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# Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

བྱང་ཆུབ་སེམས་དཔའི་སྡོད་པ་ལ་འཇུག་པ་བཞུགས་སོ་

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

We can now generate the motivation for receiving the teachings on 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.

## 2.1. Eliminating the cause for anger

### 2.1.1. The nature of the cause, including the shortcomings

This is a presentation of the nature of the cause of anger, as well as its shortcomings. The relevant verse reads:

7. *Finding the nourishment of mental unhappiness,  
Which arises from the undesired and  
From obstructions to the desired,  
Hatred grows stronger and destroys self.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary opens with a hypothetical query:

Query: How does anger generate suffering?

Answer: Mental unhappiness, which comes either from that which causes the undesired or obstructs that which is desired by the self and that which is close to the self, is the nourishment which increases anger. Having found the nourishment of mental unhappiness, the body of hatred grows stronger and destroys self in this life and future lives.

This is a presentation of how anger arises within us. On a personal level, this understanding is really very helpful as it enables us to detect what causes us to feel angry in the first place. Recognising this process can help us to prevent anger from spiralling out of control.

How does anger generate suffering? The commentary begins by explaining that *mental unhappiness comes either from that which causes the undesired or obstructs that which is desired by the self and that which is close to the self*, i.e. relatives and so forth. As presented here, mental unhappiness arises due to undesired events affecting either oneself or those close to one, or an obstruction to what one desires. It is that mental unhappiness that is the *nourishment* or fuel for anger.

When we relate this to ourselves, we can see how true it is that we become really unhappy when we get what we don't want to experience, or when there is an obstruction to what we do desire to experience for ourselves and our close ones. As soon as our mind becomes unhappy we are prone to becoming angry. That is because, as presented here, mental unhappiness serves as a fuel to anger. Unhappiness nourishes and sustains anger just like food nourishes and sustains the body as it develops and

matures. Using this analogy the commentary says that, *having found the nourishment of mental unhappiness, the body of hatred grows stronger, and thus destroys our happiness in this life and in future lives*. These are really significant points about the underlying cause of anger.

We need to see the relationship between unhappiness and anger. We become unhappy when our desires are thwarted, or if we have to experience what we don't want. Then, because of that unhappiness, we focus on what we think has caused us pain and unhappiness, and anger arises. If it is an individual then our anger is directed at that person, and the more we think about how they have obstructed us, or caused us to experience something that we don't want, the more our anger increases. That is when we begin to regard the other person as an arch enemy.

We really need to understand how the process unfolds within our mind. We generate anger because we are unhappy. When we don't investigate thoroughly, we immediately blame the person who we consider has caused our unhappiness. However, if we investigate carefully, then we have to acknowledge that it is our own unhappiness that has caused the anger and which is creating so much mental agony and pain. When we use this sort of analysis we come to understand that it is that anger which is the real enemy, not the person.

Normally of course, we don't do that investigation, so we perceive external causes, such as a person or a particular situation, as the cause of our pain and unhappiness. When our mind is unhappy then, as presented here, that unhappiness fuels anger and nourishes it. As will be explained later, joy is the opposite of unhappiness, so being joyful will prevent unhappiness, which in turn prevents anger from arising. So, for example, if someone hits us with a stick, we start to feel unhappy as soon as we feel pain, and then, in a flash, we become angry with the person who inflicted that pain. But if we are not fazed by that one hit of a stick, and actually remain joyful, then there is no place for anger to arise.

The point made in the commentary is that as anger becomes stronger and stronger it destroys our happiness in this life and in future lives. Thus the exhortation, even though it is not mentioned specifically here, is that we must assiduously overcome anger.

When we consider the logic of the process by which we become angry we realise there is a state of mind between the event and the emotion of anger, which is our feeling of unhappiness. We are the owners of that unhappiness, so if we don't generate unhappiness then we will prevent the generation of anger. These are significant points that we really need to consider.

When we really embody this approach then we are practising the real meaning of patience. Many people comment on how amazing it is that His Holiness the Dalai Lama is so patient with the Communist Chinese. That is because His Holiness embodies this practice of patience so that what seems to be unimaginable becomes possible. If we really think about these significant points we will gain a very deep understanding. More details about this will be presented later on.

## 2.1.2. Advice to strive in the method to oppose anger

8. *Therefore I need to destroy the food  
Of this enemy of mine,  
An enemy who has no other function  
Aside from harming me.*

Here Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

Therefore I should destroy mental unhappiness, the nourishment of this enemy of mine. There is nothing that harms me more than this enemy of anger, and I should strive in destroying this arch enemy of mine.

As has just been explained, our mental unhappiness serves as a fuel for anger, *therefore I should destroy mental unhappiness which is nourishment of this enemy of mine*, i.e. anger. Furthermore, because *there is nothing that harms me more than this enemy of anger I should strive in destroying this enemy of mine*. In other words, one needs to make an effort to overcome the real enemy that causes distress and agony. This is another significant point. When anger arises it not only harms others, but it also harms oneself. When one recognises that anger has no other function than to harm oneself, then one can recognise it as being the real enemy that needs to be overcome. Anger has no redeeming features. From our own experience we know that the moment anger arises we immediately feel unsettled and uncomfortable. Not only does it cause mental agony now, but anger also affects future lives as well.

The virtues of patience were presented earlier. The direct opposites of the virtues of patience are the faults of anger. Recognising that, we need to really embrace this on a personal level and do our best to overcome anger. Of course, our ultimate goal is to completely abandon anger. Meanwhile, we should, as much as possible, try to resort to these reasons and think about the disadvantages of anger when it does arise. This will help to lessen the intensity of our anger and prevent it from escalating. So we can definitely take measures now to prevent anger from taking root and increasing in intensity.

As personal practice, we need to put the most effort into protecting our own mind from anger, rather than finding excuses, like thinking, 'Oh well, they're angry so I have the right to get angry too'. If one uses that as a reason then there will be no end to one's anger. Even if one cannot stop the other person from becoming angry, one can at least make an attempt to control one's own mind and prevent anger from arising. To that extent it will benefit oneself, as well as defusing the conflict with the other.

Indeed, it is fuelling anger that causes more and more trouble in any situation. There are so many wars going on, and when we look at the situation we can see that those who are rising up are so fuelled up and angry, for whatever reason, that they will do anything to fight back. If, rather than trying to appease that anger and settle them down, one adds further causes for them to become upset, they will naturally rise up and fight with an even more intense anger. With these kinds of situations how can there really be world peace? We can never expect world peace when more fuel is added to already tense situations, with people who are already feeling unsettled.

In fact the patience practised by the stronger towards the weak is, as the teachings explain, the most supreme

practice of patience. The *Thirty-seven Practices of a Bodhisattva* mentions that the practice of patience by the mighty against those who are weaker is a really supreme practice. As the mighty can very easily crush those who are less powerful, they have no need to practise patience. In contrast, the weaker have no choice at all. They often have to take whatever harm is inflicted on them because they don't dare to fight back with someone who is mightier. So practising patience in those circumstances is said to be not as great as the powerful being patient with the weaker. At a global level, a mightier nation should be able to tolerate those who are causing some disturbance and so forth. Then peace will be possible. However, I suppose that mighty nations would not find that reasonable.

When animosity or anger between two nations or groups of people is appeased, then there is room for negotiation and peace is possible, and when anger is not appeased, there is no possibility for negotiation and peace and so forth. That is really how it is. At a personal level it is exactly the same—when there is anger there is conflict.

In fact, when a really powerful enemy crushes you, you are so afraid that there is really no time to be angry. That was my response when the Chinese came into Tibet. Someone once asked me, 'When you had to flee, did you feel any anger towards the Chinese' and my response was, 'I didn't even have time to feel angry as I was so afraid. The only thing that came to my mind at that time was that my life was in danger, and so I had to flee'. When there are guns being fired, and heavy artillery being used, the constant fear leaves no time to feel angry.

The point is that when the stronger overpower the weaker, then the weaker ones have to accept that. We can see this also with parents and their children; if parents scold or spank a young child then, of course, the child cannot do anything in return as it is so small. So when the powerful practise patience, and do not inflict harm on the weaker ones, then that is indeed a supreme act of patience.

The current conflict in Syria and Iraq is a case in point. Syria is a small country, and it seems very easy for America and Australia to decide to go there. I'm not sure about that. America has a very big population. Australia is smaller so Australia has to be very careful, otherwise the conflict will come closer to home.

In the fourth chapter Shantideva used the example of an external enemy to show the danger of befriending the delusions. When you befriend an external foe it is possible that they will turn around and become your friend if you are kind to them. In contrast, if you are kind and nice to the delusions within, they will just become more powerful and cause you more harm. These are all significant points.

Another significant verse concerning overcoming the real enemy within explained that it is easier to cover one's feet to protect them against sharp objects than trying to cover the whole earth with leather.<sup>1</sup> Likewise, overcoming the inner enemy of the delusions is equivalent to overcoming

<sup>1</sup> *Bodhisattvacharyavatara*, chapter 5 verse 13.

all enemies. Some have confided in me that they have found this advice gives their practice real meaning and purpose. When we really contemplate these points they give us every reason to practise patience.

As we are inclined to engage in Dharma practice we need to derive the real essence of what is being presented here, and try to put it into practice. As presented in the teachings, we need to regard our internal afflictions and delusions as our real enemy, and use all our energy to combat and overcome them. Conversely, we need to practise love for our external enemies. So, in short, extend love towards external enemies, and don't be patient with internal enemies. Try to use every means to overcome those inner delusions. That is, in essence, the practice we need to adopt if we are to consider ourselves Dharma practitioners.

### **2.1.3. The actual method to oppose anger**

Once again we can take note of the sequence of outlines, although, of course, Gyaltsab Je's commentary only reflects what is presented in the actual text. We have just covered the reasons why it is necessary to apply the method to oppose anger. Now we are presented with the actual methods that oppose anger. Gyaltsab Je's meticulous outlines really bring out the logical presentation of Shantideva's text, and it is good for us to really relate to this text in a systemic way, as a way of integrating it in our practice. Rather than just thinking, 'Oh, this is just an outline', we can see that the outlines, just by themselves, have great purpose.

The actual method to oppose anger is subdivided into two:

2.1.3.1. It is unsuitable to generate mental unhappiness

2.1.3.2. The reason for that

#### **2.1.3.1. IT IS UNSUITABLE TO GENERATE MENTAL UNHAPPINESS**

The commentary on the verse begins this query:

Query: How then does one abandon mental unhappiness?

Here we can see the elegant simplicity of the presentation. The verse that relates to this reads:

9. *Whatever happens, I should never  
Let this mind of joy be disturbed.  
Though disliking, one will not attain one's  
desire,  
And virtue will degenerate.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary goes on to explain:

Having contemplated the benefits of accepting suffering think: "I shall under no circumstances let my mental joy be disturbed." Contemplate this point well.

Mental joy is the antidote to mental unhappiness. Therefore, if one generates dislike upon meeting something undesired, then, though one generates dislike, one will not achieve one's wishes, and the virtue that bestows the desired result degenerates. In this way all sufferings are generated.

*Having contemplated the benefits of accepting suffering*, refers to the benefits of willingly accepting suffering, which will be presented in more detail later on in the text. The point here is that suffering does have some advantages and should not be viewed in a completely negative light. There are in fact many *benefits* in *accepting suffering*, and

contemplating this one should think, '*I shall under no circumstances let my mental joy be disturbed*'. This is a point I also make in my own teachings. I often remind people that preserving and protecting one's joy is of the utmost importance for one's wellbeing.

Having contemplated this point thoroughly, we need to make the personal commitment, 'Regardless of whether the circumstances are good or bad, and especially when things are not going well, I will not allow my sense of joy to be disturbed or diminished', and in that way maintain that feeling of joy and happiness.

As presented in the commentary, joy is the antidote to mental unhappiness. *If upon meeting something that is undesired*, e.g. being harmed, *one generates dislike*, however that dislike *will not achieve one's wishes*. In other words, developing a dislike for someone who harms us won't affect that person at all. Furthermore, rather than accomplishing one's wishes, developing dislike actually destroys the virtue within oneself, obstructing the desired result of happiness.

In summary, as the commentary states, *In this way all sufferings are generated*. The point here is that whatever the unfavourable circumstance, generating dislike will not help to accomplish our wish for our own wellbeing. Indeed, rather than accomplishing anything, generating dislike actually harms our future experience of joy and happiness, because it results in the degeneration of the virtue within us. Because it is a negativity, the moment anger is generated it destroys the virtue that we have accumulated, which is the cause of our future happiness. That is how, as explained in the commentary, all sufferings are generated.

#### **2.1.3.2. THE REASON FOR THAT**

This refers to the reason why it is unsuitable to generate unhappiness. The verse in relation to this outline is one that many have found to be extremely useful and beneficial. It is a verse that is often quoted, and you will all have come across it many times.

10. *If one can do something  
What is there to dislike?  
If one can do nothing,  
What use is dislike?*

Gyaltsab Je explains the meaning of the verse thus:

If one can do something about the object that generates mental unhappiness, then what reason is there to generate dislike? Right away one acts and the mental unhappiness vanishes. In case one cannot do something then what is the use to generate unhappiness? One can dislike that space lacks obstructions, but what is the benefit in that?

As so clearly presented here, *if one can do something about an object that generates mental unhappiness then what reason is there to generate dislike?* To take a contemporary example, if a car breaks down and the problem can be fixed then taking it to a mechanic to be fixed will solve the problem. There is no real need for dislike or an unhappy state of mind, because it is fixable. In the event that it can't be fixed and has to be written off then, again, there is no purpose in generating dislike. If it can be fixed then there is no need to worry; if it cannot be fixed then there is no purpose in worrying about that either. We can

use other examples such as someone dropping a ceramic cup. If it is cracked it can be fixed, so you fix it and then you can use it again. So there is no need to generate dislike and an unhappy mind. Whereas if it is broken into pieces and cannot be fixed, then generating dislike and worrying about it will not help to solve the situation. It will just cause more mental distress.

This advice is particularly relevant with physical illnesses. When we are ill and there is a remedy or cure then there is no need to really worry and generate a mind of dislike, as it can be cured. In the event that it is a disease that is difficult to cure then one has to accept that. The mental anguish generated from worrying will just add mental suffering to our physical suffering.

As the commentary states, if it can be fixed, *then right away one acts and the mental unhappiness vanishes. In the case one cannot do something then what is the use to generate unhappiness?* So again we are being reminded that if a situation cannot be remedied, or cannot be fixed, then there is no use in generating unhappiness. A further analogy presented in the commentary is that *one can dislike that space lacks obstruction but what is the benefit in that?* If someone were to be really upset with space because it lacks obstruction, saying, 'Oh, this space is useless. It's empty and doesn't have any function', then what purpose would that serve? None at all.

#### **2.1.4. Striving in abandoning anger after having analysed the cause for anger in detail**

This has three subdivisions:

2.1.4.1. Showing the general division of objects for generating anger

2.1.4.2. Stopping anger at undesired actions

2.1.4.3. Stopping anger at obstructions to one's wishes

##### **2.1.4.1. SHOWING THE GENERAL DIVISION OF OBJECTS FOR GENERATING ANGER**

Here we are being presented with the different kinds of objects or situations that generate anger. Some use these same objects as objects for generating patience. In fact the objects of anger and the objects of patience are basically the same, aren't they? The objects of our anger are the very objects with which one needs to generate patience with.

Here Gyaltsab Je uses these objects in the context of anger. The relevant verse reads:

11. *I do not wish for myself or my friends  
Suffering, criticism, harsh words  
And unpleasant talk.  
For the enemy it is the opposite*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

For myself and my friends I do not want these four: feelings of suffering, criticism, harsh words spoken to one's face and the spreading of unpleasant derogatory rumours. These I do not wish for, and wish to reverse them, but in relation to the enemy these likes and dislikes are the opposite. In short, they are the eight worldly dharmas.

In relation to ourselves and those closest to us we don't want to experience any kind of *feelings of suffering*, any kind of *criticism*, or *harsh words* spoken directly to us, or *the spreading of any unpleasant or derogatory rumours*.

In fact we wish to experience their *reverse*, meaning that we want to experience the opposite of what we don't want. We do not want to feel any suffering and we want to feel happiness; we do not wish for criticism and we wish for praise; we do not wish for harsh words but wish only for pleasant words to be spoken to us; and we do not wish for unpleasant or derogatory rumours to be spread about us, but wish to have a good reputation.

But in relation to our enemies we wish the opposite. We want them to feel suffering and be the object of criticism, harsh words and unpleasant, derogatory rumours. Meanwhile we don't want them to experience the opposite of these negative experiences.

Basically, with these eight worldly concerns we want to experience the positives, but don't want to experience the negatives, whereas we want enemies to experience the negatives and not the positives. When we see how true this is for ourselves, we can see how these objects are the basis for all anger. When we are experiencing the negative side anger arises, and we also feel anger when the enemy experiences the positive side. So basically these eight worldly concerns or dharmas serve as the basis of so many unwholesome actions and non-virtuous states of mind.

Maybe we can go into a little bit more detail about these eight worldly dharmas in our next session. In the meantime it would be good for you to really look into these and understand how you actually experience them: the four that I do not wish for, and their opposites which I do wish for, whilst for my enemies I wish the reverse.

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

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