

Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

བྱང་ཆུབ་སེམས་དཔའི་སྡོད་བ་ལ་འཇུག་བ་བཞུགས་སོ་

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

14 April 2015

Based on the motivation we have just generated, we can now engage in our meditation practice. *[meditation]*

It is very important that we generate a proper 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.

2.1.4.3.2.1. Anger at obstructions to worldly dharmas is unsuitable

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

2.1.4.3.2.1.1.4. The reason for it being distorted

2.1.4.3.2.1.1.4.2. If it is suitable to be wished for because it makes others happy, then it is suitable to like all others¹ (cont.)

The main point to be understood in this part of the text is that it is encouraging one to practise patience with many different reasons.

Indeed, the practice of patience is essential for our wellbeing. The reality is that we repeatedly experience all sorts of hardships and difficulties in daily life, which can cause us so much mental agony, and without the practice of patience it would be very difficult to bear those hardships and difficulties. More specifically, the patience of bearing these difficulties lies within the category of being patient with suffering. As you will recall, the definition of patience is a mind that remains undisturbed in the face of harm or suffering. Through the practice of patience we are able to protect our minds from becoming disturbed when difficulties and hardships arise, and thus maintain a happier state of mind.

Whenever we think, 'Oh, I have difficulty', or 'I have a problem', then the primary method for dealing with hardship and problems is the practice of endurance, willingly accepting that problem or difficulty. If we are able to practise the patience of willingly accepting hardship then we will not fall victim to that hardship. Conversely, if we lack that patience of willingly accepting hardship, then we will always be controlled by hardships. Then we will always be controlled by problems rather than being in control of those problems.

This is also true with our pursuit of studies. When we are willing to accept hardships, then whatever circumstances we may face we will be able to continue our studies and complete them. Otherwise when we encounter the slightest difficulties we might find excuses not to continue, saying things like, 'Oh, I'm just too tired', or 'I feel hungry', or 'I don't feel like doing it right now' and so forth. These sorts of excuses in the face of small hardships mean that we procrastinate, and may end up not completing our studies.

It's inevitable that we encounter hardships and difficulties with our study and so forth. However, the difficulties that you may face now are nothing compared to the hardships that I have gone through to complete my studies. In spite of many hardships, it was not giving up and willingly accepting those hardships that allowed me to continue, to keep up with my studies and complete them. I'm not saying this to boast about what I've endured. Rather, from my own experience I'm sharing with you what is possible when one has the mindset of willingly accepting hardships. With such an approach one will have the endurance to continue with one's studies.

In fact, willingly accepting difficulties is the optimum means for overcoming difficulties and hardships. If we don't willingly accept difficulties, then we will not find the means to overcome them. As a result we will be perpetually dominated by difficulties and one hardship after the other, to the point where we may feel that we are not be able to cope with them any longer.

Liking being praised brings about childish behaviour²

What is being addressed here is attachment to praise and so forth. When one has strong attachment to seeking praise and so forth, then that resembles childish behaviour. So we need to practise patience to overcome our attachment to this worldly desire for praise and so forth. As will be pointed out later on, our main goal is seeking liberation, and so being attached to praise and so forth is not conducive for attaining our goal.

The verse relating to this heading reads:

97. *Therefore, if one generates joy,
By saying 'I am being praised',
Since this is again invalid,
It resembles childish behaviour.*

Here Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

Therefore, if it generates joy in one's continuum saying 'I am being praised', then when this is analysed it does not have the slightest essence. In this way, since mere praise is not valid as the cause for happiness, it only resembles childish behaviour.

As the commentary explains, if one actually analyses the *joy in one's continuum* when one is *being praised*, then one would find that *it does not have the slightest essence*. When one analyses the situation, one finds that praise is merely conventional, and thus it doesn't have any real essence. So when one actually looks for the joy that one experiences when one is praised, one will find that there is no real essence to it.

The commentary continues, *In this way, since mere praise is not valid as the cause for happiness...* This means that mere praise is not the actual cause for happiness, so liking praise only *resembles childish behaviour*. What we need to understand here is that if there is attachment to praise, then the implied converse is that one will be unhappy when one is criticised. The two go hand in hand.

If one is attached to praise then that naturally means that one is averse to criticism. When one is attached to praise and seeks it out, then the slightest criticism becomes a cause for great unhappiness. Whereas if one has trained one's mind to not be overly attached to praise, then criticism will not cause so much unhappiness and mental pain. Liking praise and not liking criticism are joined at the hip.

¹ Last week it was given as *It is distorted to make merely this as one's objective*
Chapter 6

² *Through liking being praised one becomes a childish person*

In fact criticism can even become a cause for joy; great practitioners train their minds to welcome criticism. By applying the mind training techniques it is actually possible to like criticism. This is the main point that we need to understand: attachment to praise is ultimately the cause for unhappiness, rather than a cause of happiness. When one understands this point then one will be able to see that seeking praise, and always wanting to hear nice words and so forth, does indeed resemble childish behaviour. This is what needs to be understood.

These points are very significant points in relation to our everyday encounters with others. There are so many occasions where even the slightest provocative or unpleasant word can immediately cause great anger, leading to conflicts between individuals. So these are definitely relevant points.

2.1.4.3.2.1.2. Thinking of it as beneficial

There are two subheadings under this heading:

2.1.4.3.2.1.2.1. Anger at obstruction to praise and reputation is unsuitable, as it obstructs [the path leading to] the lower realms

2.1.4.3.2.1.2.2. Anger is unsuitable as one wants to become liberated from cyclic existence

From these headings we can see that when there is some obstruction to receiving praise, then that is actually a great cause to be happy, because it obstructs the path leading to the lower realms. Also, obstructions to praise and reputation liberate one from cyclic existence, thus there is no reason to be upset and angry about that. That is what is being explained under these two headings.

2.1.4.3.2.1.2.1. Anger at obstruction to praise and reputation is unsuitable, as it obstructs [the path leading to] the lower realms

This is subdivided into two

2.1.4.3.2.1.2.1.1. Through grasping at praise and reputation all faults are generated

2.1.4.3.2.1.2.1.2. Obstructing them obstructs the lower realms

2.1.4.3.2.1.2.1.1. Through grasping at praise and reputation all faults are generated

Before the verse is presented, the commentary presents this statement:

It is unsuitable to be angry at that which destroys praise and reputation.

Then the verse is presented.

**98. Praise and so forth distract one
And also destroy disillusionment,
Jealousy for those with qualities
And degeneration of excellences**

Here, Gyaltsab Je explains:

Praise, reputation and gain distract one from the virtuous object and also destroy disillusionment with cyclic existence. They also cause jealousy for others with qualities and also destroy one's virtues and the excellences of others. As such, they are the source of all faults.

The line *praise, reputation and gain distract one from the virtuous object*, presents an extremely significant point. It indicates that attachment is the main obstacle to one's meditation practice. This is explained in great detail in Chapter 8. When one has strong attachment to worldly concerns and so forth, one will always have a distracted mind. Consequently, because of these distractions, one will not be able to maintain one's focus on the virtuous object when meditating.

Furthermore, as mentioned here, praise, reputation and gain *also destroy disillusionment with cyclic existence*. The basis for developing renunciation is to first generate a sense of disillusionment with cyclic existence. So being attached to the joys and pleasures of cyclic existence, and being concerned with worldly things, such as liking praise and so forth, opposes the development of disillusionment with cyclic existence. Since attachment to praise and so forth destroys disillusionment with cyclic existence it is an obstacle for developing renunciation.

Then, as further explained in the commentary, *they also cause jealousy for others with qualities and also destroy one's virtues and the perfections of others*. When one cannot bear hearing about the good qualities and virtues of someone else, then that is due to jealousy. That jealous mind escalates to the point where it actually generates a mind of anger. Through not being able to bear hearing about the good qualities of someone, a mind of aversion or anger can arise. That mind of anger then destroys one's own virtues and excellences, and other good qualities that we have. So it is the mind of jealousy that leads one to generate the mind of anger, which then causes one's own excellences and virtues to decline and be destroyed.

Furthermore, *the excellence of others* is also destroyed. Through the mind of jealousy you can disturb the minds of others in various ways, causing their excellences to also decline and be destroyed. So, while a mind of jealousy and anger destroys one's own excellences and qualities, it also serves, indirectly, as the means to destroy the excellences and qualities of others as well.

Thus, the commentary concludes, *As such they are the source of all faults*, which means that attachment to praise and reputation is the basis of all faults.

These are really significant points of advice that speak right to our hearts. When others are praised one should find reason to be joyful and happy about that, rather than being unhappy. The only reason for being unhappy is because of jealousy. When we are jealous, we will feel uncomfortable and unhappy the moment others are praised. As jealousy increases, that discomfort turns into being unable to bear hearing others being praised for their good qualities and excellences, and that leads to anguish and anger.

Further, one needs to change one's attitude from one of acceptance, to one of actually liking it when others are praised for their qualities and so forth, thinking, 'Oh, how wonderful they have such qualities! These people are indeed praiseworthy because of their qualities and so forth. How wonderful it is to hear that praise!' This then creates a happy mind for oneself. Just as others experience joy when others praise them, one can also experience joy and happiness when they are praised. All it takes is a change of attitude, replacing a mind that would otherwise feel unhappy out of jealousy into a mind that feels joy when others are praised. Then, hearing others being praised for their qualities and so forth will bring happiness to oneself, which is a great benefit.

This is what we can refer to as the Buddhist science of the mind, which is really very profound. Indeed, Western psychologists and scientists also recognise how profound these passages are. They comment that this is not an exclusively Buddhist approach, but one that is universal. If everybody adopted these ways of thinking and changing attitudes, then there would be so much benefit in the world. We can describe these parts of Buddhist teachings as being the psychology or science of the mind. In fact the Buddhist

world is rich in the science or psychology of the mind, although perhaps somewhat lacking in the science of the external world, whereas the western developed countries and so forth are quite rich in the science of the external world, while lacking in the science of the inner world, or science of the mind.

To reemphasise the main point, as a Dharma practitioner one needs to adopt an attitude of not being attached to receiving praise while being happy when others are praised. That is because being attached to receiving praise only contributes to the decline of one's own virtues and so forth. On the other hand, being happy to hear others being praised only brings about good qualities and virtues, while at the same time preventing mental agony.

The reason why I emphasise these really significant points is because they may be not be apparent right away. But if you really pay attention you will find that a lack of appreciation of the excellences and goodness of others actually causes lot of mental pain, more specifically jealousy, to arise. Many have confided in me saying that when they notice that their siblings or relatives are doing well, they feel uncomfortable, and even experience a lot of mental pain. Indeed, the people we are most likely to be jealous of are those with whom we have a close connection. It is less likely that we will be jealous of those with whom we are not acquainted, strangers and so forth.

As mentioned previously, we might not initially notice that the pain and discomfort we feel actually comes from jealousy. But if we really take the initiative to think about these points, we will check our mind as soon as we start feeling uncomfortable. Then we will be able to notice jealousy and be able counteract that jealousy. We can then replace the agony of not feeling comfortable with their excellences with an attitude of appreciation. Training the mind to be happy about the excellences of others definitely relieves much unnecessary mental pain and agony.

To retain a sense of balance, one really needs to pay attention to these points. As the teachings mention, it is the afflictions that cause us so much mental pain. To see this, all we need to do is to consider these practical examples of the effects of jealousy and anger. We can all relate to how they disturb our state of mind. Whereas the person who is practising, finding antidotes and counteracting these afflictions, is someone who is really at ease and who maintains a sense of joy. People will be at ease with them, and they will be welcome guests wherever they go!

2.1.4.3.2.1.2.1.2. Obstructing them obstructs the lower realms

Here *obstructing them* refers again to obstructing the worldly concerns of grasping at praise and reputation. And obstructing them is a means of obstructing the path to the lower realms. The implication here is that there is no reason not to accept that.

What we need to understand from this presentation is that this mind training is a supreme means of engaging in Dharma practice. If we want to consider ourselves as Dharma practitioners, then we need to take these points on board, and try to incorporate them into our mindset.

The relevant verse reads:

**99. Therefore, aren't those that are closely involved
In destroying one's praise and so forth,
Engaged in protecting one from falling
Into the lower realms?**

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je explains the meaning as follows:

Therefore, aren't those taking great care in destroying one's praise, reputation and so forth, engaged in protecting one from falling into the lower realms?
How can one be angry at them?

This rhetorical question implies that they are indeed protecting one from falling into the lower realms. When others are critical and destroy one's reputation, they are also destroying attachment to praise and reputation. Those who pamper us with praise and reputation could, in fact, lead us to become more inclined to be attached to that. Whereas those who are critical and who destroy one's reputation are, in fact, destroying one of the causes, i.e. attachment to reputation and praise, for one to go to the lower realms. When someone destroys that attachment to praise and reputation, then in fact they are ultimately taking care of one. *So how can one be angry at them?* This implies that one should actually like them.

2.1.4.3.2.1.2.2. It is the means to become liberated from cyclic existence and thus it is unsuitable to be angry³

This is subdivided into two:

2.1.4.3.2.1.2.2.1. Since obstructing praise and so forth liberates one from cyclic existence it is unsuitable to be angry

2.1.4.3.2.1.2.2.2. Anger is unsuitable as it cuts the door to suffering

2.1.4.3.2.1.2.2.1. Since obstructing praise and so forth liberates one from cyclic existence it is unsuitable to be angry

**100. Oneself, who aspires to liberation,
Does not need the restraints of gain and
veneration,
How can one be angry
At that which liberates one from bondage?**

Gyaltsab Je explains the meaning of this verse as follows:

Further, since one aspires to attain liberation from cyclic existence, and since gain and veneration bind one to cyclic existence, one does not need such restraints. How can one be angry at that which liberates one from bondage by obstructing gain and veneration? It would be appropriate to like it.

The commentary begins by pointing out that we *aspire to liberation from cyclic existence*. Following this affirmation the commentary goes on to say that *gain and veneration bind one to cyclic existence*. Here we need to understand that attachment to gain and veneration binds one to cyclic existence. *One does not need such restraints*, relates to the earlier affirmation that one is seeking to be free from cyclic existence. Since attachment to gain and veneration actually binds one to cyclic existence, hence the affirmation, 'I don't need them, because I aspire to be free from cyclic existence'.

So, *how can one be angry at that which liberates one from bondage by obstructing gain and veneration?* Having pointed out earlier that attachment to gain and veneration binds one to cyclic existence, how could one then be angry with someone who actually obstructs the binding factor of gain and veneration? The words *how can one be angry at that* implies that one shouldn't be angry with them. In fact, as mentioned here, *it would be appropriate to like it*. Thus, rather than becoming angry with these obstructions, it is appropriate to like them.

³ The text uses *Anger is unsuitable as obstructions to praise and such liberate from cyclic existence*

2.1.4.3.2.1.2.2.2: *It is unsuitable to be angry since it cuts the door to suffering*

Again this is referring to obstructions to praise and so forth. Obstructions to praise actually cuts the door to suffering, therefore anger is unsuitable. The verse relating to this reads:

101. *One wishes to enter suffering
But like the blessings of the buddhas
It becomes the threshold not allowing to pass.
How can one get angry at that?*

One wishes to enter the house of suffering, but like the blessings of the buddhas, it serves as a bolt to the door, not allowing one to pass into that house of suffering. How can one become angry at that? Since it is a great friend it is appropriate to like it.

Being attached to praise is like wishing *to enter the house of suffering, but, like the blessings of the buddhas*, the obstruction to gaining praise and veneration is like a bolt that locks the door, *not allowing one to pass into that house of suffering. How can one become angry at that?* In this analogy, just as you cannot enter a house when the door is bolted, obstructing attachment to gain and veneration obstructs one from entering the house of suffering. Therefore *how can one become angry at that?* This rhetorical question is implying that one should not be angry.

Since it is a great friend it is appropriate to like it refers to those who obstruct one from entering a situation that involves great suffering; they are the greatest of friends. That is how this line is to be understood.

ANGER AT OBSTACLES TO THE GENERATION OF MERIT IS UNSUITABLE⁴

Having just explained the unsuitability of anger at that which obstructs gains, one might now wonder whether it might be acceptable to be angry at those who obstruct one's merits. This section counteracts that thought in three subdivisions:

1. It is unsuitable to be angry due to obstructions to merit
2. It is not an obstruction to merit
3. Think of it as an object worthy of respect

1. IT IS UNSUITABLE TO BE ANGRY DUE TO OBSTRUCTIONS TO MERIT

Here there are two subdivisions:

- 1.1. Abide on the supreme austerity
- 1.2. Obstructing it becomes an obstacle to one's merits

1.1. Abide on the supreme austerity

The commentary begins by referring back to the previous section.

Argument: Though it is unsuitable to be angry at obstructions to worldly dharmas,...

The implication of this is, 'OK, I accept that it is unsuitable to become angry with obstructions to worldly dharmas, but it must surely be fine to be angry with that which obstructs one's merits. Then the next verse is presented:

102. *They are an obstruction to merits it is said;
It is also unsuitable to be angry at them.
If there is no austerity like patience
Then wouldn't one abide on it?*

The commentary then completes the opening sentence:

... enemies obstruct the merits of generosity, morality and so forth, thus one gets angry.

Answer: It is unsuitable to be angry at them, because since one aspires to accumulating merits then wouldn't one abide in patience, since there is no other austerity that equals being patient with anger? It is extremely suitable to abide on patience.

The opening line makes this hypothetical statement: *enemies obstruct the merits of generosity, morality and so forth, thus one gets angry*. This is indirectly saying that they are obstructing our opportunity to gain merit. When others obstruct our gain, 'they are obstructing my means for engaging in meritorious activities such as generosity and so forth, and therefore I don't get an opportunity to accumulate merit'. Therefore, one becomes angry.

To counteract the hypothetical assertion that it may be suitable to be angry at those who obstruct the means for one to accumulate merit, the commentary says, *It is unsuitable to be angry at them because since one aspires towards accumulating merits then wouldn't one abide in patience, since there is no other austerity that equals being patient with anger?* As presented at the very beginning of the chapter, there is no higher form of austerity than the practice of patience. So because the practice of patience is a supreme form of austerity, it is the supreme means to accumulate merit. Since you aspire to accumulate merit, then rather than becoming angry at those who obstruct your means of accumulating merits, wouldn't you rather practise patience, since that is the supreme means to accumulate merit? The conclusion here is *it is extremely suitable to abide on patience* since there are no other practices equal to the practice of patience for accumulating merit. Therefore it is far more appropriate to abide on patience, rather than retaliating with anger.

1.2. Obstructing it becomes an obstacle to one's merits

The verse relating to this heading reads:

103. *If, through my own fault,
I do not practise patience with them,
I obstruct myself from
Abiding close to the cause of merits.*

Gyalsab Je's commentary on the verse reads:

If, through one's own fault of being greatly angry, one generates anger to abiding close to the cause of merits of being patient with the enemy, then one obstructs one's merits and not the other person.

Here we are being told that it is not the enemy that is the real obstacle to one's generation of merit. Rather it is the way one's own mind relates to the enemy. If one becomes angry with the enemy, then one's merits will decline, whereas keeping the enemy close will be a means to accumulate more merit through the practice of patience. As the commentary says: *through one's own fault of being greatly angry, one generates anger to abiding close to the cause of merits of being patient with the enemy*. So the enemy is actually a cause for one to accumulate merit through being patient with them, while becoming angry one destroys that merit. This is really quite a subtle presentation. In saying, *then one obstructs one's merits and not the other person*, the commentary is stating that the other person is not responsible or obstructing one's merit. Rather, through becoming angry one obstructs one's own merit.

⁴ ed. Technically this is the second part of the earlier heading 2.1.4.3.1. *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*, which was introduced last week. Because it contains a number of nested headings the numbering system is being restarted here.

Thus, it is all related to one's own state of mind. Depending on one's mindset, an enemy can be a great cause to accumulate merit by practising patience with them. But if one becomes angry with the enemy then what would otherwise become an opportunity for one's merit to increase, actually causes merit to decline.

To emphasise the point, it is the way we relate to the enemy that actually causes our mental agony. If we become angry with the enemy then of course our mind becomes disturbed. Whereas if we accept the enemy, even if they are near by, and don't allow ourselves to become angry, then there will be no mental pain or agony. So what is clearly being shown here is how it actually depends on our own attitudes rather than on the other person. Now this might differ from western psychology, which might say, 'If the cause of distress is the other person, try to avoid them'. However in Buddhism it is not the external person who is the cause of our agony, but our own mind.

This point was presented earlier in the chapter with an analogy of how it is impossible to subdue and overcome all enemies, but subduing one's own mind and overcoming anger is equivalent to subduing all enemies. The analogy was that it is impossible to cover the whole earth with leather so that one's feet will not be punctured with thorns and so forth. But if one covers one's own feet with leather then that will protect one's feet in the same way as covering the whole world.

2. IT IS NOT AN OBSTRUCTION TO MERIT

This has two parts, which are very profound presentations about how to practice:

2.1. General

2.2. Establishing with example

2.1. General

The verse relating to this reads:

*104. When it does not exist it does not arise,
When it exists it does arise,
If it is its cause
Then how can it be called an obstruction?*

The commentary explains:

The merit of patience does not arise when there is no harmer; when there is an enemy then the merit of patience exists. If this very enemy is the definite cause of the merit, then how can it be called an obstruction? That which is conducive is not suitable as an obstruction.

The merit of patience does not arise when there is no harmer, relates to the first type of patience, which is the patience of not retaliating to harm. The second two types of patience is the patience of definitely thinking of Dharma and willingly accepting suffering, which is much more pervasive, and relates to many different circumstances in life.

That first patience of not becoming angry and retaliating to harm is only practised in relation to there being a harmer. So there has to be someone who is harming us if we want to practise this type of patience. Gaining merit through the practice of patience does not arise when there is no harmer. It is only *when there is an enemy that the merit of that patience of not retaliating to harm can be gained.*

Further, the commentary explains, *if this very enemy is the definite cause of the merit then how can it be called an obstruction?* This refers back to the earlier presentation of how to

counteract the false reasoning that it is suitable to be angry with an enemy because they obstruct our merit.

Here the text is saying that far from being an obstruction to one's merit, the enemy is the very cause of one's merit, because without an enemy who harms one, one could not possibly practise the patience of not retaliating in the face of harm. It is only because there is a harmer that the need to practice the patience of not retaliating to harm arises. Therefore, there is a cause and effect sequence where the enemy who is the harmer is the cause for the generation of patience of not retaliating.

Therefore *that which is conducive is not suitable as an obstruction.* Because something or someone is conducive to one's practice of patience, and thus the accumulation of merit, it cannot possibly be an obstruction. This is a very profound reasoning showing us how to see an enemy as our best friend.

If we can cover at least eight verses in each session, then we should be able to move quite rapidly through the text. The discussion and test nights should then take us through to the end of May.

We will also do our recitation of the *Bodhisattvacharyavatara* on 24 May. Please make a note of that date, as this recitation is part of the Study Group commitments. I have scheduled the recitation to coincide with Saka Dawa, the holy month of the Buddha's birth and enlightenment. Because that is such an auspicious time, reciting the text will be a means to accumulate extensive merit.

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

*Transcribed by Su Lan Foo
Edit 1 by Adair Bunnett
Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe
Edited Version
© Tara Institute*