
Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

བྱང་ཆུབ་སེམས་དཔའི་སྤྱོད་པ་ལ་འཇུག་པ་བཞུགས་སོ།

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As usual we can spend some time in the regular meditation practice.

[Meditation]

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

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

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

1.3.3.3.1. Extensive explanation (cont.)

1.3.3.3.1.3. How to engage in the action of sleeping

The verse relating to this heading is:

96. *Sleep like the Protector, when he passed
Into parinirvana, in the desired direction.
Make sure from the start, with introspection
about
The thought of getting up quickly.*

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je gives this explanation of the meaning of the verse:

For sleeping, assume the position of the protector when he passed into parinirvana. Lie down on your right side, with your head in the desired direction, putting your left leg on your right leg, and your head into your right hand, and then sleep well covered with the *cho-go*.

At the time of sleep put your mind onto a virtuous object with mindfulness and introspection and adopt the recognition of brightness. Adopt from the start the mind that thinks, 'I shall rise quickly', and sleep with the thought, 'Tomorrow I shall practise the Dharma with the newly regenerated body'."

As the commentary explains, when we sleep our body should be in a position that is similar to that of protector, Lord Buddha Shakyamuni, in the aspect of passing into nirvana.

Depending on the direction that you wish to face (such as holy images on your altar), you lie down on your right side with your head in that direction and placed on top of your right hand. This lying position is also referred to as the sleeping lion position. The Lam Rim teachings give detailed explanations on the significance of adopting this sleeping posture, which emulates the fearlessness of a sleeping lion.

The commentary continues with the description, *putting your left leg on your right leg*, which is quite clear. Then, having positioned oneself in this manner, one sleeps covered with the *cho-go*, which is the upper yellow robe of the Sangha.

The main significance of placing oneself in this position, which is the position the Buddha adopted when he showed the aspect of passing into nirvana, is to remember death and impermanence. Of course, in actuality the Buddha is

immortal, however he showed the aspect of passing into nirvana for the purpose of teaching death and impermanence to his disciples. So sleeping in this position is a reminder for us of death and impermanence. That is what we need to understand here. As *Praise to Buddha Shakyamuni by Way of the Twelve Deeds*, states:

To exhort the lazy to be quicker,
At the pure site of Kushinagar
You destroyed your deathless, vajra-like body
Entering nirvana—Homage to this deed.

This shows that entering this aspect of passing into nirvana was a way to exhort his disciples to enter into the Dharma. That is why the Buddha's sleeping position is described in this text.

When the commentary states *At the time of sleep put your mind onto a virtuous object with mindfulness and introspection*, it is advising us to recall the practice we have done during the day, as a way of not forgetting the virtuous object.

Next the commentary states that before going to sleep one makes that determination, '*I shall rise quickly*'. Due to that determination one will be able to wake up at whatever time one has set. Indeed, when we develop the strong determination to wake up at a certain time in the morning, then we really don't require any alarm and will naturally wake up at that time. Following that determination to wake up early, one sets the motivation for the next day: 'After I wake up I will continue to engage in the practice of Dharma as a way to benefit sentient beings'. So in this way, prior to going to sleep one sets one's motivation for the next day.

If one goes to sleep with a virtuous mind and love and compassion in one's heart, and determines to wake up with an attitude of love and compassion, then it is most likely that one will wake up in that state of mind. Waking in a virtuous frame of mind would really be a wonderful way to start the next day. So sleeping, in itself, can be a virtuous activity. That is why, among the fifty-two mental factors, sleep is specifically included in the category of the changeable mental factors. If one has a virtuous mind prior to going to sleep then the whole period of sleep will be virtuous. Whereas if one has a negative mind prior going to sleep then that period will be a non-virtuous or negative state, and if the mind is neutral then sleep will be in a neutral state. Thus it is possible to turn sleep into a virtuous deed.

This is very practical advice. By remembering love and compassion before going to bed, if one sleeps for six hours for example, then during those six hours one will have gained the benefit of leaving the imprint of love and compassion on one's mind. It is quite unlikely that we will find the time during the day to spend six hours meditating just on love and compassion, so if we go to sleep with love and compassion on our mind, then that will ensure that our sleep becomes a really virtuous deed.

We can see how this advice ensures that even normal activities become a means to accumulate merit and virtue, and further develop our mind of love and compassion. As Shantideva advised earlier in the text, with the proper motivation we can turn normal activities such as eating and drinking into virtuous deeds. We can see that this advice is very pertinent for our practice in daily life. Other teachings give further explanations on the different states of sleep.

As indicated in the commentary, prior to going to sleep one should develop the intention: *Tomorrow I shall practise the Dharma with a newly regenerated body*. This indicates that one engages in the act of sleeping as a way to rejuvenate the

body. When one goes to sleep with that intention it ensures that the sleep itself will be free from attachment. As indicated earlier, one of the offering prayers with the practice of eating is, 'I consume this food not merely for myself, but in order to sustain my body for the practice of Dharma'. Here sleep is being presented in the same way—with the proper motivation it actually becomes an aid to the practice of Dharma.

Thus we can see how, as indicated in the teachings, whatever actions the bodhisattva engages in are only a means to accumulate virtue. From the preliminary motivation, every aspect of normal activity is turned into the practice of Dharma as a means to accumulate virtue. This can inspire us to try to follow this example with our own motivations and intentions in daily life.

1.3.3.3.2. Summary

The verse relating to this is:

97. *Out of the immeasurable actions
Of bodhisattvas, that are taught,
Until you can definitely practise them,
Take up the trainings of the mind.*

Here Shantideva sums up the practices that have been presented under the heading, Protecting Sentient Being's Minds by Training in the Action of Not Incurring Faults.

Gyalsab Je's commentary reads:

If one is not able to practise all the immeasurable divisions of the bodhisattva actions of generosity and so forth that are taught in the sutras and their commentaries, then one should first only engage in the practices of training one's mind that were explained earlier, until one is definitely able to carry out all the infinite bodhisattva actions.

As explained here, the practices of generosity and the rest of the perfections as well as the practices of the four means of gathering disciples have *immeasurable divisions*, meaning that there are incredibly extensive ways of engaging in these practices. Thus they have immeasurable divisions, and these immeasurable divisions are extensively explained in the sutras and the commentaries.

The Tibetan word *jong* can either refer to training in virtue or purification. As I have explained previously, when the word *jong* is used in context of virtue then it means to train one's mind to increase virtue. When it is used in the context of negativity then it means training one's mind to purify negativities by applying the antidotes so as not to experience the negative results of negativity. In this context it refers to training one's mind to generate bodhicitta. The earlier chapters presented very detailed and particular advice on how to train one's mind to generate bodhicitta. Therefore as the commentary explains, *one should first only engage in the practices of training one's mind, until one is definitely able to carry out all the infinite bodhisattva's actions*. Once one has trained one's mind well and generated bodhicitta, and that has been developed thoroughly and firmly, then one will be able to carry out all the extensive bodhisattva practices prescribed in the teachings.

Again, this is very pertinent advice about how to first train one's mind to generate bodhicitta, and then gradually engage in the practices. If one were to attempt to engage in all the extensive practices explained in the teachings, before having established a thorough basis, then one would not be able to follow any particular practice through. This is very relevant to our state of mind now as well.

So this summarising verse is very significant. If the teachings explain the many different aspects of the practices and so forth, they may not seem personally relevant if they are not subsumed into succinct practical advice that one can apply now. The most practical approach is to distil it down to something that is manageable for beginners so that they can use it as a basis to further develop their mind, and then later be able to engage in further practices.

1.4. The method for perfecting the trainings

The actual training of how to actually perfect the practices that were described earlier has two subdivisions:

1.4.1. The extended explanation

1.4.2. Concluding summary

1.4.1. The extended explanation

This is subdivided into four

1.4.1.1. The methods for purifying the training

1.4.1.2. The basis for training

1.4.1.3. The purpose of the trainings

1.4.1.4. The basis for engaging into listening and contemplating

1.4.1.1. THE METHODS FOR PURIFYING THE TRAINING

If one were to transgress some of the commitments, then this section provides advice on the method for purifying these downfalls.

In explaining the meaning of the verse Gyalsab Je raises this doubt:

Query: What should one do if one incurs faults despite practising the trainings?

To explain the meaning of the verse, he first says:

If one has received a root downfall, then, as it is explained in the *Compendium of Trainings*,

Recall the bodhisattva Akasgarbha in front and engage in purification.

If one receives the small or medium contaminations, the forty-six faults and other faults explained in the *Compendium of Trainings* then,

98. *Recite the Sutra of the Three Heaps,
Three times in the morning and in the evening.
Pacify the remainders of downfalls
In dependence on conquerors and bodhisattvas.*

So this verse is explaining how to purify the faults of the small and medium contaminations in one's training.

Those of you who recite the *Six Session Yoga* will recall after listing the eighteen root downfalls of the bodhisattva vows, there is a list of the four conditions that are necessary to incur a breach of those vows. What are they?

Student: Not regarding these as detrimental; not forsaking the wish to repeat such behaviour; delighting and taking pleasure in them; having no shame or consideration.

What are the two that do not need any of these conditions in order to breach that commitment?

Student: Giving up bodhicitta and holding distorted views

So, if all four conditions are intact then any breach of the vows will be a **great contamination**. Here, the small or medium contaminations refers to breaches of the vows that do not have all four conditions intact. Thus *if one receives the small or medium contamination* refers to breaching any of the bodhisattva vows, but without all four conditions intact. If one has the mind of not regarding the transgression as detrimental, then, regardless of whether some of the other

conditions are intact or not, it becomes a **medium contamination**, which is, in fact, quite a severe contamination. A **small contamination** is when either of the other three conditions are present, except for not regarding them as detrimental.

As I have mentioned previously the *forty-six faults* refers to breaches or downfalls of the bodhisattva vows. If there are either small or medium contaminations of those forty-six faults, or other faults as explained in the *Compendium of Trainings*, then one needs to engage in the purification as presented in the verse.

Gyaltsab Je presents the meaning of the verse:

...then one should confess three times in the day and three times at night, accumulate merits and recite the method to increase virtue and prevent it from being exhausted, i.e. the *Sutra of the Three Heaps*.

By taking refuge and in dependence on bodhicitta one pacifies the remaining downfalls with the four powers.

As the commentary explains, the way to purify these faults is by confessing them *three times in the day and three times at night*, and also engage in the means *to accumulate merit*. So this practice encompasses both confession and the means of accumulating merit. The way *to increase virtue and prevent it from being exhausted* is by engaging in the practice such as *The Sutra of the Three Heaps*, which is basically the *Thirty-Five Buddhas' Confession Prayer*.

As explained previously, the three heaps encompasses the heap of negativities, the heap of dedication and heap of rejoicing. By engaging in these practices one purifies both small and medium contaminations. This means that if one has not breached a commitment to the degree that it is a root downfall, then one can purify it through this practice. So this is a practice to purify minor breaches of the vows.

If one has actually broken the vows and incurred a root downfall, then one will have to apply the method of actually taking the vows again. Here, the text explains that *by taking refuge and in dependence on bodhicitta, one pacifies the remaining downfalls with the four powers*.

The first power, the power of reliance, is explicitly indicated here with taking refuge and generating bodhicitta. Then one applies the remaining three powers of the practice. This is the supreme method for purifying negativities. The four opponent powers were mentioned in detail in chapter two, so you can refer back to that. The main point presented here is that one needs to rely on these methods to purify the faults one has incurred through the breaches of one's commitments

1.4.1.2. BASIS FOR TRAINING

Here there are two verses, the first of which is:

99. *Whether from the point of view of self or other.
Whatever you do, on whatever occasion,
As taught, make it with effort
An occasion for the trainings.*

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je explains:

Regardless of whether it is for the purpose of self or others, whatever action of body, speech and mind one engages in, and during whatever occasion, the Conqueror taught all of these as opportunities for practice.

One should always make an effort not to receive a fault of the trainings while using these different occasions for one's practice.

As the commentary explains, the Buddha taught that whatever the occasion may be, regardless of whether it is to accomplish one's own purpose or the purpose of others, and whatever actions one engages in through one's three doors of body, speech and mind, they are to be treated as an opportunity for practice. Using these different occasions for practice is really the basis of all the trainings one engages in.

In stating *one should always make effort to not to incur a fault of the trainings*, the commentary is saying that in order to make the training pure, one should ensure that one does not incur any faults when engaging in that training. Thus one should always make an effort not to incur any fault while engaging in the trainings. More specifically, the time when one engages in practice is the time when one needs to ensure that one does not incur a fault.

The second verse in relation to this heading reads:

100. *There is nothing the children of
The conquerors do not practise.
For those proficient who abide in this manner
There is nothing that does not become
meritorious.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary states:

There is no object of knowledge the bodhisattva children of the conquerors do not use for practice. For those that are proficient in training in all objects, there is no action that does not become meritorious. Therefore, one should never allow the generation of faithlessness.

As explained here, *there is no object of knowledge the bodhisattva children of the conquerors do not use for practice*, which is a point that was emphasised earlier. For the purpose of benefiting others, bodhisattvas may engage in various forms of practice, or acquire skills such as the five major sciences of arts and crafts, medicine, grammar, logic, and philosophy as a means to benefit other sentient beings. To some, these may appear as mundane practices, making it very easy to be critical of a bodhisattva who is engaged in these. As you will recall, Nagarjuna presented all of these five sciences, emphasising that they are needed for the purpose of helping others. The point being raised here is that for those *that are proficient in training in all objects, there is no action that does not become meritorious. Therefore, one should never allow the generation of faithlessness*, which causes one to lose faith in a bodhisattva.

Gyaltsab Je is emphasising the need to protect one's mind from losing faith in a bodhisattva's deeds, in the belief that they are engaging in some sort of mundane activity. We need to take this as a personal instruction. As it is hard for us to know who is actually a bodhisattva it is possible that we might generate a critical mind if we see someone engaging in some mundane activity, and thus incur the heavy negativity of criticising a bodhisattva. The author of the commentary, Gyaltsab Je, emphasises this point in many of his other teachings. We need to be very careful about being critical of others, particularly of those who are engaging in various activities to benefit other beings.

1.4.1.3. THE PURPOSE OF THE TRAININGS

Here there are two sub-headings

1.4.1.3.1. Dedicating the virtue for the welfare of all sentient beings

1.4.1.3.2. Never give up the Mahayana spiritual friend and the training

1.4.1.3.1. *Dedicating the virtue for the welfare of all sentient beings*

The verse relating to this reads:

101. *Regardless of whether it is directly or indirectly
Do nothing but work for the purpose of sentient
beings.
Solely for the purpose of sentient beings
I dedicate all to enlightenment.*

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je explains:

Whether it is directly or indirectly for the welfare of sentient beings, always act for their welfare, and in no other way. Dedicate all virtues towards enlightenment, solely for the purpose of sentient beings.

As explained in the commentary, whether engaged directly or indirectly, bodhisattvas are always engaged in acts of benefiting other sentient beings. Whatever activities they engage in are for the benefit of other sentient beings, and they do not engage in any activity other than that. That summarises the activities of bodhisattvas—they are always for the benefit of other sentient beings. They then dedicate the virtues of those deeds towards enlightenment, solely for the purpose of sentient beings.

The very beginning of generating the altruistic mind of bodhicitta itself is for the benefit of sentient beings; the middle of engaging in the practices such as the six perfections is for the benefit of sentient beings; and then the ultimate goal of achieving enlightenment is also for the benefit of sentient beings. Therefore whatever activities bodhisattvas engage in are dedicated towards achieving ultimate enlightenment for the purpose of benefiting sentient beings.

Reflecting upon the bodhisattvas' deeds as being solely for the benefit of sentient beings—at the beginning, in the middle and at the end, the very achievement of enlightenment—inspires us to practise similarly. Setting the right motivation at the very beginning of the practice, engaging in the practice itself, and dedicating it at the end, making sure that it is intact, is a fruitful and purposeful practice. It is good to recall the example of the bodhisattvas' deeds to ensure that our actions are meaningful and purposeful.

1.4.1.3.2. *Never give up the Mahayana spiritual friend and the training*

The first section encompasses the qualities of a virtuous spiritual friend. The verse relating to this is:

102. *The constant virtuous friend is one who
Is proficient in the meaning of the Mahayana,
And never gives up even at the cost of their life,
The supreme bodhisattva disciplines.*

Here the *Bodhisattvacharyavatara* is presenting the qualities of the Mahayana guru or spiritual friend.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

The constant Mahayana virtuous friend is one who is an expert in all of the great Mahayana teachings as well as those who abide in the Mahayana vows, and the supreme Mahayana austerities and do not give them up even at the cost of their life.

The main point is that the qualities of the Mahayana virtuous friend are that they are skilled in all of the Mahayana treatises, as well as abiding in the Mahayana vows, the supreme Mahayana austerities, and do not give

them up at the cost of their life. Such are the qualities of the Mahayana spiritual friend, presented here in brief.

1.4.1.4. THE BASIS FOR ENGAGING IN LISTENING AND CONTEMPLATING

There are two subdivisions:

1.4.1.4.1. Training in dependence on sutras

1.4.1.4.2. Training in dependence on the commentaries

1.4.1.4.1. *Training in dependence on sutras*

Here there are two lines of verse

103ab. *Emulate the biography of Shrisambava
In the training of relying on the guru.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

From the life story of Shrisambava in the *Array of Stalks Sutra*,

The way of relying on the teacher: Child of good family, the bodhisattvas who are perfectly guided by virtuous friends will not fall into the lower realms.

One should train according to how it is explained extensively in this sutra.

This explains that the sutras confirm that *bodhisattvas who are perfectly guided by virtuous friends will not fall into the lower realms*.

This indicates that those who rely on a virtuous friend without breaking their commitments will not fall into the lower realms. So the advice here is one should train as explained extensively in the sutras.

Of course, there are more extensive explanations on the ten different ways of relying on a spiritual friend in the Lam Rim teachings.

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

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