
Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

བྱང་ཆུབ་སེམས་དཔའི་སྡོད་པ་ལ་འཇུག་པ་བཞུགས་སོ།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

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While maintaining the motivation 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 Mahayana teachings and put them into practice well.

2. IT IS NOT AN OBSTRUCTION TO MERIT (CONT.)

2.2. Establishing this with an example

The word 'this' refers to the earlier point that the enemy is not an obstruction to gaining merit or practising patience. The example is presented in the verse that reads:

105. *The beggar at the time of generosity
Is not an obstruction to generosity.
Those facilitating the renunciate
Are not an obstruction to a renunciate.*

The commentary reflects the meaning:

At the time of having the means and delight to give, the beggar is not an obstruction to generosity. Also, the abbots and preceptors facilitating the renunciate are unsuitable to be called obstructions for becoming a renunciate, of those wishing to do so.

If a beggar happens to come by when one has the material means, and delights in giving, then at that time they are not an obstruction to the practice of generosity. In fact the beggar is a condition enabling one to practise generosity and gain the merit associated with being generous.

Similarly, for someone who wishes to practise patience, the harms inflicted by an enemy are not an obstruction to the practice of patience. Rather, the harmer is actually a cause for one to engage in the practice of patience, and thus accumulate the merit associated with that practice.

The second example in the verse states that abbots and preceptors who facilitate those wishing to become renunciates, or be ordained, are not an obstruction but rather the required condition for them to actually become renunciates.

3. THINK OF IT AS AN OBJECT WORTHY OF RESPECT

This is subdivided into two:

- 3.1. One should be respectful since it generates qualities
- 3.2. One should be respectful because one has faith in the Buddha

3.1. One should be respectful since it generates qualities

This is subdivided into three:

- 3.1.1. Great benefit to oneself

- 3.1.2. Not dependent on the thought to benefit

- 3.1.3. Viewing them like the Buddha

3.1.1. Great benefit to oneself

This is subdivided into three:

- 3.1.1.1. Supreme fields are rare

- 3.1.1.2. It is suitable to like them

- 3.1.1.3. It is appropriate to have the thought of benefiting them

3.1.1.1. SUPREME FIELDS ARE RARE

The objects of generosity are plentiful whereas objects of patience, particularly the patience of not retaliating to harm, are relatively rare. A supreme field can be related to something which is rare and precious. In this sense, those who harm one can be considered to be a supreme field, as they are rare.

The verse reads:

106. *In the world there are indeed beggars,
Those harming are much rarer,
If one thus does not harm them,
Then nobody will inflict harm.*

The Tibetan word *long-wa* literally means those who seek, and people who seek something from others don't necessarily have to be beggars. So while the word is loosely used for a beggar, in general it means someone who is seeking something from you. For example, we would not refer to Buddha Shakyamuni as a beggar, although he would have sought alms in the community as a means for others to accumulate merit. The term beggar here has a larger context, and should not be limited to those who are viewed as destitute and poor.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary on the verse reads:

Since the field of patience is rarer than the field of generosity it is suitable to like one's enemies. In the world there are indeed beggars who are the field of generosity, but those who harm, who are the field of patience, are much rarer. If asked why, that is because if one does not harm others, then one will not be harmed in return.

The first part of the explanation highlights that *the field of patience is rarer than the field of generosity, and thus it is suitable to like one's enemies. The field of patience* refers to others who harm one and thus give one the opportunity to practise patience. Because those who intentionally harm one are rare, it is suitable to like them. Worldly examples confirm that rare things are more highly valued than common things e.g. the rarer a jewel, the higher its value. The field of patience refers to the harm giver, and because they are rare *it is suitable to like one's enemies.*

The commentary explains that *in the world there are indeed beggars who are the field of generosity.* This fact is easy to see. In these times of the five degenerations there is so much conflict, strife and poverty prevalent in the world. Thus, those in need of material aid are very easy to find.

In comparison, the text states that *those who harm, who are the fields of patience, are much rarer. If asked why, the explanation here is that is because if one does not harm others then one will not be harmed in return.*

This relates to subtle points of the karmic cause and effect sequence. If one is harmed now, then this is a result of having harmed others either in this life, or in previous

lifetimes. This may not be immediately obvious, but consider the possibility that those we have harmed in the early and middle part of our life might start harming us towards the end of our life. This type of cause and effect sequence is quite prevalent. The key point here is that because of the harm you have extended to others, there will be others who will harm you. What is being pointed out here is that if one does not intentionally go out to harm others, then naturally others won't harm you. So, if you don't harm others it is unlikely that you will have many enemies harming you.

Normally we would think that if someone harms us we are entitled to harm them in return because 'they hurt me first'. This indicates that if someone has initiated the harm first, then there is a justification to return harm for harm in retaliation. Even in a legal context where there is a fight, the punishment is given to the one who initiated that fight. For those who retaliate, perhaps in self-defence, the punishment seems to be less.

The worldly perspective is that if someone harms you it is quite acceptable to harm them back. In fact it is considered brave and courageous to fight back. This thought is strongly ingrained into the psyche of ordinary beings. However Shantideva is pointing out that this is not suitable, and that one should not retaliate harm with harm.

The truth of what is being explained here is evident when related to a bodhisattvas' level of practice, because a bodhisattva, whose only intention is to benefit sentient beings, would not intentionally harm any living being in the slightest. Using a Tibetan expression, they will not inflict even an atom of harm on other sentient beings.

For noble beings such as bodhisattvas, whose very practice is only to benefit and refrain from the slightest harm to sentient beings, others will naturally appreciate them. When they are highly respected and admired, there would hardly be anyone wishing to intentionally harm them. This should hold true for human sentiments. Even animals, who are considerably dumber than humans, when nurtured and cared for can recognise that kindness, show affection and do no harm in return. If an animal can recognise those who have benefitted them and give affection in return, then surely, for humans with intelligence, that would have to be the case too.

Those harming a bodhisattva are rare because of the bodhisattvas' own dedicated practice to benefit sentient beings. When bodhisattvas do encounter someone with the intention of harming them, then rather than becoming upset they would show great respect to them. They act as if they are encountering a rare and precious gem that is a cause for them to further develop their practice of patience.

To take this as a personal instruction, we need to practise as much as possible not to harbour any kind of harmful intentions. If we were to actually practise not intentionally harming others, not even in the slightest, then others around us would naturally appreciate us and like us.

When the intention of refraining from harm and wishing to benefit others is extended to one's companion, someone who one lives with, then if those two people can

practise in this way, then their relationship will be healthy and harmonious. This is something I emphasise regularly, as it is the means of leading a more meaningful and happy life.

These are significant points to keep in mind as one needs to reflect upon what causes a happy relationship with someone else. It is not dependent on wealth. Clearly just because one is wealthy doesn't mean one will have harmonious relationships. Also, just because one is influential or has status doesn't necessarily mean these will become conditions for having harmonious relationships. So what is the key factor to having harmonious relationships? It is one's positive mind, and the intention of wishing to benefit the other, and not intentionally harm them. Such a mind based on love and compassion is the key factor for harmonious relationships.

3.1.1.2. IT IS SUITABLE TO LIKE THEM

Having covered that the fields of patience are supreme and rare, the next point emphasises that it is suitable to like them.

The verse reads:

107. *Hence, just like a treasure
Received effortlessly in one's house,
One should like one's enemies,
Since they become a condition for
enlightenment.*

The commentary explains the meaning as follows:

The fields for patience are rare. Therefore one should like one's enemies with the thought of wanting to repay their kindness, since they become the condition to meditate on the bodhisattva action of patience, just like a treasure that one receives effortlessly in one's house.

The first part uses the example, *just like a treasure that one receives effortlessly in one's house*. For example, if a destitute person suddenly found some treasure in their house, without intentionally seeking for it, how glad they would be! It would be a cause for tremendous relief and joy in their mind.

Further, *The fields for patience are rare. Therefore one should like one's enemies with the thought of wanting to repay their kindness*, and the reason is *since they become the condition to meditate on the bodhisattva action of patience*.

Using the example of finding a treasure without effort, the enemy that harms one is also incredibly rare and precious. Far from becoming an obstruction to one's ultimate goal of achieving enlightenment, the enemy who harms one becomes the supreme cause for one to quickly achieve enlightenment.

It is appropriate that one generates a mind of wanting to repay the enemy's kindness, as *it becomes the condition to meditate on the bodhisattvas' actions of patience*, thus becoming the cause for one's enlightenment.

The point here is that by regarding the enemy as extremely precious and kind, rather than retaliating with harm when they harm you, you should think about repaying their kindness.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama mentions that the supreme object of practising patience is the one who harms you. It

is not our kind teachers who teach us how to practise patience, as there is no need to practise patience towards one who doesn't harm you. The actual practice is integrating the opportunity that one gets to practise patience when someone harms you.

3.1.1.3. IT IS APPROPRIATE TO HAVE THE THOUGHT OF BENEFITING THEM

The verse reads:

*108. Since it is established through this and myself
It is suitable to dedicate the result of patience
First to them -
They are the cause of patience.*

The commentary explains the meaning of the verse clearly:

Since it is established through this enemy, and myself practising patience, we are both the cause for patience. Therefore it is suitable to dedicate enlightenment, which is the result of patience, first to the harmer. The enemy is a powerful cause for the patience that creates my enlightenment.

Since it is established through the enemy and myself practising patience, we are both the cause for patience. In a practical sense, one's own initiative to practise patience is the ultimate cause for one to practise patience with an enemy, but it is through a combination of both practices that one is actually able to practise patience. Therefore it is befitting to dedicate enlightenment, which is the result of patience, first to the harmer.

This indicates the great extent of the bodhisattvas' aspirations and dedications. The altruistic mind of a bodhisattva acknowledges that the one who intended to harm them is actually a rare cause for them to practise patience.

When enlightenment is attained, the cause for the resultant enlightenment is thus dedicated first and foremost to the one who caused one to attain it, which is the enemy—the one who harmed us.

In bodhisattvas' practices that are completely dedicated to the benefit of others, there is no sense of self-centredness and no ulterior motive. Their practice is solely to benefit other sentient beings and acknowledge their contributions. The conclusion is that *the enemy is a powerful cause for the patience that creates my enlightenment.*

The aspirations and dedications we make in our daily practice come from the bodhisattva's supreme practices and positive way of dedication. Normally, when we do a practice one of the first dedications is to benefit all sentient beings to the ultimate state of enlightenment. This encompasses everything we are able to practise, and everything we receive is due to the kindness of other sentient beings. Recognising this it is befitting that we dedicate whatever practices we engage in first and foremost to the welfare of sentient beings, which is a very noble and selfless way of dedicating one's virtues. The merit one accumulates from this becomes expansive, and it is good to keep the significance of this in mind. If you use these explanations as a personal instruction to enhance your own daily practices, and give them impetus and deeper meaning, then it becomes beneficial.

3.1.2. Not dependent on the thought to benefit

This is divided into three:

3.1.2.1. It is incorrect that they are not an object of offering due to not having an intent to benefit

3.1.2.2. It is incorrect that they are not an object of offering as they have the intent to harm

3.1.2.3. They are a suitable object for offerings since they act as objects for patience

3.1.2.1. IT IS INCORRECT THAT THEY ARE NOT AN OBJECT OF OFFERING DUE TO NOT HAVING AN INTENT TO BENEFIT

What is being countered here is the thought of how could one consider an enemy as an object of offering, or to repay their kindness when they had no intention of benefitting you? The verse aims to overcome such doubts.

The verse reads:

*109. If enemies have no intent to establish patience
And therefore are not an object of offering,
Then why make offerings to the holy Dharma
Which is a suitable cause for practice?*

The commentary begins with a hypothetical argument:

Argument: Since they do not have the thought to establish patience in my continuum, they are not to be made offerings to.

The commentary explains the meaning of the verse, which provides the answer:

Answer: Then it follows one also should not make offerings to the holy Dharma jewel that is suitable as a cause for practice, because it does not have the thought thinking, 'I shall cause the generation of virtue'.

The argument is presented as *since they do not have the thought to establish patience in my continuum, they are not to be made offerings to.* One may think, 'because enemies just want to harm me, why should I venerate them and consider them kind'?

The answer: If you used this logic as a reason not to honour or make offerings to the enemy, what follows is that you would also *not make offerings to the holy Dharma jewel* which is in fact a supreme cause for one's practice. So while the Dharma jewel *is* one of the most supreme causes for one to practise, *because it does not have the thought 'I shall cause the generation of virtue'*, one may as well think that there is no need to make offerings and venerate the Dharma jewel.

If the doubt is based on the harmer not having the intention to establish virtue in one's continuum, one could say that there's no point in honouring the Dharma as well, because the Dharma, being inanimate, doesn't have the intention to establish virtue in one's continuum.

This reasoning would not apply to the two other jewels, the Sangha jewel and the Buddha jewel. But the Dharma jewel as an inanimate object definitely doesn't have any intention to benefit one. However it is one of the greatest sources for one gaining understanding and knowledge, and the causes for developing realisations. When one thinks about the words of the Buddha as the Dharma Jewel, then it is the advice and instructions the Buddha gives that become one of the supreme means for gaining understanding and realisations to progress along the path. They are indeed an object of veneration and respect.

The commentary meticulously presents this very sound logic as a way to overcome one's doubts.

Seeing that an enemy only has an intention to harm, and thus seeing no reason why one should venerate them, is due to the ordinary worldly way of thinking. These arguments and answers are presented to counteract ordinary thoughts, where we find it reasonable to retaliate or harm an enemy. These are essential points for those who intentionally want to practise patience, particularly the patience of not retaliating to harm. For someone who intends to practise this, one has to use this reasoning as a way to counteract false justifications for harming an enemy.

3.1.2.2. IT IS INCORRECT THAT THEY ARE NOT AN OBJECT OF OFFERING AS THEY HAVE THE INTENT TO HARM

The verse reads:

*110. If: this enemy has the intent to harm,
And therefore they are not the object of offering.
If they were to strive to benefit like a doctor
Then how could one practise patience?*

Again a hypothetical doubt or argument is presented:

Argument: It is not the same. The enemy is not an object of offering because they have the intent to harm me.

As a way to counteract that reasoning, the commentary explains the meaning of the verse:

Answer: If they strove to accomplish benefit and happiness, like a doctor, then they would not be the object of patience. How would one then practice the patience that does not think anything of harm? It is suitable to like the harmer.

Using the earlier example of the Dharma having no wish to benefit, yet still being an object of veneration and offering, similarly the enemy should be an object of veneration and offering. The hypothetical argument states that it's not the same, because while the Dharma has no intent to harm oneself, an enemy does have the intention to harm one, and therefore the enemy cannot be an object of offering.

The way to counteract such flawed reasoning is that it is because of the very fact that they harm you that you need to practise the patience of not retaliating to harm. If they had the intention to benefit you, like a doctor, then they would not be an object of patience, and you would not get the benefit of practising patience.

As I mentioned earlier, one does not practise patience in relation to a teacher because a teacher only has an intention to benefit one. In general, a teacher is not an object that you need to practise patience with, because they only wish to benefit you. Likewise, a doctor only intends to benefit you, so they are not an object on which you would need to practise patience.

How would one then practise the patience that does not think anything of harm? Without someone intending to harm oneself, how could one possibly practise the patience of not retaliating to harm? What is emphasised here is because they are the supreme object for practising patience, it is suitable to like the harmer.

3.1.2.3. THEY ARE A SUITABLE OBJECT FOR OFFERINGS SINCE THEY ACT AS AN OBJECT FOR PATIENCE

The verse reads:

*111. Hence, since patience is generated in dependence
On a strong mind of hatred,
It alone is the cause for patience
And suitable for offerings just like the holy
Dharma.*

The commentary explains the meaning as follows:

Since patience is not completed in dependence on a mind intending to benefit, it is generated in dependence on the harm inflicted due to strong hatred. Hence, only the harmer is the cause of patience and is suitable to be made offerings to just like the holy Dharma, despite not having the intent to benefit.

The earlier points clearly explained that patience cannot be completed in dependence on a mind intending to benefit. Rather it is generated in dependence on the harm inflicted due to the strong hatred of the harmer. What is further explained here is that there would be no need to practise patience with someone who benefits you.

Taking an example of a so-called enemy hitting you with a stick compared to a doctor giving you an injection. The injection still hurts us and we feel pain, but we don't find reason to get angry with the doctor. In fact we are glad that the doctor is giving us an injection so that we'll be cured of our illness. We are actually grateful and thankful for that.

If an enemy or someone who intends to harm one comes around with a needle and starts pricking us with it, we would become very angry. It doesn't even take a needle to prick us, even an inappropriate look will make us very upset and angry.

What this goes to show is that it is because of the intention to harm that we get hurt. When there's an intention to harm then the slightest inappropriate gesture, or physical harm, will become a cause for one to become extremely upset and angry and want to retaliate. Whereas when there's intention to benefit, even if there is some actual pain caused, then because of the intention in the other's mind, we don't consider it harm, or the other as an enemy.

The main point is that someone who harms us allows us to actually practise patience. *Hence, only the harmer is the cause of patience and is suitable to be made offerings to, just like the holy Dharma, despite not having the intent to benefit.*

The thing to understand here is the distinction between someone who harms, and someone who benefits. It really comes down to the intention they have in their mind. With an intention to benefit one, even when some discomfort is caused, such as when a doctor gives us treatment, we don't label them as a harmer. Whereas when someone has the intention to harm, then even the slightest inappropriate gesture causes us a lot of distress.

So what really differentiates a harmer from someone who benefits is the intention they have in their mind.

As mentioned in an earlier teaching, Lama Tsong Khapa said that without wishing the other to gain happiness and be free from suffering one cannot possibly have the

intention to benefit the other. These are profound points that Lama Tsong Khapa is sharing with us: a genuine intent to benefit others has to be preceded by a wish for them to be happy and not to experience suffering.

3.1.3. Viewing them like the Buddha

Here, *Viewing them* refers to sentient beings, including the harmer, as being similar to the Buddha.

3.1.3.1. Extensive explanation

3.1.3.2. Summary

3.1.3.1. EXTENSIVE EXPLANATION

This is subdivided into three:

3.1.3.1.1. It is stated in the scriptures that sentient beings and the buddhas are equal in being a field for merit

3.1.3.1.2. Establishing this with reasoning

3.1.3.1.3. Refuting objections

3.1.3.1.1. *It is stated in the scriptures that sentient beings and buddhas are equal in being a field for merit*

The Tibetan word translated literally as equal can also denote similarity, so the heading could read *are similar in being a field of merit*.

The first two lines of the verse relate to this heading:

*112ab. Therefore the Able One said: "The field
Of sentient beings and the field of conquerors."*

The commentary explains that:

Since it is necessary to treat sentient beings with respect it is stated in the *Sutra Perfectly Containing Dharma*:

The field of sentient beings is the field of the buddhas. From the field of the buddhas the Buddhadharma is obtained. It would be unsuitable to mistreat them.

In this and other quotes the Able One stated that the field of sentient beings, where one can plant the extensive seeds for merits, is as much a field to accumulate merits as the field of the buddhas.

Since *it is necessary to treat sentient beings with respect it is stated in the Sutra Perfectly Containing Dharma, that the field of sentient beings is the field of the buddhas*.

The term *field* is used in the context of the fields that serve as a basis for crops to grow. Likewise sentient beings reap the realisations leading all the way to enlightenment.

The field of sentient beings is the field of buddhas, relates to the cause and effect sequence of obtaining enlightenment. It is by relying on sentient beings, and engaging in the practices of the six perfections, that one implants the seeds of enlightenment to finally reap the result of becoming a buddha.

Furthermore, from *the field of the buddhas the Buddhadharma is obtained*, thus *it would be unsuitable to mistreat them*. The quote is explained with, *in this and other quotes the Able One stated that the field of sentient beings, where one can plant the extensive seeds for merits, is as much a field to accumulate merits as the field of the buddhas*.

What is explained here is that while we have great respect and veneration for the buddhas as a supreme field from which to accumulate merit and gain realisations etc., it is in relation to sentient beings that one actually engages in the practices of the six perfections. With the example of generosity this is very clear—

without sentient beings as objects to be generous towards, how can one possibly practise generosity?

So it is in relation to sentient beings that we are able to practise generosity, morality and so forth. It is the same with the practice of patience, as presented here, without the harmers we cannot possibly practice patience. It is only in relation to sentient beings that we are able to engage in all the forms of practice.

Without relying on sentient beings one cannot possibly practise the six perfections. Therefore sentient beings are an extremely precious field for one to accumulate merit. In that light, as a cause for one's ultimate goal of enlightenment, the buddha fields and the fields of sentient beings are equal, or similar, in providing one with the causes.

When we generate faith there is a natural inclination to make offerings and pay respect to the enlightened beings. That is because we consider the enlightened beings as a supreme field of merit. But since sentient beings are an object for one's accumulation of merit, and without them one cannot engage in practices of generosity and so forth, they are also to be seen as a similar field of merit. The point here is that one should apply one's practice of veneration, respect and offerings to the buddhas as well as sentient beings, because they are a similar field of merit. In the teachings, the source of the points which emphasise that one needs to pay respect, venerate and honour sentient beings, is none other than Shantideva's explanations.

3.1.3.1.2. *Establishing this with reasoning*

This is subdivided into two:

3.1.3.1.2.1. By having faith in the buddhas and sentient beings one will attain the ultimate aim

3.1.3.1.2.2. To discriminate between them, accepting one and rejecting the other, is unsuitable, since they are the same in that one will attain enlightenment by having faith in them.

3.1.3.1.2.1. *By having faith in the buddhas and sentient beings one will attain the ultimate aim*

The next two lines of the verse read:

*112cd. Many a one, by making them happy,
Have thus gone to the perfection beyond.*

The commentary explains:

It is suitable to respect all sentient beings, because by having faith in the buddhas and sentient beings, and by making them happy, many have gone to the perfection beyond that has completed the two purposes.

Gyalsab Je says that *it is suitable to respect all sentient beings, because by having faith in the buddhas and sentient beings, and by making them happy, many have gone to the perfection beyond that has completed the two purposes*. This emphasises that it is both the buddhas as a supreme field of merit, and sentient beings as a supreme field of merit, and the combination of making offerings, paying respect, and doing practices to both fields, that one obtains one's ultimate goal of enlightenment and thus fulfils the two purposes.

As buddhas and sentient beings equally assist one to achieve one's ultimate goal of enlightenment, both are equally an object of veneration, respect and offerings.

3.1.3.1.2.2. To discriminate between them, accepting one and rejecting the other, is unsuitable, since they are the same in that one will attain enlightenment by having faith in them.

The verse reads:

*113. The dharmas of a buddha are equally attained
From sentient beings and the conquerors.
What behaviour would it be to please the
conquerors
But not sentient beings?*

The commentary explains:

For these reasons one attains the resultant dharmas of a buddha, such as the powers and so forth, equally from sentient beings and the conquerors. What kind of behaviour would it therefore be to respect the conquerors but to not respect sentient beings likewise? It would be unsuitable.

As explained earlier, both the buddha and the sentient beings are equal fields of merit, and so for these reasons one obtains the dharmas or the qualities of a buddha, such as the ten powers and so forth. This encompasses all the qualities of a buddha's holy body, speech, and mind. The particular qualities specified in the teachings are all obtained as a result of the fields of merit. As *sentient beings and the conquerors* are equal in this respect, *what kind of behaviour would it therefore be to respect the conquerors but to not respect sentient beings likewise*. This implies that it is indeed suitable, and that one needs to pay equal respect to both.

So what is being highlighted here is that, if on the one hand one is very pious, and shows a lot of respect, making offerings and veneration to the enlightened being, but on the other hand ignores and pays no respect to sentient beings, then this would be inappropriate and shameful behaviour as both are an equal cause for obtaining such qualities.

The personal instruction is that one really needs to incorporate this understanding and show genuine respect to all sentient beings, in whatever form they take, to always extend respect to all beings equally.

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

*Transcript prepared by Mark Emerson
Edit 1 by Jill Lancashire
Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe
Edited Version*

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