

# Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

བྱང་ལྷན་སེམས་དཔའི་སྤོད་པ་ལ་འཇུག་པ་བཞུགས་སོ།

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While maintaining the motivation we generated during the prayers, we can now engage in our meditation practice. [meditation]

As usual 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 listen to the teachings, and put them into practice well.

## 2.1.4.1.2. Stopping anger at that which faults relatives<sup>1</sup>

### 2.1.4.1.2.1. Stopping it with the patience of definitely relying on the Dharma

#### 2.1.4.1.2.1.1. Why it is unsuitable to be angry if holy bodies etc. are harmed (cont.)

Here, *holy bodies* refers to the actual holy bodies of buddhas, gurus and bodhisattvas, as well as holy objects such as stupas and so forth. In the past, stupas in Varanasi and other parts of India were destroyed by followers of other faiths, who acted out of evil intent or extreme ignorance. What is being explained here is that even in extreme cases where the buddhas are harmed and holy objects and so forth are destroyed, one should not find reason to become angry. Rather one should practise patience.

Instead of retaliating with anger, one needs to develop compassion for such people. This is a very significant point. When one really thinks about it, these people, who cause such destruction to holy objects, are an object of great compassion because of the heavy negativities they have created. In fact, the compassion developed for such beings of evil intent is said to be very subtle and profound.

#### 2.1.4.1.2.1.2. It is likewise suitable to be patient with harm to relatives and so forth

It is explained here that one should also practise patience when harm is inflicted upon our teachers, close relatives and friends.

The verse relating to this is:

65. *Even if one's teacher and relatives  
And friends are harmed,  
Stop anger by seeing that it came about  
Through the earlier way of conditions.*

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je explains the meaning of the verse as follows:

It is likewise unsuitable to get angry when one's teachers, contemporaries, relatives or friends and so

forth are being harmed or one sees them being harmed. One should stop anger by seeing that the friends and so forth are being harmed due to the karma accumulated through unsuitable actions in the past, that the harm had arisen through the earlier explained way of conditions.

Here, *contemporaries* refers to immediate relatives such as one's parents or siblings, while *relatives* refers to one's spouse and in-laws, as well as one's extended family. When they are being harmed, or when one sees them about to be harmed, *one should stop anger, by seeing that the friends and so forth are being harmed due to karma accumulated through unsuitable actions in the past.*

At this point, one needs to use the earlier explanation that harms to oneself cannot come about if one hasn't created the karma to experience that harm. Similarly, if others haven't created the karma to be harmed, they won't experience any harm. The harm they experience is a consequence of their own negative karma, rather than being entirely caused by the perpetrator. So by using the reasons that were previously explained in relation to oneself, one finds reason to practise patience when relatives and friends are harmed, rather than becoming angry.

As also explained previously, we benefit when others harm us, as that harm enables us to exhaust negative karma. Furthermore, they are giving us an opportunity to practise patience. So, rather than harming us, they are actually benefitting us. In addition, they will experience the negative consequences of their action. So they are in fact an object of compassion rather than anger. The same line of reasoning also applies when one's close relatives and friends and the like are harmed.

When we think about it carefully, these are very logical reasons. But we can't leave it at that. We need to remind ourselves to put this advice into practice. We might know about the significance of the practice, but if we don't attempt to practise it, then that knowledge won't be of much help in preventing us from becoming angry. Through training our mind, going over these explanations and meditating on them, we will not become angry even when the conditions for anger are present. That is proof that we are practising patience.

If we just skim over these explanations and think 'Oh yeah, this makes sense' and don't make any attempt to practise it, then, when the conditions arise, we will find ourselves becoming upset and angry. After we get angry we might then recall the practice and make an attempt to practise patience, but by then it's a bit too late. You've already become upset and angry, and if you had acted upon it then the damage would have already been done.

The real beneficiary of one's practice of patience is oneself. The mark of patience is that in the event of physical or verbal harm, one's mind is not disturbed and one does not become agitated. That is when one actually reaps the benefit of patience, which is maintaining a mind that is free from agitation.

Furthermore, as was mentioned previously, practising patience in the event of harm is also an optimum means to accumulate great merit, and purify negative karma. Thus it is one of the greatest virtues. As explained earlier, the austerity of patience is the supreme austerity of a

<sup>1</sup> Here the heading numbering in the transcript reverts (temporarily) back to the structure of the chapter, rather than the abbreviated version used in the previous section. See the teaching of 14 October for the introduction of this heading.

bodhisattva's practice. In contrast, if we allow our mind to become upset and angry, then, as explained previously, even a moment of anger can destroy the virtues of many eons, and become a cause to be born in the lower realms.

These are essential points to keep in mind, to remind ourselves of the great advantage of practising patience, and the disadvantages of not practising it.

#### 2.1.4.1.2.2. Stopping it with the patience that does not think anything of harm

Another way to translate the heading would be:

##### 2.1.4.1.2.2. The patience of not retaliating against someone who harms you

This has four subdivisions:

2.1.4.1.2.2.1. Being angry only at that which has a mind is unsuitable

2.1.4.1.2.2.2. The reason why it is unsuitable to be angry

2.1.4.1.2.2.3. Contemplating one's fault

2.1.4.1.2.2.4. Contemplating the benefits of patience

*2.1.4.1.2.2.1. Being angry only at that which has a mind is unsuitable*

Harm can be inflicted by both animate and inanimate objects. The outline, by itself, indicates that it is not reasonable to be upset by focussing solely on animate objects.

The verse relating to this reads:

66. *Embodied beings are harmed by both  
Those with mind and those without mind.  
Why single out and take exception to those  
with mind?  
Therefore be patient with harm.*

In his commentary, Gyalsab Je states:

The embodied beings that are our relatives and so forth are harmed both by the enemy that has mind, and the weapons and so forth that do not have mind. So why do I single out those with mind, and become angry and aggressive towards them? This is unsuitable and thus I should be patient with harm to relatives.

The commentary asks why, when *embodied beings*, such as relatives and so forth are *harmed by an enemy that has a mind, and by weapons and so forth that have no mind*, does one *single out* only the harm caused by the one who has a mind, and become *aggressive towards them*? It concludes by saying that it *is unsuitable and thus one should be patient with harm to relatives*.

The reasoning presented here is similar to what was explained earlier, which is that if someone harms you with the blow of a stick, for example, the one causing the direct harm is the stick. But of course one doesn't normally become angry with the stick, because one reasons that the stick is held by a person, and that if they hadn't wielded the stick, we wouldn't have experienced any pain.

With that same logical reasoning the text went on to explain that, as you don't get angry at the stick because it is controlled by the person, so too the person is controlled by delusions such as anger. Therefore one should not find reason to be upset with that person.

Although not elaborated as such, this section of the text is a similar explanation of why we should not be upset with people who harm us. However, if we don't relate this explanation to the earlier one, then we might ask, 'Why isn't it reasonable to be upset with the person who has a mind, when they have caused me harm?' If one didn't have an understanding of the previous explanation, then one might get stuck here and start thinking, 'Well, it should be reasonable to get angry at someone if they have harmed me?'

So it is important to be able to relate this verse to the logical reasons presented in the earlier explanation.

*2.1.4.1.2.2.2. The reason why it is unsuitable to be angry*

The verse relating to this heading is a very profound summary of the main points:

67. *Some commit faults due to ignorance,  
Some become angry due to ignorance.  
Who is without fault?  
Who is with fault?*

Gyalsab Je's commentary begins his explanation with:

Some beings commit harms such as killing and so forth due to being ignorant of the law of cause and effect, and some become angry because of being ignorant of the faults of anger.

This is really a presentation of the fact that great harms are created due to being ignorant of the law of cause and effect or karma; and being ignorant of the faults of anger and so forth.

- Being ignorant of the law of cause and effect or karma, is the main cause for one to be reborn in the lower realms; and
- Being ignorant of the faults of anger and so forth, i.e. being ignorant of the fundamental truth of reality, is the cause to be reborn in higher realms within cyclic existence

That's how karma is created - through ignorance.

As specifically explained here, *some beings commit harms such as killing and so forth*, which includes some of the five heinous crimes of killing one's mother; killing one's father; killing an arhat and so forth.

Other heavy negative karmas implied by *and so forth* include stealing, which can be of varying degrees of severity. There is also sexual misconduct, as well as the heavy negative karma of holding on to wrong views. These are causes that create great misdeeds and negativity.

These heavy negative karmas are created due to being ignorant of the law of cause and effect. In other words, the immediate condition for creating these heavy negative karmas is the ignorance of the law of cause and effect. Although we have some understanding of karma, we continually find ourselves committing negativities and misdeeds, so we cannot blame those who, having no understanding of the law of cause and effect, create negative karmas out of sheer ignorance.

When the commentary states *and some become angry because of being ignorant of the faults of anger*, it is specifically explaining that when there's ignorance of the faults of anger, then, because one does not consider anger as a fault, one will find every reason to become angry. In

other words, if one doesn't see the faults of anger then when the conditions for anger arise and are present, it will further escalate, and there will be no hesitation in expressing and acting out of anger.

On the other hand, if one has contemplated the faults of anger, then even if anger were to momentarily arise due to certain conditions, one will prevent it from escalating by immediately recalling the faults of anger. One of the younger students, who used to come to Wednesday evening classes, once mentioned that contemplating and thinking about the faults of anger does definitely help to reduce the intensity of that negativity. Recognising the faults of anger is, in fact, one of the primary methods for preventing the escalation of anger. The more one familiarises one's mind with its faults, the more it helps to reduce that mind of anger.

Gyaltsab Je concludes his commentary on the verse with:

Out of those two, how can one say who is without fault and who is with fault? Since both are equally with fault, it is unsuitable to return harm with anger.

Here he is presenting further reasons as to why *it is unsuitable to return harm with anger*. A perpetrator of harm is either ignorant of the law of cause and effect or ignorant of the faults of anger, and so they engage in negative deeds, and create so much negativity. When one really thinks about this, they are in a very pitiful situation. Through their creation of so much negativity, they are creating the causes for their own misery and suffering. If we don't contemplate these points it would be very easy to become angry with those who are guilty of such heinous crimes as murder, saying, 'How inappropriate that is! How dare they do something like that? How is it possible for them to do such evil things?'

But if we really think about these points to gain a deeper understanding, we will understand how people engage in these negative acts out of sheer ignorance. Then, instead of annoyance and anger, one will really start to feel a deep sense of compassion for them. So these are really profound methods to develop a much stronger compassion.

One needs to relate this passage to the earlier explanations of how to prevent anger when one is harmed, and practise patience instead. Just as that elaborate presentation showed us the necessity of engaging in the practice of applying the patience of not retaliating when someone harms you, this section of the text is related specifically to the harm inflicted on holy beings and one's relatives, friends, and so forth. Just as one trains one's mind in not retaliating when others harm oneself, one uses the same thread of reasoning to practise patience, and not retaliate when one's relatives and friends and so forth are harmed.

#### 2.1.4.1.2.2.3. *Contemplating one's fault*

This relates to contemplating the faults of the person who is being harmed.

The first of two verses under this heading is:

68. *Why did I create previously  
The karma to be harmed?  
If all depends on karma  
Then why do I take exception with them?*

Here Gyaltsab Je explains:

In the past, why did I create the karma due to which others harm me? If all the meaningless harms that I receive depends on my bad karma, then why do I become angry with the other person?

As the commentary explains clearly, *the harm that I receive now is due to the karma that I've created in the past*. If that is the case, then whatever harm I receive from another is none other than the results of karma that I've created in the past. Therefore one should not find reason to be angry with the other. The verse backing this up is:

69. *I shall make an effort to act meritoriously  
So that all, upon seeing this,  
Develop the mind of love  
For each other.*

Here Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

Having seen that all harms and sufferings arise from karma one thinks, 'When will it come to be that all living beings have a loving mind towards each other? I will make this happen'. So in this way I must strive for the merits of compassion and so forth.

This is a really wonderful explanation of how to put this teaching into practice. As explained here, *all harms and suffering are the results of previously created karma*. Having understood that, *one thinks, 'When will it come to be that all living beings have a loving mind towards each other?'* Here, all living beings refers to close and dear ones, enemies, and strangers to whom one normally would feel indifference. For as long as that distinction between friends, enemies and strangers is present, harms and so forth will be inflicted upon each other.

How wonderful it would be if all beings could replace that mind of discrimination with a genuine sense of care, and a loving attitude towards each other. Having contemplated the value of that wonderful state, one thinks *I will make this happen. I must strive for the merits of compassion and so forth*. Generating this mind of great love and compassion is also the means to accumulate great merit.

So there is no reason to be upset and angry with others. Whatever harm that's experienced is only due to the results of previous karma. Wouldn't it be wonderful if, through seeing this, everyone was free from being upset and angry with each other, and instead generated love and compassion for each other?

#### 2.1.4.1.2.2.4. *Contemplating the benefits of patience*

This is subdivided into three:

2.1.4.1.2.2.4.1. Striving not to allow one's virtue to degenerate

2.1.4.1.2.2.4.2. Purifying the causes for hell by tolerating small sufferings

2.1.4.1.2.2.4.3. It is suitable to like the austerity for the great purpose

#### 2.1.4.1.2.2.4.1. *Striving not to allow one's virtue to degenerate*

Far from letting virtue degenerate, we should strive to further increase those virtues.

There are two verses under this heading, the first of which is:

70. *For example, when a house is on fire,*

*And the fire has started to spread to other houses,  
The hay and so forth to which it has spread  
Is suitable to be given up.*

The explanation in the commentary reads:

For example, if a house is on fire and the fire has moved to another house where it spreads to the grass and wood, then it is suitable that one sacrifices the hay and wood in order to save the wealth of the house. It would be unsuitable to have attachment to them.

The *example* that is used is *that if another house is on fire, and the courtyard in one's house contains hay and wood, then to protect one's house and valuables one would be prepared to sacrifice or remove that hay and wood to remove the danger of sparks igniting it. If one were attached to the hay and wood in one's courtyard it could destroy one's own house and possessions.*

The second verse extends this example:

71. *Likewise, when, through being attached to something,  
The fire of hatred spreads,  
And there is doubt that one's merits will burn,  
Then of course one has to give it up.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

Similarly, if the fire of hatred is spreading due to the condition of attachment to friends and so forth and there is the danger that the wealth of merits and so forth will burn, then the basis of one's attachment is suitable to be given up; thus it is unsuitable to be attached.

How often do we find ourselves engaging in negativities due to strong *attachment to friends, relatives and so forth*? For example, when they are harmed one finds reason to become really upset and angry, which will destroy *one's own merit* and roots of virtues. Therefore, one *should give up attachment* to one's friends and relatives as a means of protecting the great wealth of one's merit and virtues.

#### **2.1.4.1.2.2.4.2. Purifying the causes for hell by tolerating small sufferings**

This has two subdivisions:

2.1.4.1.2.2.4.2.1. Example

2.1.4.1.2.2.4.2.2. Meaning

##### **2.1.4.1.2.2.4.2.1. Example**

First of all Gyaltsab Je presents an argument:

Argument: If one is separated from friends and relatives one will suffer.

Here one is finding reason not to be patient when one's relatives and so forth are harmed, based on the point that *if one is separated from friends and relatives one will suffer*. So seeing them harmed or suffering is a reason to be upset and angry.

The answer is presented in this verse:

72. *How can it not be good if a person to be killed  
Is released upon having his hand cut off?  
How can it not be good if one is freed from hell  
Through the human sufferings?*

The commentary explains the answer:

Answer: If a person condemned to death is freed upon having his hand cut off then how is that not good? It is good. Likewise, if one is freed from the

suffering of hell merely by experiencing the human sufferings of hunger and thirst, then how is that not good? It is appropriate to tolerate small sufferings to reverse larger sufferings.

The explanation begins with the rhetorical question, *if a person who is condemned to death is freed upon having his hand cut off, then how is that not good?* This implies that an individual who is condemned to death would find the lesser suffering of losing one's hand to be more acceptable. In comparison with the unbearable suffering of being killed, the suffering of losing one's hand would be more bearable. The main point of this analogy is that it is appropriate to bear a small suffering as a means of relieving a greater suffering. In comparison to being killed, the suffering of having one's hand cut off is relatively minor.

Having presented this example the commentary further explains that *likewise, if one is freed from the suffering of hell merely by experiencing the human sufferings of hunger and thirst, then how is that not good? It is appropriate to tolerate small sufferings to reverse larger sufferings.*

As presented here, in comparison to the unbearable and intense sufferings of the hell realms, the suffering experienced in the human realm, such as intense hunger and thirst, is relatively minor. A very good example is the Nyung Nye practice. During the Nyung Nye one experiences extreme thirst and great pangs of hunger. However, that kind of suffering has a great purpose in that it is a way of purifying one's negative karma. When this practice is done appropriately it becomes a cause to relieve the sufferings of the hell realms. So it is worthwhile to bear small sufferings, if doing so becomes a cause to relieve a greater suffering. I've done many Nyung Nyes, and there is definitely great suffering. However even though it's not comfortable physically, when one sees its purpose, one does not allow that physical suffering to overwhelm one's mind, and so one continues with the practice. This is a good example to use in conjunction with what is being explained here.

These are examples of hardships that one goes through when practising Dharma. When one sees the value of the practice, then one will not be deterred by small sufferings and think, 'Oh it's too difficult. I can't bear this. It's not worthwhile doing it'. That would be losing the opportunity to accumulate great merit and purify great negative karma.

The main point here is that engaging in Dharma practices requires some effort, hardship and difficulties. But that is worthwhile when it becomes a cause to relieve greater suffering. This is what one needs to keep in mind. One can extend that understanding to practising patience beginning with small sufferings. As we become familiar with being patient with small sufferings we will develop patience with greater suffering. That is another way of looking at what is presented here.

As literally explained in the commentary, it is worthwhile being patient with smaller suffering as that becomes a cause to relieve greater sufferings. This also implies that if one cannot be patient with small sufferings, then there is no way that one will be able practise patience with greater sufferings. So it is definitely worthwhile to begin with being patient with small sufferings.

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#### 2.1.4.1.2.2.4.2.2. Meaning

The hypothetical argument used to introduce the verse is:

Argument: I cannot bear even these sufferings.

*I cannot bear even these sufferings* relates to the sufferings of the human realm. These include hunger and thirst, as well as other suffering such as being criticised, being beaten or bound, experiencing sickness and so forth. These are all sufferings experienced on the human realm.

The verse states:

73. *If I cannot bear  
Even the present sufferings,  
Then why do I not reverse anger  
The cause of the sufferings of hell?*

Then the commentary explains that:

Answer: If I cannot bear even the small present sufferings of hunger, thirst and being cut with weapons, then why do I not make an effort to reverse anger which is the cause for the sufferings of hell? I should strive to reverse it.

As explained very clearly, we become angry because we *cannot bear the small sufferings* that we experience in this human existence, such as *hunger and thirst, being cut* and beaten and so forth. The reason why we become angry is because we're not able to bear that suffering. So if it's so hard and difficult to bear the suffering of the human existence, then why would one *not make the effort to reverse the anger which is a cause for the great sufferings in the hell realms?* The conclusion here is one should make every effort to reverse the cause of one's great sufferings in the hell realms, which is anger. So it is incredibly worthwhile to practise patience with the small sufferings of our current existence, as a means to prevent the creation of the causes to experience much greater suffering in the hell realms.

We need to keep this very significant point in mind and put it into practice. If we find it so hard to bear even the small suffering that we are experiencing now, then, with the prospect of having to experience great suffering in the future, why would we not strive to actually overcome the cause of that great suffering, which is anger. Why would one intentionally not want to practise patience? It would be really ridiculous and pointless to intentionally create the causes for much greater suffering. So the personal instruction here is that it is incredibly valuable to actually engage in the practice of patience.

It is reasonable to conclude that if one cannot bear small sufferings then one should, by every means, avoid creating causes for much greater suffering. However we often find the reverse, where someone, who cannot bear to experience some small suffering, takes the drastic measure of jumping off a cliff or a bridge to end their life, and ends up with much greater suffering through ending their life.

That's really quite ironic—they were intending to escape from the small suffering they were experiencing, and ended up having to experience much greater suffering. If we look at it from this point of view, then we can see that it is really very foolish to try to purposely create more suffering, especially as a means of trying to remove smaller sufferings. In fact, the opposite should be

practised, which is avoiding the causes for greater suffering through experiencing lesser suffering now.

The text is showing us, with very logical reasons, that if we don't want to experience small sufferings, we should then use every means to avoid the causes for much greater suffering. There are many, many instances of people taking drastic measures in an attempt to rid themselves of some comparatively minor suffering, but end up in experiencing even greater suffering.

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

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