
Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

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While maintaining the motivation we have just generated during the recitation of our prayers, we can now engage in our meditation practice. [*meditation*]

We can now generate the positive 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 engage in listening to the Mahayana teachings and put them into practice well.

Having just engaged in the *tong len* (giving and taking) meditation practice, we need to recognise how to incorporate its real essence, which is to generate and strengthen love and compassion in our heart. We need to do this to the extent that when we see suffering sentient beings deprived of happiness, we will be naturally inclined to help free them from sufferings and establish their happiness. The essence of Dharma practice is when we develop these attitudes and incorporate them in our practice.

Engaging the practice of *tong len* should not be a matter of just visualising it while sitting in a formal meditation posture. It needs to actually move one's mind, to transform it so that there is a more genuine sense of love and compassion extending towards other sentient beings. We need to ensure this.

I regularly emphasise that to actually embrace the practice of love and compassion extending to all beings in general, one needs to first establish love and compassion towards those who are close to oneself. If one cannot really generate a genuine sense of love and compassion towards those who are close to one, then it is quite unlikely that one will be able to develop it to the greater degree of focusing on all beings. Indeed, one needs to take the initiative to cultivate a true sense of love and compassion, beginning with those closest to oneself. One can then definitely experience the practical benefits to the extent that it will reduce problems and conflicts one may have with those who are close. In fact all our problems will naturally begin to subside. We can see that any problems that arise due to conflict, or that arise with those we are close to or deal with regularly, really arise from a lack of genuine love and compassion towards them.

When a genuine sense of love and compassion starts to take root, it is a fact that it overcomes a lot of unwanted problems and conflicts. Thus one can have a more joyous and happy relationship with one's companion and others in general.

We all already have the seeds of love and compassion within us, and it's a matter of further developing and strengthening them. This occurs gradually when we take

the initiative to contemplate on the great advantage and the essential need to develop love and compassion, and put the methods into practice. Gradually we will see that a true sense of love and compassion starts to develop in one's heart.

We can definitely see the positive outcomes of someone who has developed love and compassion as they contribute to the wellbeing of the community or society they may live in. A true sense of love and compassion means a true sense of concern for others, so such people will strive to bring about the wellbeing and betterment of that community or society. They will not engage in any destructive activities that harm their community or society's wellbeing. The positive outcome is that they will be appreciated and welcomed by others everywhere. They themselves will always have a sense of ease and natural calmness about them, and because they're not causing trouble for anyone, they won't have any enemies confronting them. This is how we need to relate to developing love and compassion on a practical basis—that real benefit does occur.

I definitely see the practice of cultivating love and compassion as essential and the most beneficial practice. In my regular practice I try to associate my mind with love and compassion, to recall it and remind myself of its essential qualities. Wherever I go, whatever the occasion might be I try to make my mind become close to the feelings and attitudes of love and compassion.

In my own personal experience, the positive consequences I experience are because I have imbued my mind with that positive attitude. Wherever I go I'm personally joyful and feel happy in whatever circumstances I find myself in. Ordinary everyday people I don't regularly associate with, or know well personally, befriend me and are happy to help me in whatever circumstance I may be in. Even though I don't ask for their help they seem naturally drawn towards trying to help me. I definitely attribute this to my efforts to try to cultivate positive attitudes. So from my own personal experience I can say that a practical benefit of befriending others and seeing everyone as close, is that it brings companionship and friendship. This is a real and positive outcome of the practice.

Most importantly, the more we familiarise ourselves with the *tong len* practice of giving and taking to strengthen our love and compassion, the more it will particularly assist us at the time of death when we may experience difficulties. Being familiar with *tong len* then allows us to take on the sufferings of all sentient beings while experiencing suffering oneself. If at that time we immediately resort to *tong len* and take on the sufferings of other sentient beings, this will purify extensive negative karmas and assist us to have a good rebirth. When very heavy negative karmas are purified, the consequences can only be that one experiences the positive results of one's karma, which will assist one for a future good rebirth.

Familiarity with the practice of exhibiting love and compassion and cultivating a positive attitude creates positive imprints, which are carried on to the future life. We can see the result in young children where some are naturally considerate and compassionate towards others.

Without being influenced they exhibit genuine concern, love and compassion towards others from their own side. This is a clear sign that they have been familiar with positive attitudes in their previous lifetimes.

I'm trying to exhort you to really take this practice to heart. The practice of Dharma really is the means of accumulating virtue and abandoning negativity. In summary that is really what Dharma practice encompasses, because any practice we relate to will be either the specific means to accumulate merit and virtues, or the means to purify one's negative karma as a way to abandon negativities.

In simple terms, if one were asked what one needs to accumulate in one's practice, it is virtue. And what one needs to abandon is negativity. When we can ensure in our heart that we are engaging in practices that encompass the means to accumulate virtues and abandon negativities, then we can be assured we are doing Dharma practice. This is, in essence, what we need to keep in mind.

That is the basis that forms a strong foundation from which we can then establish further practices. In fact we can find this base of accumulating virtues and abandoning negativities in all major religions.

This has been a summary of how to engage in the practices presented in the following verses.

2.1.2.1.2.2.2. *They are difficult to bear*

The commentary commences with the statement:

It is unsuitable to be lazy because of the many negativities created previously, and also if one analyses the various causes for the lower realms one is still creating them every day.

The verse reads:

12. *Having created the karma for the hells
Where one's delicate flesh is burned
When scalded with hot water,
Why does one abide happily?*

The main emphasis under this heading is that the sufferings *are difficult to bear*. When intense sufferings actually befall oneself at the time of death it will be extremely difficult to bear them. This highlights that we might fall short if we think, 'oh well, if sufferings occur later that's fine, I'll be able to bear them then'. But this highlights that if even small sufferings are difficult to bear now, then when extreme sufferings occur later on then it will certainly be extremely difficult to bear them at that time.

The commentary continues:

Why does one abide happily now, having created the karma to be reborn in the lower realms, where one's body of delicate flesh will have to experience the sufferings of being burned intensely when scalded by the hot water that boils angrily in the hell realms.

One should strive in virtue just like one's head is on fire.

The commentary explains that when one has created many negativities, non-virtuous actions, these become the cause to experience intense sufferings in the hell realms. It vividly explains that when it comes to one's awareness that one has created such negativities, and our delicate

body's flesh will be exposed to the extreme sufferings in the hell realms, then how can one just remain idle and do nothing about it now?

One should engage in immediate practices of purification and the accumulation of virtues. The gravity of the situation is presented with an analogy that one should *strive in virtue just like one's head is on fire*. If this were literally the case, then one would immediately react and put out the fire before one's head was scalded and burned. Just as one would have an immediate response of putting out a fire on one's head, likewise in relation to negativities one should immediately apply antidotes to purify negativities when one has created negative karmas. This is the practice that true practitioners engage in. As soon as they realise that they might have created a fault of any kind, they take the measures to immediately confess and purify it.

The essence of this presentation will also be explained in further verses, but I mention it now as a way to exhort you to engage in the means to purify negative karmas and prevent an unfortunate rebirth in a lower realm such as a hell realm. We need to bring to our awareness that one has all the conditions intact right now to actually purify negativities one has created in the past.

The commentary brings a vivid image to one's mind describing the intense sufferings of the hell realms such as *being burned intensely when scalded by the hot water that boils angrily in the hell realms*. Personally when I see volcanic eruptions spewing molten rock I imagine the extreme heat. I then bring forward the unbearable imagination of how much suffering one would experience if one were actually consumed by that lava. Apparently the fires of the hell realms are said to be even more intense, but we can only relate to something equivalent to that on this earth, like lava. The point is that these analogies are ways to exhort one to actually engage in the practice of virtue. We have favourable conditions, and so it is as if we have our fate in our hands, and whether we will experience intense sufferings or a good rebirth in the future is our responsibility. We have the choice, so we need to make that choice.

2.1.2.1.2.2.3. *It is contradictory to wish for happiness and not to strive in virtue*

The points being presented in the explanation of the verse here are very relevant for one's practice. Take it as personal instruction.

If one were asked whether one wishes for happiness, without any hesitation we would say 'yes'. But if we asked ourselves whether we were creating the causes for happiness (accumulating virtue), and found that we were not creating many of those causes, then these two thoughts would be completely contradictory. That is, while we wish for happiness, we are not taking any initiative to create the causes for happiness, which is virtue. That is definitely a contradiction.

The meaning of the verse and the explanation from the commentary are not difficult to understand, the main point is to actually try and put it into practice as this is how it will benefit you.

The verse reads:

13. *Those wishing for results without effort
And who are sensitive receive much harm
And, like the gods gripped by death,
Wail, 'Alas, I am overwhelmed by suffering'.*

The commentary explains:

Those wishing for the result of happiness without striving in its cause, virtue, and who are sensitive even towards the smallest of sufferings, will receive much harm. Like the gods gripped by death whose wish for a long life will not be fulfilled, and who will receive what they do not wish for, one will wail, 'Alas, I am overwhelmed by suffering'.

The first line in the commentary, that *those wishing for the result of happiness without striving in its cause, virtue*, is a statement we can definitely relate to. Again, it encourages us to think about the fact that we do definitely wish for happiness, but seldom find ourselves seriously engaging in creating its cause, which is virtue.

As the commentary further explains, while wishing for the results of happiness and not striving in its causes, virtue, then those in the condition of being very *sensitive even towards the smallest of sufferings, will receive much harm*.

Reflecting on the truth of the statements here we can definitely see that for someone who is sensitive, or lacks tolerance for even the smallest of problems and difficulties, would naturally be someone who always complains and who always seems to have many problems, because things are bound to go wrong and not always work the way they want. Those unable to tolerate even the smallest things going wrong will evidently experience much harm. We can see now such individuals who always complain that something is not right, and they seem to lack a true moment of relaxed and peaceful joy.

The statement that they *will receive much harm* means that difficulties and problems will always be present for those intolerant to small sufferings. In such a situation these individuals will be *like the gods gripped by death whose wish for a long life will not be fulfilled*. The gods referred to here are the long-lived gods who, due to their karma, have a very long lifespan. Then, with a long life full of luxuries and pleasures they become very complacent and don't think about the suffering they'll experience in the future.

If we become complacent, then, while in the grip of death (which can occur at any time), we would have the same mentality as a long-lived god. Like them we too become complacent with a lot of time on our hands, so when the actual time of death comes, we, like them, will realise that our time is over, and we have not had time to fulfil all our wishes and hopes. This is a time when great suffering is experienced.

The main point here is that if one doesn't prepare for the greatest time of suffering, then when it occurs one won't be able to cope with it. As mentioned previously, the best way to cope with difficulties is to endure hardships, willingly accept them now, then one will not experience a continuous sense of dissatisfaction and unhappiness.

The point of the long-lived god analogy is that one should not spend one's life as if one has all the time in the world to enjoy pleasures. If one has this attitude one becomes a victim to complacency and laziness. The actual time of death is inevitable and approaching by the moment, with the moments in our life getting shorter rather than longer. So, if we engage in frivolous activities and completely ignore the fact that death is imminent, then when death occurs, because we have failed to prepare for it, and instead become consumed with distracting activities, we will experience great suffering, as we will be unprepared to deal with the sufferings. That is the main point.

2.1.2.1.2.2.4. *Exhorting to strive in the method for becoming liberated from suffering*

As one does not want to experience suffering, this part of the outline exhorts one to actually become liberated from suffering.

The commentary starts with a hypothetical question:

If asked, 'How then should one act?'

The verse presents the response:

14. *In dependence on the human boat
One will be liberated from the great river of suffering.
Since this boat will be difficult to find later on,
Deluded one, do not fall asleep at this time.*

The commentary explains:

Since one can attain liberation if one strives in dependence on the basis that one has attained freedoms and endowments. In saying liberate yourself from the great stream of suffering in dependence on the boat of the human body, it shows that the freedoms and endowments have great purpose.

In essence the presentation here explains that, first of all, we definitely wish to be liberated and free from suffering. Then, in order to be free from suffering one has to depend on a basis which will enable one to be free from it. The basis presented here is none other than one's precious human rebirth, intact with the eight freedoms and the ten endowments. The value of a rebirth is presented in three points: our basis has great meaning as one can achieve great purpose; it is difficult to find such a good basis; and having found this basis of a precious human rebirth it can disintegrate very easily.

The commentary explains that *since one can attain liberation if one strives in dependence on the basis that one has attained freedoms and endowments*, and says you should liberate yourself from the great stream of suffering in dependence on the boat of the human body. Here our human rebirth is presented as analogous to a ferry boat that carries people across from one shore to the other.

To extend the analogy to ourselves, our body is like the boat and our individual being is like the passenger being ferried across to the other side. Just as a boat carries the passengers from one shore to the other, so our precious human body can assist us to move from samsaric existence to liberation. This shows that the freedoms and endowments have great purpose.

The commentary continues:

Since the achievement of the freedoms and endowments is extremely rare, it is very difficult to find this boat again later on. Hence, deluded one, at this time of having found this boat do not fall asleep, but liberate yourself from the great stream of cyclic existence by way of practising the paths of the small, medium and great capable beings.

This shows that one needs to strive while having found the difficult-to-find freedoms and endowments.

Having first explained that this body has a great purpose, this next point shows that it is very rare and we could easily lose it *since the achievement of the freedoms and endowments is extremely rare, it is very difficult to find this boat again later on*. Therefore, the text says, *deluded one, having found this boat do not fall asleep*, but use it for the purpose of liberating yourself.

The commentary concludes with, *this shows that one needs to strive while having found the difficult-to-find freedoms and endowments*.

2.1.2.2. ABANDONING THE LAZINESS THAT GRASPS AT NEGATIVE ACTIONS

This part of the outline explains the laziness we may have in allowing ourselves to engage in negative actions.

The verse reads:

15. *Having abandoned the supreme happiness of the infinite
And holy Dharma, which is the cause for happiness,
Why do you like the distraction, mental excitement
And so forth, that are causes of suffering?*

The commentary expands upon this:

Having abandoned the supreme joy in practicing the infinite methods of the holy Dharma, which are the causes for all the happiness of this and future lives, why do you like unsuitable actions resulting in suffering, such as negativities, the distractions of many different thrills, mental excitement and so forth? It is unsuitable to like them because they are the causes of suffering.

In stating that *having abandoned the holy Dharma which are the causes for happiness of this and future lives*, the commentary answers to a hypothetical question with the exhortation, *why do you like unsuitable actions resulting in suffering, such as negativities, the distractions of many different thrills, mental excitement and so forth?* The conclusion is *it is unsuitable to like them because they are the causes of suffering*. So this is quite clear.

The thing we need to rejoice about is the practice of virtue. When one practises any Dharma practice which involves accumulating virtues, then we can feel glad about, and rejoice in that. Then the more we feel glad and rejoice in these practices, the more this helps us increase the positive results of those positive actions.

These explanations are relevant to one's personal status. As I've mentioned previously, there are times when we would have been glad of the opportunity to accumulate some negativity, and feel sad when we've missed the opportunity. This is the point being presented here, one which brings to the heart the real issue of the attitude we

lack if we are to accumulate more virtues and engage in Dharma.

The hypothetical question in the commentary is a good one to ask yourself, 'why do I like unsuitable actions resulting in suffering, such as negativities, the distractions of many different thrills. The Tibetan word *drud-tsi* used here has the connotation of allowing oneself to be surrounded by many things which influence one into negative ways. It includes people and negative friends etc. who cause one to engage in bad behaviour. The word *drud-tsi* is translated here as *many different thrills*, followed by *mental excitement* and so forth.

This is a significant question to ask oneself. Why do we like things that are unsuitable to like, as they are the causes of suffering? If one can recognise certain activities as a cause for one's own suffering, then why would one intentionally want to engage in them? This is an exhortation to start contemplating our normal activities as a way of slowly transforming our three doors of body, speech and mind (which are otherwise inclined to creating negativity), to actually engage in more and more virtuous activities. For that transformation to take place we need to seriously contemplate these points.

The point to reflect upon is the fact that if we allow ourselves to be influenced by negativities and engage in distractions and assorted thrills and mental excitement, these then become the causes for problems in our life. When we consider the various difficulties that arise in our life, it is because we've followed these negativities or distractions that then cause the problems in our life. As such one should exhort oneself to engage in the practice of Dharma.

Leaving aside the sufferings which will have a result in the future, even in our current day-to-day life, if we want to have a more meaningful life with less problems and less conflict with others etc., then leading a life that practises virtue and conducting ourselves with positive behaviour is what ensures a more meaningful life.

Contemplating on these points takes time and we need to think it through well, but it becomes quite clear that it is quite absurd for one to willingly engage in negativities if we don't wish to experience difficulties and problems in our life. It is absurd that we engage in the very things that bring us difficult problems. These are significant points to transform.

To summarise earlier points, if we lead a life where we dislike the very causes for happiness, while on the other hand willingly like and engage in the causes for our suffering, the negativities, then the consequences are bound to be more suffering for ourselves.

We need to ensure that we practise the opposite of that, and that we begin to willingly accept and like the causes for happiness and engage in virtues, and willingly engage in abandoning the causes for suffering, which is to abandon negativities. That would be the proper way to go about our practice.

The following verses also present very significant points which we will cover in the following sessions. Just to summarise again the significant points which were presented this evening: a personal instruction is to really contemplate the fact that all the sufferings that one has

experienced thus far are none other than having engaged in the causes of suffering, the negativities. If we feel we have been deprived of happiness, then that is because we have failed to actually accumulate the causes for happiness which is virtue.

Even recognising this point takes time because it involves the subtleties of karma—the cause and effect sequence of how virtue is the cause of happiness, and negativity is actually the cause of all our sufferings. One needs to reflect upon the points of the cause and effect sequence as a way to exhort oneself to reflect upon how one needs to reverse one's inclination of liking to engage in negativities, and start putting more time and thought into the value of what we call virtues.

Contemplating these points is the way transformation will take place. We need not go too far back into the past to contemplate the negative consequences of negativity. If we could reflect on our own life so far, even within the past fifteen years, we can see the kinds of activities we have engaged in, which have clearly resulted in more problems and difficulties for ourselves. It becomes very clear when we know certain activities were clearly negative, and have definitely contributed to the unwanted circumstances and difficult problems in our life.

Conversely, if on reflection one has willingly taken upon oneself certain virtuous activities, see how these have resulted in a more peaceful and happier sort of mind, and how that has contributed to one's wellbeing. When we really reflect on how our own activities and deeds have brought about certain kinds of consequences, then that clarity is like looking in a mirror and seeing everything clearly.

The negativities here refer to the obvious ones such as killing or stealing or sexual misconduct. When we reflect upon the ten non-virtues, these are the obvious negativities. One would have engaged in these and they would have brought about negative consequences for oneself. Reversing this means to willingly abandon the taking of others' lives, to willingly make a commitment to abandon taking others' possessions and to willingly make a commitment to refrain from sexual misconduct etc. The willingness to actually take up the practice of avoiding non-virtue means we are practising the opposite, virtue.

Starting in this simple way is a means to understand how one can actually adopt these practices to avoid negativities and engage in virtues. Again, we can reflect that even in a short span of one's life one can definitely notice the negative consequences of engaging in negativity. Whilst the positive results are also experienced in this life, the positive results in the future life are also definite. Even in this life we can see that our life becomes much more meaningful, much less hectic, less problematic, and more purposeful. To that extent we can see the benefits of the practice.

2.1.2.3. ABANDONING THE LAZINESS OF DISCOURAGEMENT

This is subdivided into three, which we will cover next week.

2.1.2.3.1. Advice to strive in the antidotes to discouragement

2.1.2.3.2. How it is taught in the scriptures to practice the antidotes

2.1.2.3.3. One can attain enlightenment if one strives, by stopping laziness

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

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