
Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

བྱང་ལྷན་པོ་མཁའ་འགྲུབ་ཀྱི་སྤྱོད་པ་ལ་འཇུག་པ་བཞུགས་སོ།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

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As usual we can devote some time to our meditation practice.

[meditation]

Now we generate the most positive motivation for receiving the teachings along these lines:

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

2.1.4.1. SHOWING THE GENERAL DIVISION OF OBJECTS FOR GENERATING ANGER (CONT.)

In short, one should refrain from the eight worldly dharmas, which are the causes of anger. As Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

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.

When we, or our close and dear ones, experience these four unpleasant situations, then anger arises. Conversely we wish for their opposites: wanting to experience happiness rather than suffering; wanting to experience praise rather than criticism; wanting to hear pleasant words rather than harsh words; and wanting to have fame rather than experience derogatory rumours. We don't want to experience the four unpleasant situations and we do want to experience the four pleasant ones.

It is the complete opposite for our enemies—we are happy when they experience suffering, but unhappy and angry when they experience happiness. We don't want them to receive any praise, and are happy when they are criticised; we are unhappy when they have pleasant words spoken to them, but glad when harsh words are used towards them. If our enemies have fame, then that makes us uncomfortable and unhappy, and thus angry, and when there are unpleasant rumours about them, we are glad.

Those, in brief, are the eight worldly concerns: one wishes to avoid four unfavourable conditions, but wishes them upon one's enemies; one wishes to enjoy four favourable conditions, but hopes one's enemies will not encounter them. As I have said, it's important for us to really look into how we get caught up in the eight worldly concerns.

In short, we basically want to experience the happiness of the contaminated samsaric pleasures. Of course, there is nothing wrong with wishing to have a higher level of happiness, but here we are talking about a strong clinging and attachment to the happiness derived from samsaric pleasures, and an aversion to any unpleasant experiences. We want to be praised and not criticised. We cling to worldly fame, and are unhappy if we are the object of any

derogatory rumours. Fame itself is not a bad thing if it is based on actual good qualities. For example, amongst sentient beings no-one could be more famous than a bodhisattva. Bodhisattvas are renowned for their deeds of benefiting other sentient beings, so a bodhisattva's fame only enables them to further benefit sentient beings, rather than being a source of harm to themselves. Thus, as the term itself indicates, we need to understand that the eight worldly dharmas refer to worldly concerns.

I have explained the means to counteract the eight worldly dharmas in detail previously, however as it is important to have a good understanding of them, I will go over it again now. So, as explained earlier, one wishes for the happiness that is derived from being attached to the contaminated worldly pleasures, and it is this happiness derived from worldly pleasures, fame, praise and pleasant remarks which are related to worldly views that we need to overcome. Whereas the happiness that one would experience from obtaining liberation or ultimate enlightenment is a happiness that we need to pursue, for it is a worthy goal. Wishing for the happiness of liberation or enlightenment will inspire us to achieve that great goal.

As explained in Nagarjuna's *Letter to the King*, as well as in the Lam Rim teachings, one needs to equalise the eight worldly concerns or dharmas. This means we need to adopt an attitude which is the opposite of our normal attitudes. Instead of wishing for happiness, one willingly wishes to endure suffering and hardship, and so forth. The way to understand this in its proper context is that the experience of even temporary happiness is the result of good karma, or the virtue that one has accumulated in the past. Thus, when we experience that wellbeing and happiness, we are actually using up our good karma. When we reflect upon this fact, then we won't feel too keen about wishing to experience samsaric pleasures, because we know that we will be using up our own good karma.

Suffering, on the other hand is the result of negative karma, and whenever one experiences suffering it is exhausting the negative karma that one has accumulated in the past. By contemplating in this way we realise that since suffering exhausts our negative karma, it is actually good for us, and the sooner our negative karma is expended, the better it is for us. By thinking in this way, we realise that it is quite reasonable to change our attitude from wishing to experience happiness and avoid suffering, to one of willingly wishing to experience suffering, and being very wary of experiencing the happiness arising from worldly pleasures. By adopting this attitude, one will not be daunted by suffering, because of the knowledge that it is expending one's negative karma. With this attitude one will also be practising the patience of willingly tolerating sufferings.

Another way to look at the significance of the practice of equalising the eight worldly dharmas is that by not engaging in this equalising practice and exchanging our attitudes, we are, in effect, longing to experience the happiness of worldly samsaric pleasures. Such a longing will increase our attachment, which will then hinder our practice. When our attachment to the happiness of samsaric pleasures increases, it further intensifies our

anger when we experience its opposite, which is suffering.

Furthermore, when we anticipate the joy of experiencing samsaric pleasures, we are ignorant of the fact that such happiness is in the nature of contaminated pleasure, rather than long-lasting happiness. Holding onto this view increases our ignorance. Thus the three poisons are increased if one does not practise equalising the eight worldly concerns.

Taking up this practice of equalising the eight worldly concerns will strengthen our *tong len* (giving and taking) practice, which we attempt to practise in our regular meditation. As I have mentioned previously, someone who doesn't wish to experience happiness, and who willingly wishes to experience suffering, can really take the *tong len* practice to heart. If one does not want to experience suffering and wants to experience only happiness, it wouldn't be possible to even think of taking on the suffering of other sentient beings. Furthermore if one is really attached to happiness, one would not want to be parted from it, so giving one's happiness away to other sentient beings would not be possible. As I have mentioned previously, the *tong len* practice would be an appropriate practice for those who have taken up the practice of equalising the eight worldly dharmas.

To summarise the main points, the 'taking' part of the *tong len* practice is when one willingly wishes to take the suffering of others upon oneself. When one is wary about experiencing happiness, one will easily be able to give it to other sentient beings, which covers the 'giving' part of the practice. As mentioned previously, being able to practise the patience of enduring suffering will prevent anger from arising when one experiences hardships and difficulties. Rather than being unhappy when our enemies experience happiness, we will be glad about that, which will also prevent anger from arising when we see our enemies experiencing good conditions. This is really a great and profound practice, so it shouldn't be taken lightly. Indeed this practice has great meaning and purpose. This should be apparent when one sees the extent to which it transforms our mind. Further details about this will be presented later on.

2.1.4.2. STOPPING ANGER AT UNDESIRED ACTIONS

This section covers how to prevent anger from arising. There are three subdivisions:

2.1.4.1.1. Stopping anger at wrongdoings directed at oneself

2.1.4.1.2. Stopping anger at wrongdoings directed at one's friends

2.1.4.1.3. Stopping anger at those who benefit one's enemies

We can see how these three types of anger definitely relate to our immediate experiences in everyday life. The moment one experiences some wrongdoing directed at oneself or one's friends, one immediately becomes upset and angry. How wonderful it would be if we could actually prevent anger from arising when we face such situations! How gentle and calm our mind would be!

STOPPING ANGER AT WRONGDOINGS DIRECTED AT ONESELF¹

This has two main sections:

1. Tolerating the generation of suffering
2. Being patient with contempt and so forth

1. TOLERATING THE GENERATION OF SUFFERING

This section is subdivided into three:

- 1.1. Meditating on the patience that tolerates suffering
- 1.2. Meditating on the patience that definitely relies on the Dharma
- 1.3. Meditating on the patience that does not think anything of harm.

This is where the three divisions of patience are presented:

- Meditating on the patience that tolerates suffering
- Meditating on the patience that definitely relies on the Dharma
- Meditating on the patience that does not think of anything of harm.

As presented many times, the definition of patience is a mind that does not become disturbed in the face of harm and suffering. So this means if our mind is not disturbed when we experience harm from external conditions, or from our own experiences of suffering, then we are practising patience.

The opposite of patience is anger. The Lam Rim teachings specifically mention an opposite to each of the three types of patience listed here. However, in general, anger is the opposite of patience. The definition of anger is the malicious mind that intends to harm, which is focused on the three objects that cause one suffering.

The patience of willingly tolerating suffering is really a paramount practice for everyday life. Anger is mostly related to lacking the patience to tolerate suffering. So whenever we experience suffering we can contemplate, 'This is the result of my non-virtuous actions in the past, and therefore it is befitting that I experience this now, as a way to eradicate the results of my past negativities'. By contemplating in this way, suffering becomes more acceptable, and we will not become despondent when we experience it.

As I said earlier, the Lam Rim explains the opposites of these three kinds of patience. As I recall, the opposite to the patience of *meditating on the patience that tolerates suffering*, is a despondent mind that feels weighed down and worthless. The opposite to *meditating on the patience that definitely relies on the Dharma*, is a lack of interest in the Dharma, and no aspiration to practise it. The opposite of *meditating on the patience that does not think of anything of harm*, is basically anger. You can check the Lam Rim as well, but these are, as I recall, the opposite of the three kinds of patience.

1.1. Meditating on the patience that tolerates suffering

This is subdivided into five:

- 1.1.1. Contemplating that one is not beyond the nature of contaminated suffering

¹ To keep them manageable the heading numbers and styles start again at this point.

1.1.2. Contemplating the benefits of meditating on suffering

1.1.3. Contemplating how they are not difficult once habituated

1.1.4. The benefits of striving to abandoning afflictions

1.1.5. Extensive explanation of the benefits of suffering

1.1.1. Contemplating that one is not beyond the nature of contaminated suffering

One is not beyond the nature of contaminated suffering means that one definitely has to experience contaminated sufferings. Because one is still in samsara, one still has a samsaric nature.

The relevant lines of verse from the root text read:

*12ab. Causes for happiness come adventitiously,
Causes for suffering abound.*

In his commentary on these two lines Gyaltsab Je explains:

In cyclic existence the causes for happiness arise only occasionally and the causes for suffering abound. Since one is not beyond the nature of cyclic existence it is appropriate to tolerate sufferings.

As explained in the commentary, *in cyclic existence the causes for happiness arise only occasionally*. One needs to understand that the cause for happiness is virtue. Thus, for example, if you were to reflect upon whether you have accumulated virtue or non-virtue today, it may be quite evident that you have created more non-virtuous deeds than virtuous ones. If that is the case, you would have been creating more causes for suffering than causes for happiness. So, as indicated in the commentary, when the causes to experience happiness are generated only occasionally, then naturally, the result of happiness is also only occasional, and instead of happiness, one experiences more suffering. This can also relate to the fact that the immediate causes for our happiness are also scarce. Even on a daily basis there are far more occasions where things go wrong, which cause us suffering, than conditions for happiness.

Since one is not beyond the nature of cyclic existence the causes for suffering abound, relates to non-virtuous activities or negativities. If the delusions are prevalent in our mind, then it is more likely that we will be creating more non-virtues or negativities on a regular basis. If we find that this is true for ourselves now, then it would also have to have been true in past lives. Through having created abundant causes for suffering in the past, one naturally experiences more suffering now. Likewise, if we failed to create the cause of happiness, which is virtue, in previous lives, we will naturally experience the result of a lack of happiness now.

These are really significant points about karma. When one creates non-virtuous deeds and negativity, the result will be suffering. Whereas if one creates virtuous deeds, the result will be happiness. As the great Kadampa masters advised, on a regular basis one should, at the end of the day, count up how many deeds were influenced by the delusions, and were thus negative deeds, and how much virtue was accrued during the day. The results of this analysis show us our progress. Then we can slowly transform our lives by creating more virtues and shunning more negativities. This is a personal instruction

on how to adopt virtue and abandon negativity. If we do that then we will then secure a better life right now, as well as preparing for our experiences in future lifetimes. This is very succinct advice that is being presented here.

In very simple terms, if we wish to experience real happiness in life, then we need to accumulate virtue. If you want to experience real happiness, then you must accumulate the causes for that, which is virtue. If you do not wish to experience suffering, then you need to abandon negativity which will eradicate the causes for suffering. One becomes a real practitioner when one abides by this code of training. When we really contemplate and think about how our experiences now are related to specific causes and conditions that were created in the past, we generate a real confidence in the importance of adopting virtue and abandoning negativity. We really need to take this on board.

1.1.2. Contemplating the benefits of meditating on suffering

One should understand that we don't need to be completely afraid of suffering, as there are actually benefits in experiencing it.

The following six lines explain this:

*12cd. Without suffering there is no renunciation
Therefore, mind be firm!*

*13. If the faithful of Durga and the Kanapa
Tolerate the meaningless feelings of
Being burned and cut, then why
Do I not have courage for liberation?*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary on these lines reads as follows:

It is appropriate to contemplate cyclic existence to be in the nature of suffering because without contemplating the suffering of samsara the mind definitely wishing to be free from samsara will not arise. Hence, "Mind be firm!"

It is appropriate to tolerate suffering. The faithful of the goddess Uma, in order to reverse and lessen the austerities of Ishvara, on the ninth of the middle month of autumn, fast and cut and burn themselves for one or three days in order to please her.

The people of Kanapa and so forth in the south, in order to compete with each other, endure the sufferings of cutting their bodies and the like. If one can tolerate sufferings for such meaningless purposes, then why do I fear the experiences of suffering for the great purpose of liberating all sentient beings from their sufferings? It is appropriate to tolerate them.

As explained here in the commentary, *it is appropriate to contemplate cyclic existence to be in the nature of suffering, otherwise the mind wishing to definitely be free from samsara will not arise*. As one of the great lamas, Drakha Rinpoche, who was from the same area in Tibet where I come from mentioned, there are no accounts of practitioners entering the path and gaining realisations by experiencing pleasures.

How this previously unknown booklet by Drakha Rinpoche came to be published was that there was an occasion when His Holiness the Dalai Lama was delayed in Patna for some time. In order to pass the time he said, "I'd like to check out what's in the library here, as I've heard it holds some rare texts in its collection". So

Dzongsar Khyabse Rinpoche went to the Patna Library and found a collection of Drakha Rinpoche's works. When this was brought to His Holiness' attention, His Holiness was interested and wanted to see them. When he came across this particular text he was so impressed that he said "Oh, this should be made more available!" That was when this booklet was published. Apparently there is also a collection of Drakha Rinpoche's works in a library in America. It is quite amazing to think that a library in Patna and a library in America had held copies of his works, but this was not widely known.

After this text was published it remained relatively unknown until His Holiness the Dalai Lama mentioned in a teaching how he had found the advice given by Drakha Rinpoche to have been very beneficial for his own mind. The booklet was being distributed freely during a teaching, and so people quickly rushed to acquire a copy for themselves! Having gained access to this book, we can see its great significance.

Of course if we had ample time I would be referring to some of the appropriate passages in this book, along with the Lam Rim teachings. But because we don't have much time, we won't do that. In his text, Drakha Rinpoche says that there are many accounts of delusions increasing and negativities not being purified, as a result of enjoying the pleasures and happiness of samsara, and no accounts of practitioners who have lessened their delusions and purified their negativities through the experience of pleasures. However there are many accounts of practitioners who, having contemplated suffering, have lessened their delusions, purified their negativities, and accumulated extensive merit.

Then he quotes the great Kadampa master Chen-ngawa, who says one should cherish suffering, for it is through sufferings and hardships that the lamas and Sangha perform their great virtuous deeds. The great extensive deeds of the lamas are indeed the result of enduring a great amount of suffering and hardship in their practice. The sangha also endure the hardships of practising morality, and endure discomforts whilst engaging in virtues of the three doors of body, speech and mind. Thus, by willingly experiencing sufferings they are able to purify extensive negativities and accumulate very extensive merit to achieve the higher realisations of liberation and enlightenment. This is why, as explained, it is appropriate to cherish suffering.

The great lama Drakha Rinpoche was also known, amongst those who revered him, as a manifestation of Chenrezig. On a personal note, I had a classmate who came from the same town as Drakha Rinpoche. So he had an unequivocal faith in Drakha Rinpoche and he used to say to me, "Oh, there's really no lama like Drakha Rinpoche. He's a really incredible practitioner and a great being".

Gyalsab Je's commentary explains that *it is appropriate to contemplate cyclic existence to be in the nature of suffering*. As mentioned before, without contemplating the nature of samsara the wish to definitely be free from samsara will not arise. When one sees the great benefits from contemplating suffering, one will see the appropriateness of enduring suffering.

Furthermore, as explained in the commentary *it is appropriate to tolerate suffering*. Examples of such suffering include *the faithful of the goddess Uma, who, in order to reverse and lessen the austerities of Ishvara, on the ninth of the middle month of autumn, fast and cut and burn themselves for one or three days in order to please her*. So just to please this goddess, the devotees of Uma endure extreme pain and suffering.

Furthermore, *the people of Kanapa and so forth in the south, in order to compete with each other, endure the sufferings of cutting their bodies and the like. If one can tolerate sufferings for such meaningless purposes, then why do I fear the experiences of suffering for the great purpose of liberating all sentient beings from their sufferings?* So in comparison to such meaningless sufferings without much purpose, one's own sufferings, which arise from engaging in practices for the purpose of liberating all sentient beings from their sufferings, are worthwhile. By contemplating this we will not fear suffering. The implication here is that, as explained in the commentary, it is appropriate to tolerate suffering. More extensive benefits will be explained later.

There are many accounts of people enduring extremely painful acts such as putting fire on their heads and inflicting harm on their body in various other ways, for meaningless reasons.

1.1.3. Contemplating how they are not difficult once habituated

As indicated, tolerating suffering will not be difficult once one becomes acquainted with it.

That is subdivided into two:

1.1.3.1. Extensive explanation

1.1.3.2. Summary

1.1.3.1. EXTENSIVE EXPLANATION

This has four subdivisions:

1.1.3.1.1. It becomes easier with familiarisation

1.1.3.1.2. Establishing this with an example

1.1.3.1.3. The object to tolerate

1.1.3.1.4. Example of how, through familiarity the strength of patience increases

We can go over these in our next session. The main thing for you to do is to familiarise yourselves with the explanations, and try to understand them in relation to your own practice. As one of our real enemies is anger, finding ways of how to oppose this enemy is really worthwhile.

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

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Edited Version

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