

Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

བྱང་ལྷན་མེད་མཁའ་འགྲུབ་ཀྱི་བློ་བཟང་པོ་ལ་འཇུག་པ་བཞུགས་སོ།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

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As usual, we can spend some time in meditation.

(pause for meditation)

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

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

1.3.3.2.1. Gathering with the mundane (cont.)

1.3.3.2.1.2. Do not harm the body for small actions

The verse relating to this heading is:

86. *Do not harm for insignificant actions
This body that practises the supreme Dharma.
If one acts in this way, the wishes of sentient beings
Will be accomplished swiftly.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary on this verse reads:

One's body, which is the basis for practice of the holy Dharma that accomplishes extensive benefit for self and others, if it is guarded well, should not be harmed for a small benefit of others. Rather it should be guarded like a wound.

If one does this, then by way of completing the three higher trainings on the basis of the precious human rebirth, one will be able to quickly accomplish the wish of sentient beings.

From the *Four Hundred Stanzas*,

Although one of course views the body as enemy
One still protects it.
If one lives for a long time with discipline
Great merit will arise from it.

In this context, the precious human *body, which is the basis for the practice of the holy Dharma that accomplishes extensive benefit for self and others*, refers to a bodhisattva's body with all those conditions intact. However we can also relate this to the good conditions that we have now, such as having access to the Dharma teachings and so forth.

Here we are being advised that guarding the body means that we should not harm this precious human body, which accomplishes the ultimate wish of sentient beings, for the sake of small gains or benefits for others. The commentary uses the analogy of guarding a wound to illustrate how the body should be protected; just as one would *guard a wound* from further damage and harm, likewise we need to protect and guard our body at all times. This analogy was presented in earlier teachings and I also explained the meaning at that time.

As the commentary explains, if one protects one's body well, then because of having all the right conditions for one's practice *by way of completing the three higher trainings*

on the basis of this precious human rebirth, one will be able to quickly accomplish the wishes of sentient beings. When one fulfils one's ultimate goal of the practice of the three higher trainings, which is to achieve enlightenment, then one will naturally be able to fulfil the wish of other sentient beings as well.

In the first two lines of the *Four Hundred Stanzas* verse, *Although one of course views the body as enemy, One still protects it*, one refers to the one who sees reality, such as the noble bodhisattvas who understand ultimate truth. They see this contaminated body, which is the basis for external and internal harms and so much suffering, as an enemy. Even so, one still needs to protect this body.

The next two lines of the quote from the *Four Hundred Stanzas*, *If one lives for a long time with discipline Great merit will arise from it*, indicate that if one lives for a long time by protecting one's body with the discipline of observing morality, then one will accumulate great merit. Here, *great merit* refers to both the accumulation of wisdom as well as the accumulation of merit.

If I recall correctly, this verse is presented as a response to this doubt: if the body is to be seen as an enemy, then why would one want to protect it? You can also check the commentary on the explanation of this verse.

While the earlier explanations are quite clear it is good for us to reflect on their meaning and try to implement it in our practice.

1.3.3.2.1.3. Explaining the time and necessity for offering the body

When practising generosity with one's body one needs to know the appropriate time and necessity or purpose. This explanation follows the earlier indication that one shouldn't harm one's body, such as giving one's arms or legs to others, for a very minor purpose. Now the text explains the right time and purpose for offering one's body.

87. *Do not offer this body with
Impure thoughts of compassion.
Offer it in any way to accomplish
Great purpose here and yonder.*

Here Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

Although from the very beginning bodhisattvas have offered everything including their body, to sentient beings from the depth of their mind.

However, if one feels despondent with the prospect of being asked for the flesh of one's body and the like, and generates feelings of regret afterwards and so forth, then until the pure mind of compassion that cherishes others more than oneself has been developed, one should not give this body.

Although from the very beginning refers to the time when a trainee first becomes a bodhisattva by entering the path of accumulation. Although bodhisattvas on the preliminary stages of the path of accumulation and preparation have developed the courageous mind of offering everything for the sake of sentient beings, which would include their body and so forth, they are nevertheless still on the preliminary stages of the practices. Because there is a probability that bodhisattvas at the initial levels of practice could feel *despondent* at the prospect of having others ask for their flesh or body parts

and so forth, the practice of offering one's body parts is not advised. Furthermore, it is possible that one will later feel regret, rather than rejoice in giving one's body.

Until the pure mind of compassion which cherishes others more than oneself has been fully developed refers to the development of ultimate bodhicitta, which is within the mental continuum of those who have reached the first of the ten grounds and above. Thus, what is being explained here is that until bodhicitta has been fully developed *one should not give this body*.

The text backs this up with reference to the *Compendium of Trainings*.

This is extensively explained in the *Compendium of Trainings*, where the untimely offering of one's body is described as an action of *mara*.

As explained here, giving one's body before one has fully developed bodhicitta is considered an action influenced by *mara* or demons, which indicates that it is not a completely pure practice.

Next the commentary explains the appropriate time, which is:

One should offer it when one is really free from the obstacles to generosity, such as miserliness and so forth, and the offering becomes a faultless completion of great accumulation, and most certainly when it becomes a cause to achieve a great purpose in this life and beyond.

Thus, the appropriate time to offer this body is when the bodhisattva develops ultimate bodhicitta from the first ground onwards, when they are completely *free from the obstacles to generosity* and so forth. The necessity or purpose of offering one's body is *when it becomes a cause to achieve a great purpose in this and future lives*.

This encompasses the two main points of the appropriate time, and the necessity or purpose.

1.3.3.2.2. *Gathering with the Dharma*

The previous section referred to gathering others as disciples and so forth, through being generous with material aid and so forth. Now comes the explanation on gathering others through offering the Dharma.

This section is subdivided into three:

1.3.3.2.2.1. The physical behaviour of an audience that one should not teach

1.3.3.2.2.2. Analysing the distinction of the motivation of a vessel

1.3.3.2.2.3. Do not lead those with the wish for the great to the small

1.3.3.2.2.1. **The physical behaviour of an audience that one should not teach**

The physical behaviour of an audience that one should not teach refers to the inappropriate physical gestures of those who are not suitable to receive the Dharma teachings.

So as the verse reflects here:

88. *Do not teach the Dharma to the disrespectful.
Not to those who, while healthy, wear
headbands,
Umbrellas, sticks, carry weapons,
Or cover their heads.*

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je explains:

One should not explain the Dharma to those that do not have respect for the Dharma and the teacher, or to those whose behaviour is unsuitable, such as wearing headbands when not sick, carrying umbrellas, sticks, weapons or covering their heads with cloth and so forth.

The first part of the commentary is that *one should not explain the Dharma to those who don't show respect for the Dharma and the teacher*. This refers to not respecting the qualities of the Dharma. Because the Dharma has such highly esteemed qualities, it would be inappropriate to present the profound and sacred Dharma to someone who does not respect it. Those who do not have respect for the Dharma are by default not suitable vessels to receive the Dharma. Furthermore, teaching the Dharma to those who do not respect the teacher or the Dharma would cause them to incur the negativity of disrespecting the Dharma. In this way, rather than bestowing benefit it becomes the cause for them to experience harm from the negative consequences. So, the first part of the explanation, *one should not explain the Dharma to those that do not have respect for the Dharma and the teacher*, refers to those whose minds are not pure enough to receive the Dharma.

The second part of the explanation refers to those whose physical behaviours are unsuitable. They might have a pure intention to receive the Dharma, respecting both the Dharma and the teacher, but it would be inappropriate to present the Dharma to them because of their inappropriate behaviour. The text lists some examples.

Unsuitable behaviours include *wearing headbands when not sick*. This implies that while it is permitted to wear a headband because one is not well, wearing a headband for no particular reason would be a sign of disrespect. Likewise, *carrying umbrellas*, or *sticks*, or *weapons*, or *covering their heads with cloth and so forth* are examples of disrespectful conduct when listening to a Dharma teaching.

For example, as monks we are not allowed to put our *zen* (upper robe) over our heads while listening to the teachings. During His Holiness' teachings, when there is no roof and it is quite hot and sunny, he gives the Sangha permission by saying, 'Put your *zens* on top of your head to protect yourself from the hot sun'. The usual practice however is not to cover the head, out of respect for the teachings.

1.3.3.2.2.2. **Analysing the distinction of the motivation of a vessel**

This refers to further checking the intention or motivation of those who are coming to listen to a teaching. The relevant verse is:

89. *To those holding the lesser to be great and
profound,
To women without their spouse,
Hold equal respect for the lesser and supreme
Dharma
And practise it all.*

Here, Gyaltsab Je explains:

One does not teach the profound and extensive Dharma to those who are not a vessel due to a lesser

motivation and also not to women alone, without their spouse.

It is taught that if one discriminates between the superior Mahayana and the lesser Hinayana on the basis of being wholesome or bad, suitable or unsuitable, becoming the method for enlightenment or not and so forth, is abandoning the Dharma.

One should therefore have equal respect for all paths and practice them all.

This explanation mentions that one should not *teach the profound and extensive Dharma to those who are not a suitable vessel, due to a lesser motivation*. Another way of explaining this is that it would not be suitable to teach the profound and extensive Dharma to those who have the motivation of the Lesser Vehicle. Because of their intention or motivation they are not ready to hear the profound and extensive Dharma, so one should not teach it to them.

With respect to *women alone without their spouse* we need to understand the specific context of the advice, which applies to those who are presenting the Dharma. For example, it is said to be very dangerous for their vows for a fully ordained monk to teach a woman while they are alone; others might also form negative views about the propriety of that. Likewise, if the teacher is a nun then it would be inappropriate if they were to teach a man alone, without their spouse being present. We need to understand that while one gender is mentioned here it refers equally to the other gender. It is important to understand these points in their proper context.

Furthermore, as mentioned here, one will incur the fault of abandoning the Dharma if one discriminates between the superior Mahayana and the Lesser Vehicle, on the basis that one is wholesome and the other is not wholesome; that one is suitable and the other is not; that one has the method to become enlightened and the other does not. It is said that the karma of abandoning the Dharma is a heavy negative karma.

Therefore, as Gyaltsab Je emphasises, one should have equal respect for all paths and practise them all. So Gyaltsab Rinpoche is definitely sharing some really profound advice with us.

1.3.3.2.3. Do not lead those with the wish for the great to the small

This heading indicates that it would be totally inappropriate to suggest to those who have a genuine, keen interest in practising the Great Mahayana Vehicle, would be better practising the Lesser Vehicle.

The verse that relates this is:

90. *Do not bring those that are a vessel
For the extensive Dharma to the lesser Dharma.
Do not cause them to give up the training,
Do not mislead with sutra and mantra.*

As Gyaltsab Je explains in his commentary:

Do not lead someone with Mahayana lineage that is a suitable vessel for the extensive Dharma to a lesser Dharma, such as the hearer's path. It is taught that this becomes a downfall.

One should *not lead someone with a Mahayana lineage*, meaning someone who has the actual capacity of mind to practise the Mahayana, and who is *a suitable vessel*, from

the extensive Dharma to the lesser Dharma, such as the *hearer's path*. As such that would be a *downfall*.

The next part of the commentary reads:

Also do not cause someone that is a suitable vessel for the morality of restraint to give up their practice of morality while they are suitable vessels, through misleading them with sutra and mantra, saying that they will become pure merely by reading sutras and mantras.

In this way do not mislead others with sutra and mantra.

The point being emphasised here is that while someone may be a suitable vessel to study and practice morality, telling them that to become liberated it will be sufficient for them to purify their mind by merely reading sutras and mantras would be very misleading advice.

This reminds me of the comments made by someone I met from Singapore who was one of the co-founders of an institute in the Kagyu tradition. He commented to me that while the advice to recite, for example, 100,000 Vajrasattva mantras, or do 100,000 prostrations without any further explanation and saying that it will lead one to reach enlightenment, may have some significant purpose, he was not really sure about the actual benefit. I felt that his comments on how doing extensive practices without the basis of a proper understanding could be misleading were valid.

The emphasis here is that misleading suitable vessels who are capable of understanding the teachings by saying that they will become pure just by reading sutras and reciting mantras, is inappropriate. If they are not suitable vessels and lack the capacity and intelligence to understand the teachings and fully grasp their meaning, then it would be skilful to present practices for them to do at their level. However, if trainees who have the intelligence and capacity and are thus suitable vessels were to be given tasks of merely reciting mantras or reading sutras, then that would be misleading them.

Those who have that approach may be presenting it in that way because they don't have much knowledge of the teachings themselves, and cannot present them thoroughly. Saying, 'You don't need to study much; you don't need to understand much. That's OK, just do these mantras and recite these practices and everything will be fine' would be the act of misleading others.

1.3.3.3. PROTECTING SENTIENT BEING'S MINDS BY TRAINING IN THE ACTION OF NOT INCURRING FAULTS

This is definitely a very important point for bodhisattvas. Because they are such noble beings, engaging in inappropriate actions could cause others to generate a negative mind, and if they were to cause others to be critical of the bodhisattva, then that would be a cause for them to create really heavy negative karma. Therefore bodhisattvas have a great responsibility to engage in appropriate conduct and behaviour to protect the minds of other beings from the faults of criticism and so forth. This is an important point for us also to keep in mind.

This heading has two sections

1.3.3.3.1. Extensive explanation

1.3.3.3.2. Summary

1.3.3.3.1. Extensive explanation

The extensive explanation is subdivided into three:

1.3.3.3.1.1. Abandoning faulty behaviour that causes others to lose faith

1.3.3.3.1.2. How to act when showing the path

1.3.3.3.1.3. How to do the action of sleeping

1.3.3.3.1.1. Abandoning faulty behaviour that causes others to lose faith

Gyaltsab Je begins his commentary on this section of the text with these words:

Ordained bodhisattvas must apply restraint, which is explained in the general basket of teachings on morality, unless there is an exemption that permits them otherwise. As it will cause a loss of faith in the minds of others, even lay bodhisattvas must apply this restraint.

As mentioned here, there are certain forms of conduct that are specifically prescribed for the ordained. There are some circumstances where there are exemptions, but otherwise ordained bodhisattvas have to abide by all of those vows, because not doing so can cause others to lose faith. For the same reason, even lay bodhisattvas have to abide by certain forms of conduct. This was also explained in *Precious Garland*, which we have previously studied.

Then comes the verse relating to this:

91. *If one leaves behind tooth woods and spittle
Then they should be covered.
To urinate and the like, on water and ground
Used by all is inferior.*

92ab. *Do not eat with a full mouth noisily,
Or with an open mouth*

Then the commentary continues:

If one leaves behind the wood used to clean the teeth and leaves one's spittle on the ground, then these should be covered up with earth and the like. One should also not pollute commonly used water or land with faeces, urine, and mucus as this is frowned upon by the gods and others.

Traditionally in India they use wood from a nim tree as a substitute for toothbrushes. They chew on a piece of the wood to make it like a bristle, which they use to clean their teeth. Having cleaned the teeth in such a way, the advice is that one should not just throw the piece of wood down on the ground for it to be seen by others; likewise one should not just spit onto the ground. Both should be covered up. This of course doesn't really apply in Australia where there is a good tradition of putting the garbage into the garbage can, and you don't see people spitting on the street at all. This is an excellent system.

In general however, one needs to be careful not to cause others to feel disgust, or a bit uncomfortable, when they see behaviour such as spitting out food after one has eaten it. That would be considered as very disgusting. At the moment someone sees that, and thinks it is disgusting, then they become critical of the person who has done that. So if a bodhisattva were to engage in such behaviour, it would cause disgust in others, and if, out of that disgust, they are critical of the bodhisattva, then that will be the cause to create the negative karma of being critical of bodhisattvas. Therefore the advice is that the

bodhisattva always needs to engage in conduct and behaviour that protects the minds of others.

Likewise, *one should also not pollute commonly used water or land with faeces, urine and mucus as this is frowned upon by the gods and others.* This is not only a cause of disgust, but is also a cause of harm for others.

Furthermore:

Do not eat with a full mouth, making noises like chag-chag and so forth while eating, or eat with an open mouth.

Again, these explanations are for monks with vows. When eating one should not eat with one's mouth open, or make sounds such as indicated here, or have too much food in one's mouth, or eat noisily, or with an open mouth. This sort of behaviour will disgust others and is inappropriate.

The next six lines of verse are:

92cd. *Do not sit with the legs stretched out,
Do not rub your hands together.*

93. *When riding or sitting on a mattress or place,
Do not be together with another woman.
Abandon anything that causes worldly beings
to lose faith,
That observed and that to enquire about.*

The explanation in the commentary is quite clear.

While sitting on a bed or the like, do not sit with both legs stretched out on the ground. One does not rub both hands together at the same time, but there is no fault if one rubs them sequentially.

One does not ride together with someone else's women on a horse and so forth, or sit together with them on the same seat or place. Lay bodhisattvas also should not sit together with another woman who is not a relative.

In short, one should abandon any inappropriate behaviour that causes the worldly to lose faith, either by observing directly what is done or not done, or through informing oneself by enquiring what is appropriate and inappropriate according to that place and time.

In some cultures and traditions it is considered disrespectful to point your feet out towards others. It is also seemingly disrespectful to rub your hands in front of others, although *there is no fault if one rubs them sequentially.*

One does not ride together with someone else's women on a horse and so forth, or sit together with them on the same seat or place. Lay bodhisattvas also should not sit together with another woman who is not a relative. These are quite clear instructions.

In summary, as explained by Gyaltsab Je, *one should abandon inappropriate behaviour that causes worldly beings to lose faith.* One does this *either by observing directly what is done or not done, or through informing oneself by enquiring what is appropriate and inappropriate according to that place and time.* This means that if you are in a place where you don't know the traditions, and you don't know what is appropriate and what is inappropriate, you should ask about the proper ways to act.

This reminds me that prior to coming to Australia Pam, one of the teachers who taught English to the young

monks at Kopan, gave me some instructions on things such as how to use cutlery and so forth. She said that in the West if you are invited to a place, there are different types of cutlery for different parts of the meal. Indeed, whenever we go to a new place, it is appropriate to know the traditions and customs of that place so that we act appropriately.

1.3.3.3.1.2. How to act while showing the path

This refers to acting in the appropriate way when you are showing the path to others. This is very pertinent and practical advice for our daily lives. The relevant verses read:

94. *Do not point with a finger,
But respectfully, with your
Full right hand,
Show the way.*
95. *Do not move your hand excessively
But only just enough, with some words.
Snap your fingers and so forth,
Otherwise it becomes unrestrained.*

The explanation in Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

When indicating the way for somebody, do not do so with individual fingers from the left hand because this is regarded as insulting. One respectfully points in the right direction with the full right hand outstretched.

One does not wave unnecessarily with one's hand, as this would become excitement and be unconscientious. Instead wave with your hand a little bit, say something and snap your fingers. Otherwise, if one is too loud, then it becomes unrestrained.

This explanation is also quite relevant to our tradition here, where raising your fingers inappropriately is a very bad, even dangerous thing!

When pointing out the path to others in India, it is considered rude and disrespectful to the other when you point with one finger, or just a few fingers. The proper way is to stretch out your full palm and show the way with your right hand. That is the gesture to adopt.

The next part of the explanation is that *one does not wave unnecessarily with one's hand, as this would become excitement and be unconscientious*. Instead wave your hand slightly. If one has to call someone, instead of shouting out loud or waving one's hand wildly, one should slightly snap one's finger, which will gain their attention. *Otherwise one is too loud and becomes unrestrained*.

1.3.3.3.1.3. How to do the action of sleeping

This explanation is precisely in accordance with the presentation in the Lam Rim teachings, but we can leave this for the next session. When done in a proper way sleeping is referred to as the yoga of sleeping, so even the act of sleeping can become a practice.

*Transcript prepared by Judy Mayne
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