

Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

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

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24 February 2015

Based on the motivation we generated during the recitation of the *Refuge and Bodhicitta Prayer*, we will now engage in the practice of meditation. [meditation]

1.3.3. Considering it one's fault if something undesirable is received

1.3.3.1. THE ACTUAL MEANING

In our last session we introduced the five subdivisions under this outline.

The following verses contain very profound advice about why we need to practise patience with people who harm us. Taken at face value, this advice might seem quite unreasonable. How could being harmed by someone else be one's own fault? Without a proper understanding, this could sound quite crazy, so we need to understand this advice in its proper context.

1.3.3.1.1. Considering it one's own fault if one is harmed by others

The verse relating to this outline reads:

42. *I previously caused sentient beings
Harm similar to this.
Therefore it is suitable that
I receive now the harm that sentient beings
inflict.*

In essence, this is a presentation of cause and effect, the law of karma.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary on this verse reads:

Because I have caused the same harm that I am receiving now to sentient beings in a previous life, it is therefore appropriate that I now receive the harm that sentient beings inflict. Practise patience by thinking in this way.

While this explanation is quite clear, it is in fact a presentation of the subtle workings of karma. To understand this subtlety, one needs to have a deeper understanding of how karma works. As presented here, one is receiving harm now because one has caused a similar type of harm to sentient beings in past lives. Having harmed others in a similar way previously, the harm one is experiencing now is the ripening of the result of that previous harm. Thus one thinks, *It is therefore appropriate that I now receive the harm that sentient beings inflict upon me.* It is *by thinking in this way* that one will be able to *practise patience.*

If one already has a good understanding and faith in karma then, as presented here, one will be able to willingly accept suffering, because one understands that in the past one created the cause to experience such results.

As mentioned previously, willingly enduring suffering is said to be a paramount practice of patience, along with the patience of thinking about the Dharma. We don't need these two types of patience a lot of the time. After all, we don't encounter people who actually harm us all that often. So you extend this practice of willingly enduring suffering to all forms of discomfort and suffering.

With conviction in karma, knowing that when the cause is created, then the effect will definitely be experienced, one can immediately see one's experience of suffering as being the result of the karma that one created in the past. Then the mind of blaming the other for causing that harm will definitely not occur. One will be able to point the finger at karma, rather than blaming the person who is attacking or harming one.

When one practises patience in this way then the real benefit will be that one's mind does not become disturbed in the event of hardships such as pain and suffering. That is the real benefit of this practice. Of course we need to engage in this practice each and every day, as it is only with familiarity that we gain the benefit of the practice.

To re-emphasise these points, without a good understanding of, and conviction in karma, it would be very difficult to put this instruction into practice. Conviction in karma is developed when one contemplates how happiness arises from virtue, and how suffering arises from non-virtue. One needs to really understand if one creates virtue, then, unless it is destroyed by some negative karma or negative act, it will definitely reap the positive result of happiness. Likewise when one creates negative karma, then, if the non-virtue is not destroyed by purification, the result of suffering will definitely be experienced.

When one thoroughly understands this, then one develops a conviction in the infallibility of karma, which is that when the cause is created, the result will definitely be experienced. Karma is not a separate entity out there that brings us bad results. That is the wrong way to understand it. The negative results of karma and the positive results of virtue are to be understood as happening within one's own mental continuum, i.e. karma lies within one's own mental continuum. When contemplating karma, it is important to personalise it, and integrate it into one's own life.

The whole point of gaining conviction in karma is that it will enable one to apply one's three doors of body, speech and mind to engaging in virtue as much as possible, and avoid engaging in non-virtuous deeds as much as possible. Of course, we have covered karma in more detail in previous teachings. The point here is that one needs to use this conviction in karma to put these verses into practice.

Having an understanding of karma is said to be one of the basic ways to adopt virtue and avoid non-virtue, and a more profound way is that an understanding of selflessness and so forth is the antidote for overcoming delusions and so forth. These are the steps that we take in our practice.

1.3.3.1.2. It is the fault of holding onto the body that is a cause for suffering

Here the root verse reads:

43. *Their weapons and my body
Are both causes for the suffering.
Weapons come from them and the body from
me,
At whom shall I get angry?*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary on the verse reads:

Also for the following reason it is unsuitable to get angry: both the weapon of the other person and my body are causes for my suffering since my suffering is created by the other's weapon meeting with my body. At whom is one supposed to get angry? It is unsuitable to get angry at the other person alone.

Again, these are not obscure points. If we honestly check, we will accept this presentation as being very reasonable.

Normally we might immediately blame the person who inflicts physical harm on us, and become angry with them. Here, we are being asked to consider the causes of our pain, which are both the weapon that is used by the other person, as well as our own body. They are equally the cause of our suffering. When we consider this, then we see that it is unreasonable to see the other as the cause of the pain, and become angry with them.

If the weapon did not make contact with us we would not experience any pain. Likewise if our body were not in the nature of suffering, and therefore subject to pain, then, even if a weapon were to come into contact with our body, we would not experience pain. So the very nature of the body itself is that it is subject to pain. In other words, without a contaminated body we would not experience physical pain. Therefore it is our own body that is the cause of our pain. We may not be able to accept this immediately, but if we really pay attention, and analyse it carefully, we will come to accept that this is actually true.

Here again we are being presented with a variety of reasons to contemplate, all of which lead to the conclusion that it is reasonable to practise patience, and not retaliate when others inflict harm upon us.

Now of course being able to practise patience in this way will not develop overnight. Without conditions that make us feel angry, there is nothing to challenge us, and we might easily conclude that we are practising patience, and feel that it is very easy to practise patience. The real test is in the moment of being criticised or harmed. If we become upset and angry, then our claim to be practising patience is unfounded. Therefore we need to contemplate and become familiar with these reasons before conditions arise that might make us angry. If we do that they will become part of us.

The second verse under this heading is:

44. *This abscess similar to a human body
That is suffering and cannot bear touch,
If I hold on to it with blind craving
At whom should I be angry when it gets
harmed?*

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

This abscess that is similar to a human body if I hold onto this suffering body that cannot bear the slightest touch with craving, and ignorance that blinds intelligence, then since it can be harmed even by thorns, with whom should I become angry when it is harmed? One should think that it is one's own fault.

This verse is further elaborating on how our body is a cause of suffering, because its very nature is that it is subject to pain. The analogy used here is that the *body is similar to an abscess*, the Tibetan word for which has the connotation of the skin being scraped off. As it heals, a very thin layer of skin begins to form, but it is still very fragile, and the slightest touch might rupture it, with pus and blood then oozing out of it.

Our body is like an abscess, which can be pierced by the slightest touch or thorn, causing bleeding and so forth, and that is what causes so much suffering and pain. This relates to the nature of our body. Normally we have such strong craving and attachment to our bodies, and describing the nature of our body like this is also a way to reduce this strong craving and attachment. Contemplating in this way on a regular basis will help to develop a sense of renunciation. We might not be able to develop actual renunciation right away, but this contemplation will

definitely become the basis for developing some disenchantment with the nature of our body and reduce craving for it.

As explained here, our body is really fragile, and when the slightest rough surface, or sharp object like a thorn, comes into contact with it, we immediately experience discomfort and pain. We place so much importance on our body—we care for it and we really cherish it. This presentation asks why, if our body is so fragile and easily harmed, is it reasonable to become angry with someone else if it is hurt. It is the very nature of our body that is so easily prone to hurt and pain.

What can be understood from this presentation is that we cherish our body so much, and due to that attachment, we experience agony when it is hurt. The point here is that by engaging in the practice of not retaliating when others harm us, we are also reducing strong craving and attachment to the body. In that way, as presented here, one should be thinking that it is one's own fault that one suffers, rather than anything others might have done.

1.3.3.1.3. *It is the fault of having craved the cause of suffering in previous lives*

The first of the two verses under this heading is:

45. *The childish do not desire suffering and
Are attached to its causes;
If one gets harmed though one's own fault
What reason is there to become angry with
others?*

Here Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads

The childish do not desire suffering but are attached to and crave the causes of suffering such as killing and so forth. Hence, since I receive a result of harm projected by my own faults, what reason is there to become angry with others? It is my own fault alone.

Here, *the childish* refers to ourselves when we are experiencing suffering. We *do not desire suffering, but are attached to and crave the causes of suffering such as killing and so forth*.

This is a really profound explanation about the workings of karma. Even though we do not desire the result of suffering, we readily engage in the causes of suffering, such as engaging in the ten non-virtues of killing and so forth. Thus, we will inevitably experience suffering as a natural consequence of the negativity created in the past. This verse has the similar meaning as verse 28 in Chapter 1, where Shantideva says that even though ordinary beings wish to discard suffering, they run towards the very causes of suffering, and although they want to experience happiness, they destroy the causes of happiness like an enemy, because of their ignorance.

These lines are really quite a profound presentation of karma. Although not wishing to experience suffering, beings are naturally drawn to its causes, and they willingly engage in those causes, which include non-virtuous acts such as killing, stealing and so forth. Furthermore, beings want to experience happiness, yet they destroy the causes of their happiness by intentionally discarding its causes, which are virtuous deeds. By not intentionally engaging in virtue, one is destroying the cause of happiness.

As mentioned previously this is really profound reasoning. There is no-one who voluntarily wishes to experience suffering, and there is no-one who does not wish to experience happiness, yet we create the very causes of our own suffering and we fail to create, and actually destroy, the

causes of happiness. The unwanted results are the natural consequence of our own actions.

These are very significant points. Shantideva is meticulously presenting a very profound explanation of our situation, and the suffering that we experience. Therefore, to think *since I receive a result of harm projected by my own faults, what reason is there to become angry with others*, is very reasonable. In other words, there is no real reason to become angry with others, because one has created the causes oneself.

This advice is in line with the practices of the great Kadampa of the past. It is said that they would ask themselves, 'How many causes of happiness do I create in one day, and how many more causes of suffering do I actually create in a single day?' When they realise that they are creating more negativity, the Kadampa masters had the practice of using black and white stones. Every time they had a virtuous mind they would place a white stone in front of themselves, and every time they had a negative mind they would put a black stone there. At the end of the day they would count how many black and white stones there were. They used this technique as a deterrent to negativity, and to encourage themselves to engage in more virtuous deeds.

If you attempt to do this practice, you need to be warned that in the early days there will definitely be more black stones. This is natural for ordinary sentient beings. However that should not discourage you, because as with the examples of the previous masters, if you practise diligently, then gradually the number of black stones will start to reduce, and there will be more and more white stones in front of you. That will be a measure that you are constantly engaging in virtue.

If we don't take a farsighted view in our practice then we could easily be discouraged. We might attempt to be pious, and assume that we are practising virtue, but end up with more black stones at the end of the day, and think, 'Oh this is too much! I give up'. It is very important to have reasonable expectations. We need to understand that the process of practising Dharma requires tremendous patience and perseverance.

The next verse in this section is:

46. *For example, if the guardians of hell
And the forest of sword leaves
Are generated by one's karma
At whom shall one get angry?*

Here, Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

For example, if the guardians of hell, the forest of sword leaves and so forth, which harm one, are not generated by someone else with purpose, but arise from one's karma, then one cannot get angry at them. Similarly, if harm is generated also from one's karma in one's life, then at whom shall one get angry? Since it is one's own fault alone, from now on strive in abandoning the cause for suffering.

Here, an example of those who inflict extreme suffering are *the guardians of hell*, likewise to experience the sufferings of being in the hell of a *forest of sword leaves*, and so forth. So, what is being explained is that no-one actually creates that tremendous suffering of the hell realms, and nor are the hell realms a place that was purposely constructed. Rather, the experience of being in that state is actually created by one's own karma. That is how it is to be understood. This explanation is quite clear so I won't go into any more detail.

1.3.3.1.4. *The unsuitability of being angry at others by relating one's karma to the cause of their suffering*

The workings of karma may seem mysterious. We can take the example of the Malaysian Airlines flight MH370, which was lost without trace at sea. Some say it fell into the sea, others are not sure. Regardless of what actually happened, the fact remains that they haven't found any trace of it, so all the passengers are presumed to be dead. However two passengers booked on that flight survived. One because they were too ill to travel that day, and the other decided to book another flight. If these two hadn't experienced these immediate conditions they would have been on that ill-fated flight and experienced the same fate as the other passengers. Something created events in their personal life that caused them to not board that flight. This is an indication that when one has created virtuous causes, then even dire situations can be averted.

I have often heard people say, 'I don't know much about karma, but it seems to be true that if you do good to others, good things will definitely happen to oneself, and if one is cruel to others then there are definitely negative consequences for oneself'.

A true mark of whether one has conviction in karma can be seen in their attitude to truth and honesty. An individual who abides by the law of karma would naturally be an honest person, whereas those who may have some understanding but who don't put it into practice, are those who would deceive others. This is a practical way to gauge whether one has some faith in karma or not.

Indeed, if we really think of the infallibility of karma, then it is as if one's own karma is compelling the other person to do things to hurt oneself. It is as if it's one's own karma is putting them in a position that causes them to harm one. This profound way of thinking about karma is the focus of this outline.

The verse relating to this reads:

47. *Having been induced by my karma
Harm givers come into existence.
If that throws them into the lower realms,
Have I not destroyed them?*

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je explains:

Further, having been induced by my previous negative karma, in this life people that give me harm come into existence. If through harming me the person is thrown into the hell realms, then have I not destroyed that person? Saying this to my mind, I should scold it by thinking: 'I have thrown them into the hell realms'.

Further, having been induced by my previous negative karma, in this life people that give me harm come into existence, refers to the reason why there are those who harm oneself. It is one's previous karma that induces them to harm one. So we reflect, 'Having harmed me, this person will be thrown into the hell realms. So have I not destroyed them?'

What is being presented here is that it is one's own karma that induces the other person to cause harm, and because they have engaged in the action of harming, they have created negative karma for themselves, which will cause them to go to the hell realms. So one has, in fact, actually caused them harm, because if it was not due to one's own karma there would have been nothing that compelled them to create that harm.

When one thinks about it from this angle, then it becomes apparent that it is we who are causing them to be born in

unfortunate realms, where they will experience tremendous suffering. The point that is being presented is that seeing oneself as a cause for their future suffering is another way to prevent anger and retaliation.

1.3.3.1.5. Anger is simply wrong and unsuitable

This section shows how those who harm us are actually helping us, while also being a cause for them to go to the unfortunate realms, such as the hell realms.

48. *In dependence on them
I purify much karma through patience,
In dependence on me
They will be thrown for a long time into the
hells.*
49. *I give them harm
And they give me benefit
Why, oh unsuitable mind
Are you mistakenly angry?*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

Further, by having taken that person as the object of patience I have meditated on patience and purified much negativity. In dependence on me that person will be thrown into the hells where they experience suffering for a long time. I am giving harm to the enemy and he is benefitting me. To be angry with someone who benefits one is mistaken. Why, you unsuitable mind, do you get angry? You should like them.

As presented quite clearly, if there was no-one to harm us, we could not possibly practise patience. So an object that causes us harm gives us the opportunity to practise patience. As His Holiness the Dalai Lama mentions, our teachers are not appropriate objects on which to practise patience. Rather, it is our enemies, those who harm us, who are the objects on which to practise patience. Our teachers teach us how to practise patience, but generally speaking there is no need to practise patience with them, because we consider them to be very kind and helpful. There might be some absurd exceptions, but generally speaking that's how it is.

So the object of one's practice of patience is those very beings who we consider as an enemy, or those who harm us in any way. The harm caused by these enemies is what motivates us to engage in the practice of patience, which accumulates great virtue or extensive merit. So our enemy has given us the opportunity to purify negative karma extensively and accumulate great extensive merit. Yet *in dependence on me, that person will be thrown into the hells where they experience suffering for a long time. So I am giving harm to the enemy and he is benefitting me. Becoming angry with someone who benefits us is mistaken. Why, you unsuitable mind, do you get angry? You should like them.*

If one contemplates and considers how one practises patience, then one can see that there is a deep truth here. Those who actively go out of their way to harm us are giving us the opportunity to practise patience and so forth. Since they are giving us the opportunity to accumulate great extensive merit and purify negative karma, then they are in fact benefitting us.

Being grateful might seem to run counter to common sense, but even in ordinary terms it would not be considered correct to be angry with someone who actually helps us. So while all these practices may not immediately seem reasonable, when one actually contemplates and thinks about them, then one can see that there is great truth in them. They are not ideas that have been conjured up, but in fact present the actual reality of the situation.

The *Eight Verses of Mind Training* explain how we need to view other beings as cherished, precious jewels, when one sees that how it is in dependence upon such beings that one actually engages in the practices such as generosity, patience and so forth. However it is a gradual process and doesn't happen overnight.

1.3.3.2. REFUTING OBJECTIONS

Here there are three sub-divisions.

- 1.3.3.2.1. Refuting that it is incorrect that others benefit us
1.3.3.2.2. Refuting that it is incorrect that one is harming others
1.3.3.2.3. Stop ill treatment to those who benefit one

1.3.3.2.1. Refuting that it is incorrect that others benefit us

This relates to the earlier explanation that the person who harms us is, in fact, benefitting us. It is presented as a refutation of a hypothetical doubt.

First Gyaltsab Je presents the argument:

Argument: Do I then not also go to the lower realms due to the condition of the negativity of others?

As explained earlier, one will be the cause for others to go to the lower realms, so would it not then be the case that: *Do I not also not go to the lower realms due to the condition of negativity for others?*

The response is in these two lines:

*50ab. If I have the quality of thought
Then I will not go to the lower realms.*

Gyaltsab Je responds to the hypothetical doubt that he raised at the beginning.

Answer: If one has the quality of the thought of patience, 'They benefit me', then one will not go to the lower realms but purify negativities.

The answer to the opening hypothetical argument is that if one has the thought of practising patience and engages in that practice, thinking, *They benefit me, then one will not go to the lower realms, but will purify negativities.* This, then, is the virtue of the practice of patience. If one's mind is not disturbed by the intention of retaliation and so forth, and one practises patience thinking, 'They are benefitting me,' then, far from leading one to the lower realms, it will be a cause to purify one's negativities.

What one needs to understand from this presentation is that if one were not to practise patience and retaliate, and returns harm for harm, then one will indeed be creating the negativity that will cause one to go to the lower realms as well. However, even though the harm one receives might possibly have served as a cause for the other to go to the lower realms, the positive mind that engages in the practice of patience means that the harm does not act as a cause for one to go to the lower realms.

There are so many situations that can serve as a cause for others to create negativity, so we need to be a bit cautious in making sure that we avoid, as much as possible, putting ourselves in a position where others might generate a negative mind and create negativity. That is something we can take as a personal instruction.

These presentations are not too difficult to understand. The main thing is to contemplate these points, and really think about them.

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

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