
Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

བྱང་ལྷན་མེས་ཀྱི་སྤྱོད་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 engage in our meditation practice. [meditation]

We can now generate the motivation for receiving the teachings along the usual 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.

2.1.4.3.1. It is unsuitable not to be patient with obstacles to the harm of one's enemy (cont.)

2.1.4.3.1.3. It harms oneself

This is subdivided into two:

2.1.4.3.1.3.1. It is unsuitable to be happy over the suffering of the enemy

2.1.4.3.1.3.2. If one holds onto this happiness, it then becomes the cause for great harm for oneself

2.1.4.3.1.3.1. It is unsuitable to be happy over the suffering of the enemy

As the heading itself presents, *it is unsuitable to be happy over the suffering of the enemy*. The significant point being that if this wasn't unsuitable then one would actually be happy when the enemy suffers. This heading also implies that if one were to be happy over the suffering of the enemy, then the reverse would also be true i.e. one would be unhappy when the enemy experiences happiness.

It is important to bear these significant points in mind, and put them into practice—that would be really meaningful.

The relevant lines of verse read:

*88ab. Even if the suffering you wish for
Were established, what would be there for you
to be happy?*

Gyaltsab's commentary explains:

Even if the wish "may the enemy receive something unsuitable" were fulfilled and the other person would receive suffering, what would there be for you to be happy about? It does not benefit in the slightest.

Merely wishing unwanted things to befall the enemy, such as encountering various hardships and sufferings, will not make those unwanted things occur. Rather, it will definitely lead to more agony and suffering in one's own mind. Even if sufferings were to befall the enemy, why should one be happy about it, there is not the slightest benefit for oneself. Thus it is unsuitable.

2.1.4.3.1.3.2. If one holds onto this happiness, it then becomes the cause for great harm for oneself

The previous section highlighted that there is no benefit and that such thoughts become a cause for one's own suffering, so the next six lines of verse state:

*88cd. If it is said: "I will be satisfied,"
What would be sadder than that?*

*89. This fishhook cast by the fisher
Of the afflictions is very frightening.
Once hooked by it one will be cooked
In the cauldrons of sentient beings' hell by the
hell guardians.*

The commentary's explanation begins with this hypothetical argument:

Argument: If the enemy receives harm, I will receive satisfaction because my wish will have been fulfilled.

As an answer to that the commentary explains:

Answer: What other method is there for destruction apart from generating strong harmful intent, since one will go to the lower realms? For example, as the fisherman cooks the fish upon catching them with his hook. Similarly, having been caught by the terrifying hook of the negative karma of strong harmful intent that was cast by the fisherman of the affliction of anger, one will definitely be cooked by the hell guardians in the cauldrons of sentient beings' hell.

The argument states that when the *enemy receives harm, I will receive satisfaction because my wish will have been fulfilled*. Thus the reason for me to be happy when my enemy is harmed, is because it fulfils my wish, and thus I feel a sense of satisfaction. As an answer the commentary presents this rhetorical question, *what other method is there for destruction apart from generating strong harmful intent, since one will go to the lower realms?*

This presentation highlights that holding on to such harmful intention and feeling satisfaction becomes the supreme method for one's own destruction, as it generates such a strong harmful intent. The negativity one creates from such harmful intentions becomes the means to destroy one's own current good condition as a human being. It is as if one is exchanging one's own good current human rebirth for an unfortunate lower rebirth in the next lifetime. For example, if a rich person intentionally destroyed his wealth just to become poor and impoverished, this would be a very foolish act.

To take this as a personal instruction, one can incorporate it in one's practice by reflecting upon the fact that even while one may still have enemies, there is no benefit, and only harm if one has malicious intent towards one's enemy. As logically presented here, holding onto such harmful thoughts does not have any harmful effect on the enemy and, in fact, it only becomes a cause to experience harm oneself. Thus, in one's own interest, and as a way to protect oneself, it is far better not to hold any harmful intentions and malicious thoughts against the enemy.

The incomparably kind Buddha has given so many reasons in his teachings on how one should actually extend good intentions based on love and compassion to the enemy. When one starts to develop love and compassion for one's enemy, then that is the highest form of practice that benefits oneself.

We need to consider this advice as a means for taking precautions in our own everyday life. Whilst there may still be people that we disagree with, or who do not like us, to protect our own calm state of mind, it is best not to hold onto malicious and harmful intentions. This is the main point here.

The example is quite clear, so there is no need to elaborate on that further. The main point to take from this as a personal instruction is that, in relation to our so-called enemies it is best that we don't hold onto any harmful intention. In fact we are incredibly fortunate in that we don't have any real enemy with an intention to destroy us.

In reality, when we have disagreements with others it is usually in relation to very minor issues. So to whatever degree we may consider the other to be an 'enemy', we need to remind ourselves that there is no point, and no purpose at all in having harmful intentions, as they are not going to be of any benefit to anyone.

If we allow our mind to harbour thoughts of anger, then the nature of anger is such that if you feed it with more reasons to feel angry, then it will just increase in intensity. If anger increases, it can reach such an intense state where one would, if one had any weapons to hand, be ready to use them and harm the other. Anger can reach such levels when it increases.

If, from the very beginning, one actually trains one's mind not to hold onto harmful intent etc. then anger towards enemies, and others in general, will actually start to lessen. Then even when the enemy annoys or criticises us, we will be able to protect our mind from becoming disturbed and angry. In that instance we are actually practising patience.

When we don't allow the enemies to hurt or disturb our mind, then we will gain the great virtue of practising patience. This is how we need to try and put it into practice in our lives.

2.1.4.3.2. It is unsuitable to be impatient with obstacles to one's own benefit and obstacles to the benefit of those belonging to one's side

This is subdivided into two:

2.1.4.3.2.1. Anger at obstructions to worldly dharmas is unsuitable

2.1.4.3.2.2. Anger at obstacles to the generation of merit is unsuitable

2.1.4.3.2.1. Anger at obstructions to worldly dharmas is unsuitable

This heading implies that one should be patient when there are obstacles either to oneself or to those who are close to oneself, e.g. one's friends and relatives and so forth. What it presents in the explanations of the next verses is the means to overcome the four pairs of worldly dharmas, such as being glad when you have gain or profits and unhappy when there is loss, or you don't gain, being happy when one is praised and unhappy when one is criticised, and so forth.

These are called worldly dharmas as they relate to worldly perceptions, e.g. what would make one happy is receiving gain and profits, but when one does not receive gain this makes one feel unhappy.

In relation to praise and criticism one needs to understand that it is not the praise and criticism themselves that are considered as worldly dharmas, rather it is the effect these have upon oneself. When a worldly person is praised it makes them feel elated and happy. It is that feeling of happiness that is actually the

worldly dharma. Conversely, when one is criticised and feels unhappy, that feeling of unhappiness is the worldly dharma rather than actual criticism itself. That needs to be understood.

For worldly beings, this is what makes them either happy or sad. It is called a worldly dharma because the happiness is related to very trivial causes. Otherwise, if any sense of happiness was considered to be a worldly dharma then that would imply that bodhisattvas would have many worldly dharmas, because they have many reasons to feel joyful and happy.

The teachings explain that to apply the methods and practices to overcome the eight worldly dharmas, one needs to exchange and equalise these thoughts. In relation to praise and criticism, this means that whilst previously one would have experienced happiness when praised, and unhappiness when criticised, having trained one's mind, the reverse takes place whereby one actually starts to feel joy when one is criticised and unhappy when one is praised. That is how one exchanges and equalises these thoughts, so that it doesn't disturb one's mind. It is the same with other worldly dharmas, such as being glad when unwanted things, such as hardships, happen.

Equalising and exchanging the worldly dharmas becomes the real basis for mind training and for one to engage in the giving and taking practice of *tong-len*. Having trained one's mind in this way, one would be able to joyfully and happily take the sufferings of other sentient beings, and joyfully and happily give one's happiness to others. This is the result of having trained one's mind not to be too attached to one's circumstances.

The actual *tong-len* practice is an essential practice which serves as the very foundation of a bodhisattva's attitudes, deeds and practices. Even though we may not yet be capable of really practising it in its entirety, just training our mind in thought and contemplation is a very meaningful practice. So we need to take this on board as an essential practice.

While I have explained this many times previously, it is good to present it again as a way for you to really try and grasp the main points of equalising and exchanging the worldly dharmas.

If we do not exchange our mindset, and just maintain a worldly view, we will become habituated to feeling glad when good things happen and feeling extremely sad when bad things occur. Then because of the gladness, one develops attachment towards the things which makes one feel happy. If one is unhappy rather than glad when one experiences suffering, then when suffering occurs it will cause anger to arise in one's mind. It is in this way that maintaining a worldly view becomes the basis for one to repeatedly experience attachment and anger in relation to one's circumstances and experiences. Thus, equalising and exchanging our worldly concerns becomes a supreme means to overcome strong attachment and anger.

Another way to consider why it is inappropriate to feel joyful when one experiences happiness, and sorrow when one experiences suffering, is to see that happy experiences in any form actually use up one's virtue,

because the cause for happiness is virtue. So if we strive to experience happiness and indulge in that experience, this uses up your good karma and virtues.

Using up one's virtue for trivial things is not good, as there be won't enough virtue left to acquire the more essential things for our wellbeing. So there is no reason for one to feel joyful about experiencing happiness if one is using up one's virtues. In contrast, when one experiences suffering one normally feels sorrowful and unhappy. However if one considers that in experiencing suffering the negative karma is actually being used up, then one can feel joyful about that. So actually there's no reason not to feel happy.

This section of the text has two subdivisions.

2.1.4.3.2.1.1. Anger at obstructions to receiving praise and reputation is unsuitable

2.1.4.3.2.1.2. Thinking in a beneficial way

2.1.4.3.2.1.1. Anger at obstructions to receiving praise and reputation is unsuitable

This is subdivided into four:

2.1.4.3.2.1.1.1. There is no need for mere praise and reputation

2.1.4.3.2.1.1.2. Mere mental happiness is unsuitable as an objective

2.1.4.3.2.1.1.3. It is distorted to make merely this one's objective

2.1.4.3.2.1.1.4. The reason for it being distorted

2.1.4.3.2.1.1.1. There is no need for mere praise and reputation

The verse presents a hypothetical argument:

Argument: I do not like it when praise or reputation is obstructed.

This becomes the justification for one to be upset and angry, because *I do not like it when praise or reputation is obstructed*.

With worldly concerns, when there are obstructions to one's praise and reputation one feels unhappy, and because one is unhappy, one finds reason to be angry. We need to understand that anger is generated out of an unhappy mind, and that if one is not happy about something then it causes anger to arise.

The verse and a half relating to this reads:

*90. The tribute of praise and reputation
Does not become merit or life,
One does not become strong or without
sickness,
And happiness of the body is also not attained.*

*91ab. If one understands what is beneficial for self
Then what benefit for self lies therein?*

The commentary explains the meaning of the verse to answer to the argument:

Answer: Out of the five benefits that are explained for sentient beings, which does the tribute of direct praise and indirect reputation accomplish? It does not become merit and it does not become life. It also does not become the cause for increasing one's strength, and it does not provide physical happiness.

Therefore, if one analyses and understands the benefit for self, what benefit for self lies within praise and reputation? Not the least.

In explaining the verse, Gyaltsab Je asks one to analyse and reason whether praise and reputation bring real benefit to oneself or not. It states that *out of the five benefits that are explained for sentient beings, which does the tribute of direct praise and indirect reputation accomplish?* This is to imply that it really does not accomplish anything.

The benefits are then presented¹: 1) *It does not become merit*—praise and reputation do not transform oneself nor become a means to gain more merit; 2) *It does not become life*—it is not as if reputation and praise can help to prolong our life; 3) *It also does not become the cause for increasing one's strength*—again praise and reputation cannot in any way help us to gain more physical strength; and 4) nor does it produce any kind of physical happiness for oneself. *Therefore, if one analyses and understands the benefit for self, what benefit for self lies within praise and reputation? Not the least.*

In conclusion, since praise and reputation do not serve any purpose of bringing about true benefit for oneself, there should be no reason to be upset and angry when it is obstructed.

Training one's mind not to be upset when not receiving praise and good reputation, also means that when one does receive them one would not feel proud and elated.

2.1.4.3.2.1.1.2. Mere mental happiness is unsuitable as an objective

The next two lines of the verse read:

*91cd. If one wishes for mere mental happiness
Then one should also rely on gambling, alcohol
and so forth.*

The commentary explains,

If one's sole objective is mere mental happiness, or merely feeling happy mentally, then one would also rely on gambling, singing and dancing, taking someone else's woman and drinking alcohol.

This point really hits the mark for many who have this very ordinary motivation. The point here is that if all one is seeking is some sort of temporary mental happiness, then that is a very childish attitude. And as the commentary says, if that is all you are seeking you might as well *rely on gambling, singing and dancing, taking someone else's partner and drinking alcohol* because these give temporary mental happiness.

The precautions to take against this are that one should not resort to obtaining mere temporary mental happiness. Those without Dharma understanding can't be blamed for adopting these activities, as they consider them a real source of happiness. But for us as Dharma practitioners there are numerous means for gaining true mental happiness. So one needs to seek those that are produced through the practise of Dharma, which is genuine happiness. This is a very important instruction to keep in mind.

So whilst there are numerous ways to create happiness by immersing oneself in distractions and sensual pleasures, this would be the wrong approach, as these are fleeting and temporary. In contrast, in seeking happiness through

¹ Only four of the five are presented in the commentary.

the Dharma, one gains the bliss of the Dharma, which is sustained and maintained in one's mind.

2.1.4.3.2.1.1.3. It is distorted to make merely this one's objective

This is subdivided into two:

2.1.4.3.2.1.1.3.1. Mere praise and reputation are needless

2.1.4.3.2.1.1.3.2. Disliking their degeneration means one is like a child

These are significant points as many complain they don't receive due praise. So considering that praise etc. does not actually serve a real purpose, then *disliking their degeneration means one is being like a child* or very childish.

2.1.4.3.2.1.1.3.1. Mere praise and reputation are needless

The verse reads:

92. *Wealth is spent for the sake of reputation
And if one is even killed
Then what use are the words?
When I am dead whom will they make happy?*

The commentary explains the meaning:

Not only are they meaningless, but in order to have renown as a generous person one gives away wealth, and to be known as courageous, one goes to war. If one then even loses one's life, what will one do with the words of praise and reputation? Consider well to whom praise and reputation will give happiness after one has died.

The commentary states that *they*, i.e. praise and reputation are *meaningless*, and makes the point that they are also needless. *In order to have renown as a generous person one gives away wealth* refers to people with a significant amount of wealth who engage in acts of charity just for personal renown or fame. This is, in fact, wasting one's wealth for no personal benefit.

Similarly, a courageous person may set out to go to war merely to be known as a courageous person. Instead of gaining something significant from the experience, they might even lose their life for the sake of reputation. In that case, what would one do with words of praise and reputation? The point here is to consider to whom praise and reputation will give happiness after one has died. This last point indicates that if seeking praise and reputation serves no purpose in this life, then it will also not serve any purpose for our future lives. If this is the case why be so concerned about it?

2.1.4.3.2.1.1.3.2. Disliking their degeneration means one is like a child

Disliking the degeneration of praise and reputation *means one is like a child*, or childish.

The verse reads:

93. *Children cry desperately when
Their house of sand collapses.
Similarly, my mind is like a child
When praise and reputation wane.*

The commentary explains:

Children cry when their house of sand collapses. Similarly, my mind becomes like a child out of dislike when praise and reputation wane.

This is clear and the illustration is quite significant. We see that when children make sand castles. If they are destroyed, they can cry as if something terrible has

happened, when in fact, it was just a sculpture made out of sand. Like that *my mind becomes like a child out of dislike when praise and reputation wane*. This implies that if one actually dislikes obstructions to one's praise and reputation, then when it starts to decline, it would be childish to become disturbed and unhappy.

2.1.4.3.2.1.1.4 The reason for it being distorted

This fourth subdivision of the earlier category is subdivided into two:

2.1.4.3.2.1.1.4.1. Attachment to the praising of oneself is unsuitable

2.1.4.3.2.1.1.4.2 If it is desired due to being joy, then it is suitable to bring joy to all beings

2.1.4.3.2.1.1.4.1. Attachment to the praising of oneself is unsuitable

The outline makes it quite clear that being attached to praise about oneself is unsuitable.

The next two verses read:

94. *For instance, since sound does not have a mind
It is impossible that sound intends to praise me.
It is known that others like one,
This is stated as the cause for the joy.*
95. *It could be others or oneself
What benefit is the joy of others for oneself?
That joy and happiness is only theirs,
One does not attain a part of it.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains the meaning:

If one is happy because of being praised, it is, for instance, unsuitable to like the praising sound, because it does not have a mind and can therefore not have the thought thinking "I shall benefit that person". Therefore it is unsuitable to like it.

It is known that the person praising one generates joy at the time of praising. If this joy of the person praising is stated as the reason for one's happiness: What use is the joy of the person praising, regardless of whether others or oneself is praised? Since the joy in another's continuum is only their consciousness, one does not even attain a part of it.

The commentary explains that if one is happy because of being praised, using the reasoning 'Yes. I am happy when I'm praised', and in an instant likes the praising sound, then this implies that 'I'm happy being praised because I like the sound of praise'. That is why it says, *for instance, it is unsuitable to like the praising sound*. If you are happy being praised, just because you like the sound of praise, then that is unsuitable, because sound itself does not have a mind, and therefore cannot have the thought thinking 'I shall benefit that person'. *Therefore it is unsuitable to like it*.

This point demonstrates yet another reason for being happy when praised. If *it is known that the person praising one generates joy at the time of praising*, and this is stated as the reason for one's happiness, then our mind is finding another excuse for being happy about being praised. To counteract such a thought Shantideva asks *what use is the joy of the person praising?* This means that *regardless of whether others or oneself is praised, the joy in another's continuum is only their consciousness, and one does not even attain a part of it*.

If one states the reason for being happy when praised is because it makes the other happy, then the text reasons,

how can this make your own mind happy since their happiness is something which is within their continuum, and you don't have any part of that? So why would that be a reason for you to be happy?

2.1.4.3.2.1.1.4.2. If it is desired due to being joy then it is suitable to bring joy to all beings

This is subdivided into two:

2.1.4.3.2.1.1.4.2.1. Actual

2.1.4.3.2.1.1.4.2.2. Liking being praised brings out the childish behaviour

Actual

The verse reads:

*96. If I am happy due to their happiness
Then one needs to treat all equally.
Then why, when they become happy through
The joy of others, one is not happy?*

The commentary explains:

If the happiness of the person praising is the happiness of others and makes me happy, then I should also be happy if all other sentient beings are happy in this way. Why then, when others become happy due to the happiness of the person praising an enemy, does one become unhappy? One should be happy.

If the happiness of the person praising is the happiness of others and makes me happy, then, following the earlier reasons, the happiness of the person doing the praising is the happiness of others. If one says 'being praised makes me happy', then with that same reasoning, one should find reason to be happy for all sentient beings. One should wish for all other sentient beings to be happy in the same way, because that is the happiness of others.

Here we need to understand the logic: if you receive praise from someone and find reason to be happy about it because it makes the other person happy, then praise offered to all sentient beings should also make you happy for the same reason. Because it makes their minds happy, one should find reason to be happy for them too. With that reasoning, the commentary says, *why then, when others become happy due to the happiness of the person praising an enemy, does one become unhappy?* If that is the case, then when an enemy is praised, why do you not feel happy and instead have a jealous mind? *One should similarly be happy when an enemy is praised.* This refers back to the earlier points about inappropriateness of feeling unhappy when the enemy is praised.

However, when it is one's relatives and friends being praised, that makes one happy, because of one's attachment to them. This shows that one needs to overcome such inappropriate ways of thinking.

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

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