
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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As usual we can spend some time in meditation

[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 teachings, and put them into practice well.

The sixth chapter, which we are about to start, explains the antidote to anger, beginning with:

1.1. The faults of anger

1.1.1. The unobservable faults

1.1.1.1. ANGER DESTROYS ONE'S ROOTS OF VIRTUE

Generally, understanding the relevance of practising patience is said to be developed when one contemplates the disadvantages of anger. So the more we contemplate the disadvantages of anger, the more we will see the need to practise patience. I have presented the definition of anger previously, so I need not go into it again as you can refer to that earlier explanation.¹ It may also be presented later in the chapter.

Anger destroys the roots of virtue is to be understood as explaining that basically, anger obstructs that which brings about a pleasant result, which is virtue.

The first verse of the chapter reads:

1. *All the wholesome actions
Of generosity and offerings to the tathagatas,
Built up over a thousand eons,
Are destroyed by anger.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary on this verse reads as follows:

Since anger is the ultimate obstacle to the generation and abiding of virtuous dharmas in one's continuum, one should initially meditate on the faults of anger, and then consequently strive to abandon anger.

One instance of anger at a bodhisattva destroys from the root all the virtues arising from generosity accumulated over one hundred and one thousand eons, as well as all the wholesome actions of having made offerings to the Three Jewels such as the tathagatas, wholesome actions of meditating and morality.

As presented here, *anger is the ultimate obstacle to the generation and abiding of virtuous dharmas in one's continuum*. This is a significant point. The ultimate obstacle for the initial generation of virtue is anger, which means that when anger arises it obstructs the ability to actually generate virtue. Moreover, if one has already accumulated some virtue, then anger will prevent that virtue from abiding and remaining in our mental continuum. So anger is really the main obstacle to both accumulating and retaining virtue. We need to regard these significant points as a personal instruction.

Indeed, no-one is happy when they are angry. The more anger someone has in their mind, the less peace they will experience. So the more we reflect on the disadvantages of anger, the more likely it is that we will be able to prevent anger from taking root in our mind. In the event that we do become angry, then reflecting on the disadvantages of anger will help to reduce the intensity of that anger. So the advice presented here is really great personal advice for us.

The commentary then explains that *one should initially meditate on the faults of anger, and strive to abandon anger*. This means contemplating again and again the faults of anger. From our own experience we know that from the moment anger arises in our mind we feel unhappy and unsettled. We really need to reflect on these experiences and understand how anger actually affects us.

As further explained in the commentary, *one instance of anger at a bodhisattva destroys all virtues*. It is explained in other teachings that this relates mainly to an intense form of anger. Thus, even an instant of such intense anger *will destroy all the virtues arising from generosity accumulated over one hundred and one thousand eons, as well as the wholesome actions of having made offerings to the Three Jewels, such as tathagatas*. This means that whatever virtues one has accumulated from wholesome actions of offerings to the Three Jewels, or from taking refuge in the Three Jewels and so forth, as well as the *wholesome actions of meditating and practising morality*, is destroyed in a moment of intense anger. Thus the virtues that arise from these three main actions of positive deeds such as making offerings, meditating and morality, will be destroyed in an instant of intense anger. When the commentary refers to destroying virtue from its *root*, it is to be understood that this does not mean that anger completely destroys the actual root of virtue itself. Rather, it significantly postpones the pleasant results of virtue, which will be experienced much later in the future. This is explained in other teachings.

Then Gyaltsab Je goes on to say:

Not only this, but in a quote used by the Sarvastivadin², and which is cited in the *Compendium of Trainings*, it says that if a fully ordained monk humiliates a companion in the pure trainings, then he has destroyed the merit equalling the merit of being reborn as a thousandfold wheel-turning king for as many times as the particles one covers, down to the golden wheel, with one's body when prostrating. This merit is accumulated when one makes a prostration to a stupa that contains the hair or nails of the Buddha.

As explained in the commentary, the merits that one accumulates from prostrations is *to be reborn as a thousandfold wheel-turning king for as many times as the particles one covers, down to the golden wheel, with one's body when prostrating*. This is a description of the depth and breadth, from the surface down, of the particles that are covered when one prostrates. As explained in the treatises, the golden wheel marks the end of the earth. Of course, that is something that cannot be seen or proven scientifically.

But then again, have there not been cases in recent times showing that not being seen, even with scientific means, doesn't necessarily mean that there is nothing there? We can take the recent example of the disappearance of the Malaysian Airlines plane. Despite all the searching by so many countries they were not able to find the plane or debris anywhere. But not being able to find it doesn't mean that it

¹ See, for example the teaching of 27 February 2007.

² Those That Assert That All Exists—a school of Buddhism.

doesn't exist. Despite all the modern instruments it has not yet been found, so it seems that scientists are not able to find everything that exists.

In any case, the main point here is that the merit one obtains from doing prostrations is that one will create the cause to be reborn as a thousandfold wheel-turning king—a universal monarch—as many times as the particles that one's body covers when prostrating. However this merit can be destroyed when one humiliates, criticises or becomes angry with *a companion in the pure training*. A companion in pure training doesn't necessarily have to be a bodhisattva, so becoming angry with pure practitioners can also destroy one's accumulated virtues.

What we can derive here as a personal instruction is that even though we put an effort into accumulating virtues with practices such as prostrations and meditating, that merit can be destroyed in a moment of anger. There are those who have commented that while they can adopt a seemingly calm and composed mind during meditation, the moment they go out into the world again they soon become upset and angry once more. That is the point being addressed here: we need to be very mindful and careful to ensure that we don't destroy the merit from our positive deeds by becoming angry.

At this point we can also recall the great benefits of dedication. As explained in the teachings, if, after we have accumulated a certain amount of virtue, we immediately dedicate it to the ultimate goal of enlightenment, then that will protect one's virtues from being destroyed by anger. The analogy that is presented to illustrate this is that when a drop of water falls into an ocean it merges with that ocean, and we cannot say that it has evaporated until the whole ocean has evaporated. Similarly, when one dedicates one's virtues to the ultimate goal of enlightenment for the benefit of other sentient beings, then that merit will not be exhausted. It is also explained that one can partake of the benefits of that virtue. The more we experience the positive virtues, the more we will continue to experience their positive benefits. I have explained this in detail previously. So dedicating one's virtues is also another means of protection.

Also, as presented previously, one of the most powerful antidotes for anger is, of course, meditating on emptiness. The realisation of emptiness is the ultimate antidote that protects one from anger.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary continues:

It is taught that the anger that destroys the virtue of one hundred or one thousand eons has to be directed at a bodhisattva, which is also taught in the *Introduction to the Middle Way*. The statement in the beginning of the chapter on the four resting places in the *Great Commentary on the Vinaya*, says that anger destroys one's vows, clearly refers to the fact that strong anger destroys one's roots of virtue.

This is quite clear. The commentary then states:

Further, since it is also stated in the *Blaze of Reasoning* that wrong views and harmful intent destroy one's roots of virtue, one should strive, among other things, to contain one's anger.

Blaze of Reasoning, composed by Bhavaviveka, states that it is not only anger that destroys one's root of virtue, but wrong views can do the same. Holding onto wrong views can also destroy one's roots of virtue. This is explained very clearly in that treatise.

The main point here is that one should strive to contain or control one's anger for these reasons. Of course more detailed explanations about the faults of anger and benefits of patience and so forth can be found in the Lam Rim teachings. So you can also refer to those explanations.

1.1.1.2. DISCERNING THE FAULTS OF ANGER AND THE BENEFITS OF PATIENCE, MAKE AN EFFORT TO MEDITATE ON PATIENCE

As presented here, the supreme means to overcome anger is to discern the faults of anger and contemplate the benefits of patience.

The sequence of this presentation is really very practical because without seeing its faults there will be no initiative to overcome anger. Furthermore, if one does not see the benefit of practising patience, then there will be no impetus to develop patience. So discerning the faults of anger and meditating on patience are crucial.

The verse relating to this outline is:

2. *There is no negativity like hatred,
There is no austerity like patience,
Therefore meditate on patience
In earnest in various ways!*

Here Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

There is no negativity like anger for obstructing the generation of the path and destroying virtue, and there is no austerity like patience for destroying the painful heat of the afflictions. Therefore meditate on patience in earnest in a variety of ways and methods!

This presentation is similar to that in the Lam Rim. In saying, *There is no negativity like anger for obstructing the generation of the path and destroying virtue*, the commentary is indicating that anger has two fundamental disadvantages.

The first is that it will hinder the ripening of the positive consequences of virtue. We all want to experience the positive consequences of the virtue that we have accumulated, and anger prevents the actualisation of those positive consequence.

The second is that the moment anger arises, it generates the causes to experience negative ripened consequences, such as being reborn in the hell realm, or one of the other unfortunate realms. Just as we want to experience happiness, we don't want to experience any kind of negative consequences. However, the moment anger arises it establishes the causes for unwanted experiences.

When we contemplate these two disadvantages then we can begin to get a sense of the gravity of the consequences of anger. Of course, there are many different kinds of negativities, but there is no greater negativity than hatred or anger.

Further, as explained in the commentary, *there is no austerity like patience for destroying the painful heat of the afflictions*. Here the misery of the afflictions is likened to the physical pain of experiencing extreme heat. This analogy illustrates the extent of the mental misery and anguish that one experiences from the afflictions.

This misery is overcome by the practice of patience, and as the commentary states, there is no austerity like patience. This is a very significant point. As you will recall, patience is classified into the patience of willingly enduring difficulties and hardships, and the patience of not retaliating when harm is inflicted by others. Hardships can arise from external problems and difficulties, and more particularly

from one's practices. So willingly enduring and accepting hardships and harm is indeed a great practice of austerity.

Therefore, as the commentary states, *meditate on patience* as a prelude to all the different methods of applying patience that will be presented later on in this chapter using logical reasons and so forth. So having contemplated these points one must strive to meditate in earnest to practise patience. *Earnest in a variety of ways and methods* includes the different classifications of patience mentioned earlier, as well as the various techniques and reasons and so forth.

1.1.2. The observable faults

Having considered the unobservable faults of anger, we now turn to the observable faults of anger. These are faults which we can immediately relate to, as we can see them in our life right now.

Observable faults are subdivided into two:

1.1.2.1. Anger takes away the opportunity for physical and mental wellbeing

1.1.2.2. It turns away friends and so forth

We have all experienced the effects of intense anger on our physical health and mental wellbeing, and we also know how anger turns away friends and so forth.

1.1.2.1. ANGER TAKES AWAY THE OPPORTUNITY FOR PHYSICAL AND MENTAL WELLBEING

Basically this heading is stating that anger robs us of opportunity for either physical or mental wellbeing. The verse relating to this outline reads:

3. *If one holds the painful mind of hatred
Then one's mind will not experience peace.
One will not attain joy or bliss,
Sleep will be elusive and there will be no stability.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary on this verse reads:

Since it generates intense suffering, if one holds the pain-like mind of anger, one cannot experience the joy of having pacified mental suffering. One will also not attain mental joy or physical bliss, sleep will be elusive and the stability of a mind abiding in its natural state will be non-existent.

Pain-like mind of anger indicates that while anger does not produce actual physical suffering, the mental anguish generated by anger is equated to intense physical suffering. So, *if one holds the pain-like mind of anger one cannot experience the joy of having pacified mental suffering*. Because of the anguish of anger, one cannot experience the joy of having overcome mental suffering.

As indicated earlier, anger robs us of any sense of joy or happiness, meaning that we will not have the opportunity to have a mind that has pacified mental suffering. This means that when we experience mental anguish and suffering there is a lack of joy and happiness in our mind. As a consequence, *one will also not attain mental joy or physical bliss*. The point here is that because of the lack of mental happiness, one will not experience any physical wellbeing as well, and thus *sleep and so forth will be elusive*.

Furthermore, *the stability of the mind abiding in its natural state will be non-existent*.

1.1.2.2. IT TURNS AWAY FRIENDS AND SO FORTH

This heading refers to the fact that intense anger turns away friends and so forth, and is covered in the next one and a half verses.

4. *Even those who became dependent on
The offerings of wealth and honour
Will rise up and kill
The malevolent lord.*

- 5ab. *Friends will get disgusted,
Even those gathered with generosity will leave.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains the meaning of these verses thus:

Even those that have become dependent on the extended offerings of wealth and honour will rise up and kill the malevolent lord. Anger will also exasperate friends and cause them to be disgusted. It will also disrupt the affection of those who were gathered with generosity. Therefore one should abandon anger.

The commentary explains that even *those dependent on the extended offerings of wealth and honour will rise up and kill a lord* who is infested with hatred or anger. Those who are dependent on a lord or master who provides them with all their basic needs will, in the event that the master or lord harbours ill-will and anger, rise up and kill him. The kindness of the lord towards his subjects in some cases could be similar to that of parents who meet all the needs of their children, who are completely dependent on their parents to feed and clothe them. Even though the subjects have similarly depended on and received benefits from their lord, it is possible that they will rise up and kill him if he treats them with a negative mind of anger.

Even these days we see so much destruction caused through anger, even between very close relations. There are those who kill their employer, and in the worst case, we even see children killing their own parents and parents taking the life of their own child, or a wife killing her husband, or a husband killing his wife and so forth. We can see so many destructive behaviours that are all initiated out of anger.

As explained in the commentary, *anger will also exasperate friends and cause them to be disgusted*. If a subject can kill their own lord or master out of anger, there is no need to mention that friends and so forth will be exasperated and disgusted by anger. This point is definitely relevant. We can see so many situations where it only takes a frown, or some unpleasant remark to separate good friends. We can become really disgusted with others out of anger. How often do we hear remarks such as, 'Oh, I will never go out with them again'? Inappropriate gestures expressed with anger, such as foul remarks, a frowning face and so forth can definitely destroy relationships.

The main point is that anger turns away friends, relatives or partners and so forth. We can definitely relate to this significant point, and we need to be really mindful of it. One can also understand that if anger disrupts relationships of all kinds, then the opposite of anger, which is patience, will bring one closer to others, and lead to more harmonious relationships. So this contrast between anger and patience needs to be understood.

Furthermore, *anger will also disrupt the affection of those gathered with generosity*. Some may have gathered friends or subjects and so forth through being generous. While on one hand being generous brings people closer to you, on the other hand anger will destroy that relationship.

Thus the conclusion is that having contemplated these obvious disadvantages and faults of anger *one should abandon anger*. The way to contemplate this point is to reflect upon how anger can lead to forgetting the kindness of others, and

actually turn them against us. Anger can also create a distance between otherwise close friends or companions. This is how one needs to contemplate again and again the many great faults of anger.

1.1.3. A summary of the faults

The next four lines of verse summarise the faults of anger.

- 5cd. *In short, there is nobody
That abides in happiness through anger.*
- 6ab. *The enemy that is anger creates suffering
In the here and the thereafter.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

In short, due to anger there is no abiding in happiness. The enemy of anger is the supreme cause for the shortcomings explained earlier, such as suffering in the present and later.

As the commentary explains, *due to anger there is no abiding in happiness*, which relates to the very pertinent point that when anger is present in the mind there is no opportunity for the mind to abide in happiness and peace. So it is anger that causes the lack of a sense of joy and happiness in the mind. His Holiness the Dalai Lama also stresses this point and mentions it often in his teachings. He says that you can't find anyone who says that they are happy because they are angry! Anger gives no opportunity for any sense of joy or happiness in one's mind. That, in brief, is the main disadvantage of anger.

The commentary concludes, *therefore, the enemy of anger is the supreme cause for the shortcomings explained earlier, such as suffering in the present and later*, i.e. future lives.

1.2. The benefits of patience

I have, of course, presented this topic many times in the past. The relevant lines of verse read:

- 6cd. *Those who destroyed anger by focusing,
Will be happy here and thereafter.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

Should a person, after having contemplated well the shortcomings of anger, focus their mind and destroy anger, then this will be the cause for their very happiness in this life and future lives.

As clearly explained in the commentary, when one has seen and fully acknowledged the faults of anger through contemplating and meditating, and taken the initiative to cultivate patience, then that *act of destroying anger will be the cause for happiness* to be experienced *in this life* right now, as well as *in future lives*.

This point was also explained by Lama Tsong Khapa. When the cause of the mental anguish that arises from anger has been removed, then what remains is happiness. What obstructs happiness is mental anguish and once that unhappiness has been removed, we find happiness. So, as Lama Tsong Khapa points out, when one takes the initiative to destroy anger, one will experience continuous happiness in this life. The happiness we experience now in this life will, as explained here, also be a cause for further happiness, as it will be a cause to obtain the high status of being reborn as a human or in the god realms, and ultimately to become a cause for definite goodness.

When one obtains such high status, it will be with perfect conditions, e.g. a human body with all the perfect conditions intact. That too causes happiness in future lives. Then the commentary continues:

Therefore one should strive in abandoning anger. If one does not abandon anger, then there are very great shortcomings, as explained in the *Sutra of the Great Play of Manjushri*.

On one hand one should contemplate the great advantages of abandoning anger, and on the other hand one should contemplate the great disadvantages of not abandoning anger. Even though it is not specified in the outline, what we can also understand here is that there can also be unobserved future benefits of practising patience, as well as the observable practical benefits we will experience in this life, where we will abide continuously in joy and happiness. So we can extract this further meaning from this section of the text.

2. BRINGING TO MIND THE METHOD TO ESTABLISH PATIENCE

This has two sub-divisions:

- 2.1. Eliminating the cause of anger
- 2.2. Meditating on the benefits of patience

2.1. Eliminating the cause of anger

Here there are four sub-headings:

- 2.1.1. The nature of the cause, including the shortcomings
- 2.1.2. Advice to strive in the method to oppose anger
- 2.1.3. The actual method to oppose anger
- 2.1.4. Striving in abandoning anger after having analysed the cause for anger in detail

We can conclude here for this evening.

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

*Transcript prepared by Su Lan Foo
Edit 1 by Adair Bunnett
Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe
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