
Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

བྱང་ལྷན་སེམས་དཔའི་སྤྱོད་པ་ལ་འཇུག་པ་བཞུགས་སོ་

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As usual, we can spend some time in meditation. For this we use the motivation that we generated in the *Refuge and Bodhicitta Prayer*.

[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. So for that purpose I will engage in listening to the teachings and then, through understanding their meaning, put them into practice well.

1.3.3.2. REFUTING OBJECTIONS

1.3.3.2.1. *Refuting that it is incorrect that others benefit us (cont.)*

In our last session we covered these two lines of verse:

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

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je prefaced these lines with this qualm:

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

Previously it had been explained that one becomes the cause for others to create negativity, and hence go to the lower realms. The doubt raised here is that if we are a cause for the other to create negativity, then wouldn't that also be a condition for us to go to the lower realms as well?

The response to that is that our practice of patience will protect us against going to the lower realms. And, as will be explained further on, the harm we receive from others actually benefits us. The implication here is that it is also important for us not to serve as a condition for others to create negativity. We need to be mindful that we don't put ourselves in a position where we engage in deeds that will cause others to create negativity.

Here we can see how the commentary presents this and the following verses as a way to overcome doubts or qualms that might arise from previous points. So the commentary prefaces each verse with a qualm, which is then answered by the verse.

1.3.3.2.2. *Refuting that it is incorrect that one is harming others*

Here the qualm presented by the commentary is:

Argument: Since the other person exhausts my negative karma they benefit me and therefore will also not go to the lower realms.

As mentioned earlier, the reason one does not go to the lower realms is because one engages in the practice of patience. So, since the other person has served as a

condition for one to practice patience, wouldn't they also not go to the lower realms?

The answer is in these two lines of verse:

50cd. *If I guard myself
Then how could they receive anything here?*

Then Gyaltsab Je explains the meaning of these lines:

Answer: Since I meditate on patience for my attacker, I protect myself from negativity, but how does the other person receive merit here in this life? They do not practise virtue, and only harm.

As the commentary meticulously explains, one is protecting oneself from negativity because one practises patience with the attacker. From this explanation we need to derive the understanding that the real protector is our own practice of patience, because it protects us from creating negativity, and hence unfortunate rebirths in future lives. This makes it very clear that the real protector is not an external entity, but that it lies within oneself. It is our own practice of patience that is the real protector: it protects us from creating an immediate negativity; and in the long run it protects us from being reborn in the unfortunate lower realms.

If practising patience is a way of gaining merit for oneself, then *how does the other person receive the merit* from our practise of patience? As explained in the commentary, they do not accrue any merit from our practice of patience because *they only harm and do not practise virtue*. So the merit that we have accumulated from practising patience cannot be a cause for the other to gain merit, and thus a cause to be born in the fortunate realms.

This is also a presentation of the infallibility of karma. As explained clearly in other teachings, such as the Middle Way teachings or *Madhyamaka*, there is no way that the karma created by one individual can be transferred to another. The karmic consequences one creates, whether they are virtuous or non-virtuous, will accrue only to the one who created it. Therefore karma is not transferrable. If it were to be transferrable, then the Buddha would definitely transfer all his merits to us so that we would not experience any kind of misery or suffering. But that is not possible. What we are being shown here is that we have to take the sole responsibility for creating virtue and positive karma, and for preventing negative karma.

We need to understand that the opposite of practising patience is allowing oneself to become angry. When one exhibits anger, then that becomes a cause for creating non-virtue and negativity, which is, in turn, the cause for rebirth in the unfortunate realms. Therefore we need to take initiative to subdue and overcome anger, and for that purpose practise patience. It is said that of the many methods to encourage one to practise patience, one of the best is to contemplate the disadvantages of anger. The more we contemplate the disadvantages and faults of anger, the more inclined to practise patience we will be.

To give an analogy to illustrate how karma is non-transferable, for example we cannot say to someone, 'You can take a leisurely rest, and I'll create virtue for you'. However that does not mean that one doesn't create any virtue in relation to someone else. When we engage in a virtuous deed for the sake of others, then because the

other serves as a condition for us to accumulate virtue, we can definitely dedicate our merit to the wellbeing of the other. So although the complete results of our practice such as patience and so forth cannot be experienced by the other, they will definitely derive some benefit from our practice.

1.3.3.2.3. *Stopping ill treatment to those who benefit one*

Again Gyaltsab Je commences his commentary with an argument or doubt:

Argument: If harming is a benefit then it would also be suitable for me to retaliate.

The verse presented as a response is:

51. *However, if I retaliate with harm
They are not guarded.
Also, my actions will degenerate
Finally my austerity will disintegrate.*

Then Gyaltsab Je explains the answer:

Answer: When I harm the other person in retaliation they will not be protected, and my practice of the four dharmas of a monk and my promise to meditate on love and compassion degenerate. Thus the supreme austerity of patience disintegrates.

As the commentary explains, if one is harmed by another, and one benefits from practising patience, one might misconstrue that reasoning, and come to a conclusion that it would be suitable to retaliate and harm them in return. The answer is that *when I harm the other person in retaliation they will not be protected, and my own practice of the four dharmas of a monk will degenerate.*

The four dharmas are

- Not to scold another although being scolded;
- Not to become angry when incited to anger;
- Not to hit another when being hit;
- Not to reveal another's fault when they do the same

These four dharmas are part of the vows of a fully ordained monk, as well as a core bodhisattva practice, along with the practice of love and compassion.

If these essential practices were to degenerate then, as presented here, the practice of patience, which is the *supreme austerity*, would also degenerate. As *The Bodhisattvas Way of Life* mentions, the best austerity is the austerity of patience. So if one engages in the practice of retaliating then that supreme austerity will also degenerate.

I have contemplated these points many, many times. If someone were to harm us, we might initially think that it is reasonable to retaliate, but there is no benefit in that. In fact, rather than any benefit there's only real loss. If one's love and compassion degenerates, then there's really nothing of any real substance in one's being. The person who lacks love and compassion is someone who is empty of any real values or virtues. So retaliation is nothing but the greatest loss.

These presentations are not to be taken lightly; rather they need to be really contemplated very carefully. The more one contemplates and thinks about these points, the more one's inner wisdom will increase. This very logical and systematic presentation will also help to develop our analytical reasoning skills.

When we establish a practice based on profound analytical reasoning, then it becomes much firmer and more stable. We might superficially agree with what has been presented here, but if we don't really contemplate these points, then the next time someone says something that is inappropriate, critical or harmful in any way, the immediate reaction will be anger and the wish to retaliate.

Normally, it might seem that retaliating is a way to protect oneself, but far from protecting oneself, it only brings more misery, and more harm to oneself. The real protection is when one practises patience. If we contemplate these points again and again, using all these logical reasons, and meditate on them, then we will be well equipped to be able to actually practise patience when someone harms us. Then, rather than retaliating with anger one could, with a sense of compassion and love, actually benefit them. Even if one is not in a position to benefit them, then at the very least, one will definitely be inclined not to harm them.

We need to contemplate how these points give us a very practical way to benefit ourselves. Of course we all naturally carry the imprints of anger, so we are therefore prone to getting angry, but we also have the potential to practise patience. That is also well within our capacity. Since we have the imprints of both anger and patience we need to decide which of these two, anger or patience, we wish to follow. When we think carefully, it will become quite clear as to which option is the better one.

When we look around, it is quite evident that those who are perpetually in an angry frame of mind are those who are suffering more, whereas those who are more patient and tolerant have a happier mind. Since we all wish for happiness, and do not wish to experience any suffering, it is in our own best interest that we choose to practise that which brings the most happiness, and which reduces our suffering.

This is how we need to reason and what we need to implement in our practice. If we practise in this way then that will be the optimum means of taking care of ourselves. The practice of patience is the best protection, and the best contributor to our own wellbeing. Through these reasons and practices we can see how a genuine follower of Buddhism definitely gains the benefit of becoming a happier and gentler person. We can see that if the guidance in this presentation were to be actually practised, the result can only be that we will be genuinely happier.

There is a story about one of the former abbots of Gomang Monastery asking a visiting monk from Sera Monastery about the welfare of one of the former abbots of Sera Monastery, Khensur Lobsang Wangchuk (who was renowned as a great scholar and practitioner). The visiting monk happened to be Mongolian, and Mongolians are known to be very straightforward. His response to the enquiry about the welfare of Khensur Lobsang Wangchuk was, 'Khensur Lobsang Wangchuk is always joyful and happy. Whether he's going somewhere or just in his room, whatever he does, he is always in a joyful state of mind'.

2. BE PATIENT WITH CONTEMPT AND SO FORTH

As I have mentioned previously, we really need to pay attention to these practices, as they are very relevant to our situation.

There are four subdivisions under this heading:

- 2.1. Contempt, slander etc. do not harm my body
- 2.2. It is unsuitable to be angry with a person who is related, or connected to, the anger
- 2.3. It is unsuitable to be angry with obstacles to things like gain
- 2.4. It is unsuitable to be angry with others who lack faith in oneself

2.1. Contempt, slander etc. do not harm my body

The relevant verse reads:

52. *Since the mind is not physical
Nobody can destroy it.
If one grasps at the body
The body will harm me with suffering.*

Gyaltsab Je then explains the meaning of the verse

If I protect my mind then, since it is not physical, it cannot be harmed at all by harsh words, weapons and so forth.

Contempt, slander and so forth do *not* harm one's *physical* body, so, *if* one protects one's *mind* then *it cannot be harmed at all by harsh words, weapons and so forth.*

Then this hypothetical doubt arises:

Argument: I get angry because the body harms me with suffering, due to me grasping at the body.

The proposition is that when one actually experiences physical suffering, then it must be reasonable to become angry. What is being presented clearly here is that the physical suffering that we experience is because of our strong attachment to our body.

As an answer to that hypothetical proposition that even if one is able to protect one's mind, it must be reasonable to be angry when one experiences physical suffering, the next verse is presented:

53. *When criticism, harsh words and
Unpleasant words
Do not harm the body
Then why, mind, do you get so angry?*

Gyaltsab Je explains:

Answer: If criticism, harsh words and unpleasant words do not harm, then why mind do you get so angry? It is unsuitable.

In explaining the verse, the commentary states *if criticism harsh words and unpleasant words of others do not harm my body in the least, then, why mind, do you get angry?* Implying that *it is unsuitable* to get angry. The point here is that it is unreasonable to get angry when criticism and harsh words and so forth are heard, because there is no actual harm to one's physical body.

2.2. It is unsuitable to be angry with a person who is connected to anger

This is similar to the previous heading. The verse is:

54. *If the dislike of others for me
Does not devour me,
Neither in this life nor in others,
Why do I have dislike for them?*

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je explains:

If dislike by others for me does not harm and devour me in this life or in other lives, then why do I have dislike for them? As this only unnecessarily creates the cause for suffering, dislike is unsuitable.

It has just been shown that there is physical suffering due to strong grasping at one's physical body. However, when harsh words and so forth are spoken, they don't really hurt the physical body.

When one has accepted that there's no point in becoming upset with harsh words and so forth, then the next doubt which may arise is that whilst harsh words and criticism and so forth may not harm me physically or mentally, they still cause others to dislike me, so therefore there is a reason to become angry.

In order to overcome that doubt the commentary states that *dislike by others for me does not harm and devour me in this life or in other lives.* The reasoning is that even if others were to dislike me, then how could that actually really harm me, when it does not devour me, or the merits that I have accumulated in this life? One's merit and life will not decline now, or in future lives, as a result of dislike. Since it does not cause me any actual harm now or in the future, there's no real reason for me to become angry at those who cause others to dislike me. *As this only unnecessarily creates the cause for suffering, dislike is unsuitable.*

2.3. It is unsuitable to be angry with obstacles to things like gain

Now the text moves on to a doubt that harsh words and criticism might harm us through being an obstruction to material gain. As a way to point out that it is unsuitable to be angry in that case, the next five subdivisions are presented:

- 2.3.1. Since gain disintegrates quickly, anger at obstacles to gain is unsuitable
- 2.3.2. Stopping wrongful gain
- 2.3.3. Establishing by example that craving for gain is unsuitable
- 2.3.4. The reason why craving for gain is unsuitable
- 2.3.5. Refuting that it is suitable to establish gain

2.3.1. Since gain disintegrates quickly, anger at obstacles to gain is unsuitable

What is being presented here is that all gain is in the nature of being transient. So there's no point in being really attached to some impermanent thing that is transitory, and which disintegrates.

The first two lines of the next verse are presented as a qualm:

- 55ab. *If I have dislike for them
Because they obstruct my gain,*

Again, Gyaltsab Je's commentary begins with a presentation of the argument or the doubt:

Argument: I do not like criticism, slander and harsh words as they obstruct my gain.

If one were to say that, then the next two lines of verse 55 serve as an answer.

- 55cd. *I destroy my gain in this
And negativities abide firmly.*

The explanation in the commentary is quite easy to understand. However the personal instruction is that we need to be mindful of not being too attached to things like gain and so forth. If one has excessive attachment to gain, then that will definitely be an obstruction to one's Dharma practice, which will really harm one. Therefore it is in our own best interest to reduce strong attachment to gain and so forth.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

Answer: The gain, for which one meditates on anger, will be destroyed quickly in this life, and the negativity of anger will remain firmly in my continuum. It is easier to not achieve gain and it is unsuitable to get angry.

As the commentary clearly explains, *the gain for which one familiarises oneself with anger, will be destroyed quickly in this life, and the negativity of anger will remain firmly in my continuum.* Whatever gain one achieves will be destroyed in this life, but the negativity of anger remains firmly in one's continuum. That being the case, *it is easier to not achieve gain, and it is unsuitable to get angry.* In other words it is much better to avoid becoming angry, even if it means passing up the opportunity for gain.

2.3.2. Stopping wrongful gain

Wrongful gain basically occurs in conjunction with wrong livelihood. Having strong and excessive attachments to one's gains and so forth, will naturally fall into the category of wrong livelihood. We covered the five wrong livelihoods in the teachings on *Precious Garland*.¹

The relevant verse is:

56. *If I die today, that is easy,
To live long with wrong livelihood is
unsuitable.
Even if someone like me remained for long,
One is the very suffering of death.*

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je explains:

Even if I die today without any gain, that is easy, but it is unsuitable to live long with the wrong livelihood gained through anger. Even if someone like me abides for a long time, in the end I have to give up everything and am not beyond the very sufferings of death.

When the commentary states, *even if I die today without any gain, that is easy,* it is implying that it would be better to die (even if death comes tomorrow) without any gain, because *it is unsuitable to live long with wrong livelihood gained through anger.* A long life, sustained by gains that involve deceiving, cheating or harming others and anger, is unsuitable.

Even if someone like me abides for a long time, in the end I have to give up everything and am not beyond the very sufferings of death. Whatever gains one may have accumulated through wrong livelihoods, harming others, anger and so forth, will not sustain us for very long anyway, because when we experience death, we will have to give it all up.

If we really pay attention to this presentation, and think about the points carefully, it will make a lot of sense.

2.3.3. Establishing by example that craving for gain is unsuitable

The two verses relating to this are:

57. *If one is someone who wakes up
After having experienced a hundred years of
happiness in a dream
Or if one is someone who wakes up
After having experienced only a moment of
happiness,*
58. *For both, when they are awake
This happiness does not return.
For both, those of short life, or of long
It will be the same at the time of death.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

Regardless of whether one is someone who wakes up from a hundred year dream in which one experienced happiness or whether one is someone who wakes up after only a brief moment of happiness in a dream, for either, when awake, this happiness will not return. Similarly, whether one has had a long happy life or a short happy life, at the time of death it becomes only a mere memory, and therefore it is unsuitable to crave for gain.

Here the commentary explains the examples given in the text. Regardless of whether *one wakes up from a hundred year dream in which one experienced happiness, or wakes up after only a brief moment of happiness in a dream,* that happiness will not return. Whatever the duration of happiness experienced in a dream, it will not return. Likewise, whether one has had a *happy long life or short happy life, it becomes mere memory at the time of death.* What is being indicated here is that whatever happiness one has one has experienced from mere worldly gains, out of attachment, or from sensual pleasures and so forth, is only a mere memory at the time of death. *Therefore it is unsuitable to crave for gain.*

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

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¹ See teaching of 9 March 2010.