
Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

བྱང་ལྷན་མེས་ཀྱི་སྤྱོད་པ་ལ་འཇུག་པ་བཞུགས་སོ།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

23 September 2014

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

You can generate the motivation for receiving the teaching 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 practise well.

1.4.1.4. THE BASIS FOR ENGAGING IN LISTENING AND CONTEMPLATING

Having presented the qualities of a Mahayana spiritual friend, the text then presents the basis on which to engage in perfecting the trainings in 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

This section is covered two verses:

103. *Emulate the biography of Shrisambava
In the training of relying on the guru
Understanding this and other advice by the
buddhas,
Through reading the sutras.*

104. *The sutras generate understanding of the
trainings
Therefore read the sutras.
First, read the
Sutra of the Essence of Space.*

We covered the meaning of the first two lines last week. In his commentary Gyaltsab Je explains the meaning of the remaining six lines thus:

Furthermore, the points of advice from this treatise and other advice taught by the Buddha should be understood by reading the Mahayana sutras.

One should read the sutras because in them the trainings are explained extensively. Specifically, those that have generated the engaging vows should read first of all the *Sutra of the Superior Essence of Space*.

When the commentary states *the points of advice from this treatise*, it is referring to the *biography of Shrisambava*, which gives advice on how to rely on a spiritual friend. We covered that last week. Relying on *other advices taught by the Buddha*, refers to the advice given in the sutras on the bodhisattva trainings, which *should be understood by reading the Mahayana sutras*. So one needs to read and familiarise oneself with the Mahayana sutras in order to understand the advice on how to train in the bodhisattva practices.

The commentary then explains, *one should read the sutras because in them the trainings are explained extensively*. This is also very clear so I don't think it needs any further clarification.

As further explained, *specifically, those that have generated the engaging vows should read first of all the Sutra of the Superior Essence of Space*, which has extensive explanations of the bodhisattva vows. This sutra identifies the eighteen root downfalls of the bodhisattva vows, and how transgressions of those vows are incurred. It also explains very extensively how to purify each of those transgressions. As indicated in the commentary, one should refer to these explanations from the very beginning so as to avoid transgressing these vows, and also to learn how to purify any transgressions of those vows if they were to incur.

Those of us who have taken the bodhisattva vows need to take this as personal advice. It is not sufficient to take the vows and then just sit back and relax. Rather, one needs to endeavour to really understand the eighteen root downfalls, and how to purify them if one were to transgress them. It is very important that we really familiarise ourselves with the bodhisattva vows and the advice on how to avoid any transgressions. While you may not have access to a translation of the *Sutra of the Superior Essence of Space*, you do have access to the many texts and commentaries that explain the bodhisattva vows, what the transgressions are and so forth. So it is important to become familiar with them. Also, as presented earlier, if the transgression is a small or medium contamination, then one purifies it by reciting the *Thirty-five Buddhas Confession Prayer* with the four powers intact.

1.4.1.4.2. Training in dependence on the commentaries

There are two verses relating to this heading, the first of which reads:

105. *Since that which one practises continuously
Is shown even more extensively
In the Compendium of Trainings, one must
Read it repeatedly as well.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary on this verse reads:

Those that train and practise should also study repeatedly the *Compendium of Trainings*, where it explains extensively in thirty-two aspects how to give, protect, purify and increase one's body, possessions, and roots of virtue.

When the commentary explains *those that train and practice should also study repeatedly the Compendium of Trainings* it is referring to another text by Shantideva, in which he explains very extensively the ways and means of engaging in the bodhisattva trainings. His Holiness the Dalai Lama has presented teachings on the *Compendium of Trainings* on a number of occasions. If you have access to any translations of it in English, it would be good to read them.

The *Compendium of Trainings* has an extensive explanation of the *thirty-two aspects of how to give, protect, purify and increase one's body, possessions and roots of virtue*.

One engages in the practice of *giving* one's **body** at the appropriate time, and as well as engaging in mental training on giving one's body for the benefit of others. One also has to engage in the practice of *protecting* it, as we need our body for achieving higher purposes. Thus we need to understand the proper contexts for both giving and protecting one's body. We need to *purify* our

body to ensure our generosity is not soiled with negativities, or by any physical defects that would hinder our practice. Then we need to *increase* our virtue, by accumulating the appropriate causes to continuously obtain a body that is endowed with the eight ripened qualities in future lifetimes.

Just as there are the four practices of giving, protecting, purifying and increasing with respect to one's body, the same practices are applied to giving one's **possessions**.

The practice of being *generous* with one's **virtue** refers, for example, to dedicating one's virtue to the welfare of others. *Protecting* virtue refers to protecting whatever virtue one has accumulated from being destroyed by anger. *Purifying* means ensuring that the virtue is not soiled or stained with self-interest for the sake of this life, or even a future life. If one were to accumulate virtue just for the mere intention of protecting oneself from the lower realms, then that would be accumulating virtue out of self-interest. Rejoicing in one's virtues is the way to *increase* one's virtue.

With reference to the thirty-two aspects of giving, protecting, purifying, and increasing, there are four aspects of giving the body, four aspects of giving possessions and four aspects of giving virtue, making up twelve aspects of the perfection of generosity. We can also apply these four aspects to the remaining perfections of morality, patience, joyous effort and so forth. That makes twenty aspects, making thirty-two aspects in all.

The four aspects of giving are specifically explained in *Liberation in the Palm of your Hand*, and you can relate that to all the perfections. As you have easy access to the English translation it would be good for you to take the initiative to read it for yourselves. Next time I might quiz you on whether you've checked it out or not.

This also applies to any explanations in texts that have been translated in English; you need to take the initiative to actually refer to those texts and read their presentation. That is how you will benefit from my reference to them. If I mention a text and you think "OK, it must have been mentioned there" and just leave it at that, then you will not derive the benefit of understanding the topic in greater detail.

As a personal instruction, it is good to try to recall these four aspects of giving, protecting, purifying and increasing whenever we engage in any practice. For example, whenever we accumulate virtue or purify negative karma, it is good to relate that practice to these four aspects.

The next verse in this section of the text reads:

*106. Or, read at least the Compendium of Sutras
Which summarises, and
Put also effort into reading the second one
Composed by Nagarjuna.*

As Gyalsab Je explains in his commentary:

If one is not able to do this, then one should read at least the *Compendium of Sutras*, composed by the master himself, and the second one composed by Nagarjuna, which summarise the sutras.

If one is not able to do this, refers to not being able to relate to the extensive explanations presented in the *Compendium of Trainings*. That being the case, *one should at*

least read the Compendium of Sutras, which is also composed by the master himself, indicating Shantideva. *And the second one composed by Nagarjuna*, refers to another commentary of same name, *Compendium of Sutras*, which was composed by Nagarjuna, in which the meaning of the sutras is summarised.

Basically the advice is to refer to these texts on the bodhisattva vows: the *Compendium of Trainings*, or if that is too extensive, the *Compendium of Sutras*, or the text with the same name that was composed by Nagarjuna.

1.4.2. Concluding summary

The verse relating to this reads:

*107. That which has not been prohibited
Should be practised.
To protect the minds of worldly beings,
Practise correctly upon seeing the trainings.*

Gyalsab Je's commentary reads:

One should abandon that which has been prohibited in the sutras and commentaries and one should practise that which has not been prohibited. The purpose is to protect the minds of the worldly beings and prevent the generation of faithlessness. To this end one should, upon recognising the trainings of a bodhisattva, practise them and train in them.

This is a very clear presentation of the distinction between what is to be adopted and what is to be discarded. Put succinctly, one should abandon that which is prohibited or forbidden in the sutras and commentaries.

If one is uncertain as to what one should abandon, then refer to the sutras and the commentaries that explain what is forbidden, and which therefore should be abandoned. If the text states 'This act is forbidden', then the practice is to avoid engaging in that forbidden action. The teachings also present the practices that one should engage in, or adopt. This is how, by relying on the sutras and the commentaries, one makes the distinction between what is to be abandoned, and what is to be adopted.

Yet all too often we seem to adopt what has been forbidden in the sutras, and abandon what has not been forbidden! Out of confusion we ordinary beings actually adopt the opposite of what the sutras and commentaries advise. Here we are being advised to change our approach, and to gain a clear understanding of what is to be abandoned and what is to be adopted.

Furthermore, as explained here in the commentary, *the purpose of engaging in this practice is to protect the minds of the worldly beings as a way to prevent the generation of faithlessness* in ordinary or worldly beings, which means to protect their mind from losing faith in the Dharma.

2. CONCLUDING SUMMARY SHOWING THAT ONE HAS TO PRACTISE THE MEANING AND NOT JUST THE WORDS

This is subdivided into two:

- 2.1. Guard always with mindfulness and introspection
- 2.2. The actual meaning

2.1. Guard always with mindfulness and introspection

The relevant verse reads:

*108. Investigate repeatedly during
Actions of body and mind.*

*Merely this, in brief,
Is the definition of introspection.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

Investigate repeatedly, while engaging in the actions of body, speech and mind, with the wisdom that can distinguish between having transgressed the training or not and neutral actions, and whether or not one has fallen under the control of the afflictions.

This alone is in brief the definition of not degenerating introspection.

This is very pertinent advice, which, of course, I also emphasise regularly in my teachings. Its relevance for our daily life and practice cannot be underestimated. As presented here very clearly, we need to *investigate* our *actions of body, speech and mind repeatedly* at the time of those actions. In other words, we need to maintain constant mindfulness throughout all our actions.

Check whether any physical action is virtuous, non-virtuous or neutral, and whether it is in line with the trainings or not. Likewise, check whether your speech is virtuous, non-virtuous or neutral and whether one is transgressing the trainings. Do the same with the mind. We need to conduct a constant dialogue with our mind, always being vigilant of our actions of body, speech and mind.

This, in brief, is the definition of not degenerating introspection, which means maintaining our introspection, and not allowing it to degenerate. This act of investigating our body, speech and mind throughout all activities is called introspection, and we should not allow it to degenerate.

In summary, the main point being presented here is that we need to be constantly vigilant about our state of mind in all our actions and activities. As presented earlier, one way to check whether one's physical, verbal or mental actions are virtuous or not is by acquainting oneself with the explanations in the teachings. If we are engaging in something that is forbidden then it is a non-virtuous action; if we are engaging in something that is not forbidden, or something that is encouraged, then that is a virtuous action; if actions are not specified in the teachings as needing to be adopted or to be discarded, then they are considered to be neutral.

2.2. The actual meaning

The relevant verse is:

109. *They all have to be practised with the body.
What is accomplished by only talking about it?
Is the sick person cured
Merely by studying medicine?*

The first part of the explanation in the commentary reads:

Having understood these points and the need for them to be practised, one needs to put them into practise accordingly with this body. Without practice, merely by reciting many lists, what purpose will one achieve? None whatsoever! For example, is a person cured merely by studying the instructions on the medicine? No, they are not.

As explained in the commentary, *they all have to be practised with the body*, means that these points actually have to be put into practice. It is not enough to merely

know about them—one should actually engage in practising them.

As further explained in the commentary, if *one merely recites many lists* or quotes from many texts and so forth, but without practising what they advise, then *what purpose will one achieve?* This is a rhetorical question, and the answer '*none whatsoever*' indicates that there is no purpose at all.

In response to the lines from the root verse, *What is accomplished by only talking about it? Is the sick person cured merely by studying medicine?* the commentary explains that when a patient is prescribed a medication, they have to actually take the medication in order to be cured. It is not sufficient for them to merely read the instructions on how to take the medicine—that won't help to cure them.

Gyaltsab Rinpoche goes on to say:

In brief, although there are the three types of morality, it is important to initially train in the morality of restraint, either by actually adopting the rules of individual liberation or those which are in common with them ...

As presented here, *there are the three types of morality*, and *it is important to initially train in the morality of restraint*, which means not committing misdeeds. One practises the morality of restraint *by adopting the rules of individual liberation*, or those which are *in common with those vows*. As I have indicated many times in previous teachings, morality serves as the basis of all other practices. Without sound morality, one will not be able to accomplish any other more advanced practices. So the self-liberation vows are the very foundation on which to take and observe the bodhisattva vows, as well as the tantric vows. Refraining from the ten non-virtuous deeds is common to all three sets of vows. As I have indicated previously, protecting oneself from the seven misdeeds of body and speech is the basis for refraining from many other misdeeds. In other words, when you apply the practice of refraining from the seven non-virtuous deeds of body and speech, you will naturally refrain from many other misdeeds. Thus the morality of restraint serves as the basis for other practices.

Next the commentary presents the reason why it is essential to practise the morality of restraint:

...for if one protects them, then the others will also be protected, if one does not protect them then the others will also not be protected. If the morality of restraint degenerates, then all vows degenerate, as explained in the *Compendium*.

This directly relates to our own practice, and so it is a personal instruction.

As Gyaltsab Je further mentions:

If one thinks that the vows of individual liberation belong to the hearers and practises the trainings of bodhisattvas apart from them, then that is a great fault. One should train in the morality of restraint that abandons the natural non-virtues and is the basis for the morality of accumulating virtue and benefiting sentient beings. One should rely repeatedly on restraint to the opposing conditions of morality, and practise it in conjunction with the six perfections.

This is all quite clear. The morality of restraint should be practised in conjunction with the six perfections.

Moreover, each of the perfections can be practised in conjunction with the rest of the six perfections. Thus there is the generosity of generosity, the generosity of ethics, the generosity which is practised in conjunction with patience, joyous effort and so forth. Of course I have presented this many, many times previously but I'm not sure if you have retained it. I'm not implying that you don't have the understanding, rather I say this as a way to refresh your memory, to remind you that you do have the knowledge of these topics presented in earlier teachings.

Summarising Verse

Gyaltsab Je ends his commentary on this particular chapter with this summarising verse, in which he very succinctly mentions the essence of this whole practice.

The person taking the essence
Of practising the sequence of the path of the three
kinds of beings,
Depends on protecting mindfulness and
introspection.
Hence they should always endeavour to be proficient
in these.

As mentioned very clearly, taking *the essence of practising the sequence of the path of the three kinds of beings*—which are the practices in conjunction with the small scope; practices in conjunction with the medium scope and the great scope—*depends upon protecting mindfulness and introspection* at all times. Therefore one should endeavour to completely understand, be proficient, and have full knowledge of introspection and mindfulness.

II THE NAME OF THE CHAPTER

The final outline that concludes the chapter is a presentation of the name of the chapter. The root text reads:

This is the fifth chapter of Introduction to the Action of Bodhisattvas called Protecting Introspection.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary concludes:

This is the commentary on the fifth chapter called Protecting Introspection from the commentary on the *Introduction to the Actions of Bodhisattvas*, called *The Entrance for the Children of the Conquerors*.

That concludes the fifth chapter.

To explain the context of the next chapter we need to return to the subdivisions introduced in chapter 1.¹

2. The actual explanation of the stages of the path

2.2. The method for taking the essence

2.2.2. Explaining the individual meanings²

2.2.2.2. THE WAY OF TRAINING IN THE PRACTICES OF GENERATING THE TWO MINDS

2.2.2.2.2. The Way of Training in the Actions, the Perfections

2.2.2.2.2.1. The way of meditating on conscientiousness, the limb preventing the degeneration of the training in the mind of enlightenment³

2.2.2.2.2.2. Explaining the way of training in morality, by relating it to introspection and mindfulness, the methods for keeping virtuous dharmas pure⁴

2.2.2.2.2.3. Explaining the way of training in the remaining four perfections:

This is subdivided into four:

2.2.2.2.2.3.1. The way of training in patience

2.2.2.2.2.3.2. The way of training in enthusiasm

2.2.2.2.2.3.3. The way of training in the common and uncommon mental stabilisations that are contained in calm abiding

2.2.2.2.2.3.4. Training in the nature of superior insight—wisdom

CHAPTER 6: THE WAY OF TRAINING IN PATIENCE⁵

There are two parts to the chapter.

I. Explaining the text of the chapter

II. The name of the chapter

I. EXPLAINING THE TEXT OF THE CHAPTER

There are two main subdivisions of the explanation:

1. Meditating on patience earnestly by eliminating the obstacles to establishment and abiding

2. Applying to the mind the methods to establish patience

1. Meditating on patience earnestly by eliminating the obstacles to establishment and abiding

This has two subdivisions:

1.1. The faults of anger

1.2. The benefits of patience

1.1. The faults of anger

This is subdivided into three:

1.1.1. The unobservable faults

1.1.2. The observable faults

1.1.3. A summary of the faults

1.1.1. The unobservable faults

Here there are two subdivisions:

1.1.1.1. Anger destroys one's roots of virtue

1.1.1.2. Discerning the faults of anger and the benefits of patience and making an effort to meditate on patience.

1.1.1.1. ANGER DESTROYS ONE'S ROOTS OF VIRTUE.

In our next sessions we can go through the first verse under this heading.

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

Transcript prepared by Bernii Wright

Edit 1 by Adair Bunnett

Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

Edited Version

© Tara Institute

¹ See the teaching of 26 March 2013.

² Introduced in the teaching of 2 July 2013.

³ Covered in chapter 4, introduced on 25 February 2014.

⁴ Covered in chapter 5, introduced on 20 May 2014.

⁵ The numbering recommences with the new chapter.