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# Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

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

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

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

As usual we can 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 Mahayana teachings, and put them into practice well.

2.1.4.1.2.2.4. Contemplating the benefits of patience (cont.)

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

This has two subdivisions:

2.1.4.1.2.2.4.3.1. Having regret due to not having achieved the purpose of self or others, despite all the bodies that have already been wasted

2.1.4.1.2.2.4.3.2. It is suitable to be happy because of achieving the purpose of all sentient beings by being patient with the present austerities

2.1.4.1.2.2.4.3.1. Having regret due to not having achieved the purpose of self or others, despite all the bodies that have already been wasted

74. For the purpose of desire, I experienced  
The sufferings of being burned and so forth in  
thousands of hells,  
But I have not achieved the purpose  
Of self or others.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains the meaning clearly:

Because before I was engaged in negative actions due to desire for the mistaken object of my craving, I have experienced for thousands of eons the sufferings of being cut and so forth in hell. Despite this, I have not achieved the slightest purpose of self or others.

Previously one has engaged in actions due to desire for the mistaken object of my craving. The mistaken objects of craving, as explained in other teachings in more detail, are the objects of attachment and anger. The engagement with these objects becomes mistaken, due to the mistaken perceptions through which we interact with them. That is why the objects of craving are referred to here as mistaken objects.

Neuroscientists also support this view, stating that when one sees a fault in an object (such as an object of anger), the perceived fault is only about ten percent coming from the object's side. Ninety percent of the perceived faults are actually a projection from one's own mind. This is a very significant scientific discovery, which of course has already been explained profoundly in the Buddha's teachings.

Likewise, the mind of attachment sees the object of attachment as having only appealing features of beauty. Whereas according to the earlier explanation, the appealing features of beauty in the object may be only about ten percent. The rest would be an overrated projected state of beauty in one's mind, due to the strong attachment to that object.

The commentary explains that *due to desire for the mistaken object of my craving*, one has created a lot of negative actions in the past, so due to that one has *experienced for thousands of eons the sufferings of being cut and so forth in hell*.

The first point explains how one has created many negativities in the past, for which one has already experienced the consequences over great lengths of time in the lower realms. Once reborn in the lower realms, such as the hell realm, it is very difficult to create any virtue.

Bringing this concept into one's present life, we can see how we engage in negativities due to our desires for mistaken objects of craving and so forth. In contemplating these very profound points about karma, one can see how one engages in negative actions due to mistaken perceptions in one's own mind.

Once in the human realm, if we do not use our suffering to purify our negative karma, then as explained: *I have not achieved the slightest purpose for self and others*. If one's suffering has not served the purpose of achieving either goals for a better rebirth in future lives, or for definite goodness, which is to achieve liberation and enlightenment, then we have not achieved the slightest purpose for self and others.

To take this as a personal instruction: one needs to develop regret for not having achieved the purpose of self and others. Contemplating how, despite the numerous bodies that one has already wasted, if one has not utilised one's life to counteract attachment and anger towards mistaken objects, then one has constantly created negativity. As the outline explains, we have wasted so many bodies and experienced various types of suffering, but we have not achieved any purpose. The reason we have wasted so many lives is because they have not served to fulfil the purpose of either oneself or others. You must understand that the outline serves as a great guide in extracting the meaning of the verse.

For example this outline, *Having regret due to not having achieved the purpose of self or others, despite all the bodies that have already been wasted*, directly relates to, and introduces the meaning of the next verse, which comes under the following heading: *It is suitable to be happy because of achieving the purpose of all sentient beings by being patient with the present austerities*.

This is how I understand the meaning of these outlines and I am confident that it is correct, as I am quite familiar with their content. We can see how the outline serves the purpose of showing the sequence and logic of the verses presented in the text. One should not underestimate the value of any text's outline. For example, if one wishes to meditate on the Lam Rim, it is on the basis of a thorough grasp of the outline itself that one is able to meditate on the various topics.

There was a time in the past when I spent many months meditating on the Lam Rim, which I did on the basis of having first memorised the outline. Memorising the outline is very useful, because it makes it possible to recall the topics precisely and get an overview of the entire Lam Rim. To give an analogy, it is like sitting on top of a high mountain and seeing everything below very clearly.

Similarly, when one has learned the outline of a text such as the Lam Rim, then the meditation practice becomes very meaningful, as one has an overview of the entire Lam Rim text. The reason why I regularly emphasise the importance of the outlines is because they present a sequential and logical manner for extracting the meaning of the text.

**2.1.4.1.2.2.4.3.2. It is suitable to be happy because of achieving the purpose of all sentient beings by being patient with the present austerities**

The verse reads:

75. *This does not harm me like that  
And it also achieves great purpose  
It is suitable to be only happy about  
The sufferings that clear the harm of sentient  
beings.*

Gyalsab Je's commentary explains further:

This austerity at the time of achieving the purpose of others does not harm me that much, but in dependence on it, I achieve great purpose. Therefore, it is suitable to be only happy and accept the sufferings of the austerities that clear away all the harm of migrators.

The commentary explains that the austerity one could endure for the purpose of others would include practices of forsaking food or clothing and enduring hardships in the practices one engages in. These difficulties, while they may be hard, do not actually harm oneself to any great extent. In fact, whatever level of suffering we experience in our practice is a suffering within the human realm, so it is nothing compared to suffering in the lower realms. And rather than harming, austerities actually serve to help achieve the great meaning of serving the purpose of oneself and others: *in dependence upon it I achieve great purpose.*

We can relate to the great purpose of all the hardships one bears in one's practices as being a means for becoming the cause of either achieving high status in the future life, or definite goodness i.e. liberation, and ultimately enlightenment. So that is the great purpose one will be able to achieve by enduring the hardships of Dharma practice. Therefore, as the commentary explains: *it is suitable to be only happy and accept the sufferings of the austerities.* This relates specifically to the practice of the patience of willingly enduring sufferings. This is the type of patience that serves as the means *that clears away all the harm of migrators.*

When one achieves one's great purpose, such as attaining enlightenment, that then becomes the means to clear away the harms of all migrators. This is the extent of the great virtue, or great purpose, that one can achieve.

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

This point is very relevant and practical in our everyday life. It follows the earlier advice on how to not get angry and practise patience. It began with how to practise patience and not retaliate with anger in relation to harms inflicted on oneself personally. This was followed with advice on how to practise patience and not be angry when one's close ones, such as relatives and friends are harmed. This leads up to advice given now on how to practise patience when one's enemies are benefitted.

We can see how this is very much related to our everyday life situation. We see how we create so much negativity toward those who harm our close ones, and find reasons to get very agitated and angry. Then again, with those who help or benefit our enemies, we become really agitated and angry. This is how we seem to constantly create the situation for own mental turmoil and agony.

Everyday situations present so many occasions to get upset and angry, and create a great amount of negativity. So the sequential advice on how to practise patience is very relevant. It is not as if we are being asked to practise something which is totally unrelated to us, and beyond our reach. So we definitely need to embrace this advice and put it into practice.

This part of the outline is subdivided into three parts:

2.1.4.1.3.1. Abandoning intolerance to achieving praise and renown of enemies

2.1.4.1.3.2. Abandoning intolerance to achieving their happiness

2.1.4.1.3.3. Abandoning intolerance to achieving their gain

So from these outlines we can see great advice being presented.

In relation to the first subdivision, *Abandoning intolerance to the achievement of praise and renown by enemies* we can see how we don't favour an enemy being praised and receiving good comments, and because it makes us feel uncomfortable we find reason to get angry. Here we are being advised to abandon intolerance to this response.

The second subdivision, *Abandoning intolerance to achieving their happiness*, highlights how we are not happy when our enemies are happy. Getting angry when enemies achieve the means for happiness can cause one great pain, so this intolerance must be abandoned.

There are many who suffer precisely because they are unable to tolerate things like praise being given to one's enemies, or enemies achieving happiness. It causes many people sleepless nights, and a lot of anxiety in their mind. Many mental problems are created by none other than these ways of thinking that cause turmoil in one's mind.

Based on what is presented here we can see how people can be tormented with many reasons to become upset and angry. Elaborating on this from our own experience we can see that it is very true. We start out by not being able to tolerate good things happening to our enemies. Then, when someone helps them and benefits them, we find further reason to become more upset and aggravated. This can go further, when others help those who are helping our enemies, we find even more reason

to get upset. In this way our mind becomes more and more agitated with so much anger.

When we look at reasons for the mind to become agitated and upset, so many factors and conditions can cause one to be in mental turmoil. This seems to be in fact the reason why so many people end up becoming depressed.

Some have related to me symptoms where they reach a state of mind where everything appears to be negative and everyone is against them. These are created by none other than the mind which is going round in a vicious circle, thinking about different scenarios, adding on more and more reasons to become angry. All of that then causes the mind to have so many disturbing thoughts, causing it to become tight and very vulnerable to being easily depressed. A feeling of hostility can arise in one's mind with everything appearing negative. That is what some have confided in me. We need to understand that these feelings are created by the mind getting out of control.

The mind escalates a small problem into a big one. To use the earlier example, we first get angry with our enemy, then with those who help our enemies, then with those who help those who help our enemies, and so on and so forth. All this is the cause for one's mind to be in turmoil and become depressed. This can all be stopped when one stops anger towards one's enemy, which is the main cause for all the other reasons to become angry. Thus, when one develops a genuine sense of love and compassion towards one's enemy, all the other reasons to be angry will also naturally subside.

This is how we can see the great value and power of love and compassion. It has the power to transform our mind in a positive way. This is why I regularly emphasise love and compassion as being really important, indeed most valuable in one's life. So we need to constantly familiarise our mind with it again and again. The mind of love and compassion is one of the greatest states of mind for establishing genuine peace and wellbeing within oneself.

Based on the teachings, we can see how the Buddha has presented such profound methods and means in the techniques of cultivating love and compassion in relation to not only one's close ones, but also to strangers and enemies. When one extends one's love and compassion on all three levels—friends, strangers and enemies—then it naturally becomes unbiased love and compassion, not discriminating between some who are close, others who are distant, and some as enemies.

When one overcomes that attitude, all beings will appear as very close and dear to oneself. This is an indisputable and profound teaching by the Buddha which is unequalled by any presentation in other traditions. It is quite unique. So when we refer to the Buddha's teachings we can then start to develop a genuine sense of admiration for the qualities of the Buddha himself, and the value of his teachings.

Encompassing all beings and not having antagonistic views towards others, comes from familiarity with love and compassion. With the attitude of love and compassion we can also develop genuine respect for other traditions, by maintaining an unbiased attitude towards other faiths.

#### 2.1.4.1.3.1. Abandoning intolerance to the achievement of praise and renown by enemies

This is subdivided into two.

2.1.4.1.3.1.1. Since it is the cause for one's happiness it is suitable to want it

2.1.4.1.3.1.2. Since it is the cause for the happiness of others it is unsuitable to not want it

Again, the outlines alone are a meticulous presentation. The meaning of the following verses are presented in relation to abandoning intolerance to one's enemies achieving praise and renown. Abandoning this becomes a cause for one's own happiness, so it is suitable to want to abandon intolerance. Secondly, it becomes the cause for others' happiness; so not wanting to abandon it is unsuitable.

The teaching is really training our minds to change our negative attitude. This is why I emphasise again and again in my regular teachings, how a lot of the problems we create are just ways of thinking (or attitudes) that we have developed in our mind over time. It is necessary to recognise this and make attempts to change our way of thinking, change our attitude. What we call happiness or unhappiness is very much related to one's way of thinking.

2.1.4.1.3.1.1. *Since it is the cause for one's happiness it is suitable to want it*

The verse under that reads:

76. *By praising others who have qualities  
One attains the happiness of joy  
Thus mind, if they are praised  
Why are you not happy?*

The second verse under that reads:

77. *That this happiness of joy of yours  
Is an unflawed source of happiness  
Was taught by those endowed with qualities.  
It is also the best for gathering others.*

Gyalsab Je's commentary explains the meaning of this verse:

If others praise an enemy of mine saying, "He has qualities", then the person praising also gains happiness. In that case, why mind do you also not make the other person happy by praising the enemy? If you do, then the happiness of the joy of liking others' qualities will become the unflawed source of future happiness. This was taught by those with qualities, the conquerors and their children, and praised by them as such. It is also the best for attracting disciples.

*If others praise an enemy of mine saying 'he has qualities' then the person praising also gains happiness. What is being explained in essence is that the very act of praising someone else's qualities brings joy and happiness to one's own mind. One wouldn't genuinely praise someone if one didn't like them. The very act of praising someone means that one has a sense of admiration for them, therefore one happily offers them praise.*

So it is with a sense of admiration for the other that one offers praise. Normally one would criticise someone who one does not admire, instead of praising them. So when anyone praises anyone else it is done in light of genuine

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admiration and respect. Thus, praising others brings joy and happiness to one's mind.

Thus, *why mind do you also not make others happy by praising the enemy?* What is being explained is that just as the other person gains joy and happiness in their mind when offering praise to the enemy, if you were to follow the same example and offer praise to the enemy, it would also bring joy to the other's mind and consequently to yourself as well.

Thus, as explained in the commentary *If you do, then the happiness of the joy of liking others' qualities will become the unflawed source of future happiness.* In relation to oneself, by praising the qualities of the enemy, one gets the immediate benefit of gaining a more joyous and happy mind now, as well as becoming a cause of happiness for future lifetimes.

*This was taught by those with qualities, the conquerors and their children, and praised by them as such.* What is being explained here, in relation to praise, is that seeing qualities in others and praising them, especially an enemy, becomes the supreme means for gaining happiness for oneself in this life and future lifetimes. Furthermore, it is also the best means to gather disciples. As you would recall from earlier teachings there are four means of gathering disciples, such as using pleasant words that are in accordance with their minds, helping them in according to their needs and so forth.

So here, when one praises the qualities of someone, they would naturally appreciate that. And when others appreciate you for offering words of encouragement and praise, they are naturally drawn to you. They will not feel distant to you, rather they are drawn to you. So, for someone with a bodhisattva attitude of wishing to benefit others, this is one of the supreme means of gathering disciples, as a way to further benefit them.

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

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