think well of them'. Because of this danger the safest practice is to praise others in secret.

The next point presented in the commentary is also very, very significant and relevant to our normal dealings with others. When others praise the qualities of another person, then we should agree with that praise by saying, 'Yes, it is like that, just as you say'.

The reason why this practice is emphasised here is that if the person being praised is someone who is likeable, then, even if it is not fitting praise, we might say, 'Yes, that is true. They have a lot of qualities'. Whereas if it is someone one doesn't like, then even though they are being rightly praised, we might say, 'Oh, I'm not sure about them'. The main point here is that whether the person to whom the praises are offered is agreeable to oneself or not, the best practice is to acknowledge that praise and say, 'It is like that'. Adopting such conduct not only prevents one from engaging in misdeeds, but we also accumulate great merit by acknowledging the qualities of others.

Furthermore, agreeing in that way also makes the one who is offering the praise joyful too.

The next point in the commentary is also very relevant and significant advice. It relates to when others praise your qualities: *If your qualities are praised, then without conceit analyse whether the mind really has these qualities or not.*

If someone were to talk about qualities they may see in you and so forth, then reacting with a sense of, 'Oh, I might be great. Oh, they have mentioned my qualities so I might be someone special', would be only increasing one's pride. To assess whether what they say is true, one should first check as to whether one does actually have those qualities, and that the praise is fitting. If one does have those qualities, accept that praise but without any conceit or pride.

1.3.2.2.5. The benefit of making others happy

What are the benefits of making others happy?

*77. Because all efforts are to bring joy,
It is so precious that it is priceless.
Thus, enjoy the blissful happiness
That comes from the virtue of working for
others.*

*78. In this life one will be peerless
And also on the other side will be great
happiness.
Faults cause unhappiness and suffering
And also on the other side will be great
suffering.*

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je explains:

All the actions of the three doors of bodhisattvas are to make others happy. Because this happiness of others is so precious, it is priceless, like a rare object that cannot be bought even with great wealth.

As presented in the commentary, *all the actions of the bodhisattvas through their three doors—physical, speech and mental intentions—are performed as a means to make others happy and bring them joy.* Bodhisattvas are always engaged in actions that make others happy, because they are aware that the *happiness others experience is priceless, like a rare object that cannot be bought.* No matter how much money or wealth you may have, you cannot use it to purchase the happiness of others.

Thus, bodhisattvas always use the most appropriate ways and means to make others joyful. As mentioned here, that is because the joy and happiness of others is priceless. I regularly emphasise that we need to engage in actions that will make others joyful and happy. We all have that

potential, so it is worthwhile to actually utilise it to bring about joy and happiness to others.

As much as possible, we need to minimise, and try to rid ourselves of any gestures, mannerisms, and behaviours that cause misery to others. If we notice our actions are bringing about misery and agony, then we need to definitely refrain from those actions. Conversely, we need to engage in actions that bring joy to others.

The second paragraph of the commentary reads:

Therefore, with the quality of making others happy, others will not be jealous of one in this life. By practising making others happy, joy in this life will not decline, and one will without doubt also receive possessions and so forth, and in the life beyond one will also attain great happiness.

There are unintentional benefits from making others happy.

- The commentary explains that *with the quality of making others happy, others will not be jealous of one in this life*. When, from one's own side, one sincerely engages in making others joyful and happy, then that will prevent others from being jealous. That is because one is actively engaged in making them happy.
- One also creates the causes for *possessions* and wealth to increase.
- *The happiness and so forth of this life will not decline*, rather it will be restored and established well.
- As a positive consequence of making others happy, one will also attain *great happiness in the life beyond*, meaning the next life. Here, happiness can range from attaining the happiness of the humans or gods, to obtaining the happiness of liberation and the ultimate happiness of full enlightenment.

So these are the great benefits of making others happy.

Next, Gyalsab Je explains a very significant point:

Otherwise, [meaning if we practise contrary to the aforementioned conduct] as the shortcomings of being angry at the qualities of others, one will experience in this life mental unhappiness and physical suffering, and also in the next life one will experience great suffering.

Having mentioned the benefits of making others happy, if one were to practise the opposite, which is being angry at others' qualities, then, rather than rejoicing in them then, *one will immediately experience mental unhappiness and physical suffering in this life*.

Generally, being unhappy is the basis on which one generates anger. Anger and mental unhappiness usually support each other. If you check, you will notice that anger usually arises when the mind is unhappy. So when one is not happy with someone else's qualities, then that is the basis for starting to become upset and angry. The main point here is if we generate anger about qualities of others, then that will cause further mental agony, as well as physical suffering. So, here again we find some very pertinent advice, which is that being angry affects our mental health, as well as causing us physical harm.

Through their investigations, scientists have come to the conclusion that those with a very temperamental nature, who are always irritated and angry, are more likely to

have physical ailments such as strokes. Apparently anger can induce the blood clots that cause strokes. I have also heard that a perpetually angry attitude suppresses the immune system, making the person much more prone to illness and disease.

The main point mentioned in the text is that if we adopt a mind of joy, make others happy, and praise the qualities of others and so forth, we will receive benefits both in this life and the lives to come.

Conversely, if we practise being angry and upset with the qualities of others, then it will cause mental agony as well as physical suffering in this life and future lives.

That is really the main point. We are being encouraged to practise in accordance with the benefits for oneself.

1.3.2.2.3. *Being skilful in the actions of the three doors*

The three subdivisions under this heading are:

1.3.2.2.3.1. How to act while one speaks

1.3.2.2.3.2. How to act while one looks

1.3.2.2.3.3. Relating oneself only to virtuous actions

1.3.2.2.3.1. How to act while one speaks

79. *When speaking it should be agreeable and coherent,
Clear and pleasant.
Without attachment or anger,
One should speak gently and appropriately.*

Gyalsab Je's commentary explains:

As it is explained in the *Sutra of the Ten Grounds*, when speaking with others it should be agreeable from the heart, coherent, easily understandable, clear and pleasant, in order to be acceptable to their mind.

Having abandoned the motivations of attachment and anger, one should speak gently and appropriately in regard to time and amount.

As explained in the commentary, *when speaking with others*, one should speak *from the heart*. One should use only truthful words and say them in an *agreeable* way.

In the Tibetan version the word translated in the commentary as *coherent* has the meaning of there being a consistent connection between the first and second parts, making it easily understandable. The point about being clear and consistent in what you are saying is so that others can trust your words.

Next, speech should be *clear and pleasant*, and *acceptable* to the minds of others. Here *clear* has the significance of serving to clear away doubts that others might have. If one is not clear, then even after explanation people will still have doubts about what you said. If you are clear in your speech then that will remove any potential doubts from their mind.

Furthermore, the *motivation* of one's words or speech to others should be one that is removed from attachment and anger, thus ensuring that whatever words one relays to others are not based on attachment or anger.

One should speak gently as opposed to speaking harshly. Speaking *appropriately in regard to time and amount* refers to making the length of the presentation in accordance to what is acceptable to others.

As the commentary states, *this is as explained in 'The Sutra of the Ten Grounds'*.

1.3.2.2.3.2. How to act while one looks

This explains how to look at others and how to act in such a way.

80. *When looking at sentient beings say,
"In dependence on this very sentient being
I will become a buddha",
And look at them honestly and lovingly.*

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

Here, Gyaltsab Je explains:

When we look at sentient beings then, similar to the happiness we receive from drinking a refreshing drink after having been thirsty, we think, 'In dependence on this very sentient being I will attain enlightenment', and look at them with a clear mind in a loving manner.

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Edited Version*

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As explained in the commentary, the analogy is that if one is really thirsty any drink that quenches our thirst will be really refreshing and rejuvenating.

The point of the illustration is that being thirsty is an unpleasant experience and that the suffering of thirst is removed when one quenches one's thirst with water. Similarly, that which relieves the overall suffering in our life is, of course, reaching the state of enlightenment. So when we encounter sentient beings, we can remind ourselves, 'Through this very sentient being I will achieve enlightenment'.

From the accounts in the Buddha's life stories and so forth, the very first stage in the generation of bodhicitta is in relation to developing love and compassion for sentient beings. And of course all the practices in which the bodhisattvas engage in the middle are also in relation to sentient beings. Finally, the ultimate state of enlightenment is attained in relation to sentient beings. Therefore, all the stages, from the beginning to the end result of enlightenment, relate to sentient beings.

The thought to generate in our mind as soon as we encounter any sentient being is, *in dependence on this very sentient being I will attain enlightenment*. With that thought in mind we look at others with a clear mind and a loving attitude, thus generating love and compassion toward the sentient being. If, when we encounter sentient beings we can adopt this advice then we will only have a positive state of mind, free from judgement and prejudice and so forth. Having such a clear state of mind recognises this person in front of us as the very sentient being who will help us to become enlightened.

1.3.2.2.3.3. Relating oneself only to virtuous actions

This is subdivided into three. The three subdivisions under this heading are:

- 1.3.2.2.3.3.1. Practising generosity to the special field of offering
- 1.3.2.2.3.3.2. Creating virtue out of one's own power
- 1.3.2.2.3.3.3. Increasing one's virtue evermore and thinking about the purpose.

We can go through the explanations of these subheadings in the next session.