
Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

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

Let us now generate the motivation for receiving the teachings along these lines:

For the sake of all mother sentient beings I need to achieve enlightenment, and so for that purpose I will listen to the profound teachings and put them into practice.

If we generate such a positive motivation prior to engaging in the practice of listening to the teachings, and then dedicate it at the end, then we have engaged in a positive practice. Any practice that begins with a positive motivation, a positive engagement in the middle and a positive dedication at the end, is a most meaningful practice.

2.2.1.2.2.2.1. Pride in taking action

2.2.1.2.2.2.1.1. Identifying the pride of taking action (cont.)

In our last session we left off at the point of identifying the pride of taking action. The pride referred to here is, as mentioned previously, not a deluded pride but a mind of great courage and strength. When the commentary explains, if one sees *that others could do the action as well, one thinks 'I shall do this alone'*, the action referred to here is a virtuous action; one shouldn't, of course, engage in non-virtuous actions. Virtuous actions can also be described as virtuous karmas, and this will be presented more elaborately later on.

The pride that is being presented here is a way to encourage the development of great strength of mind. Without that strength of mind, it is very easy to give up whenever there are difficulties or challenges. If we are to maintain our stamina in order to follow a practice through, we need to develop that strength of mind. That is what is being encouraged here.

2.2.1.2.2.2.2.2. The reason for practising it now¹

Having identified the pride of action, the next verse presents the reason for thinking, 'I shall do this alone'. Gyaltsab Je begins his commentary with this statement:

One needs to achieve the works of sentient beings by oneself, independently from others

The relevant verse is:

50. *These worldly beings with no control due to afflictions
Cannot achieve their own purpose.
Hence migrators cannot act like oneself
And therefore one needs to do this.*

Then Gyaltsab Je explains:

That is because these worldly beings, which have no control due to their afflictions, cannot achieve even their own purpose.

Hence migrators cannot strive in virtue for the purpose of others like one can, and even if one were to rely on them it would be useless. Therefore think, 'I have to do the actions for the benefit of others all by myself'.

When the commentary states *That is because these worldly beings, which have no control due to their afflictions, cannot achieve even their own purpose*, it is referring to the condition of worldly beings. As presented in an earlier verse, although wishing to overcome suffering, they run towards suffering itself, and though wishing for happiness, out of ignorance they destroy their own happiness like an enemy.² This is the situation of samsaric beings: while not wanting to experience any kind of suffering, they uncontrollably engage in the very causes of suffering due to the delusions, and whilst wishing to experience happiness, they destroy the very causes of that happiness, again due to ignorance. For as long as one is under the influence of delusions then, let alone the ultimate source of happiness, such as liberation and enlightenment, even temporary happiness is very difficult to obtain.

In order to feel the full impact of these words we need to relate them to ourselves, as they reflect our own situation. As I have mentioned previously, if one relates these lines only to other poor suffering sentient beings, then these passages will not really help to move one's mind and bring about a personal transformation. Thus, one needs to relate it to oneself by thinking, 'For as long as I am under the influence of the three poisons I will have no control over what I am doing. Even though I wish for happiness, I destroy the causes of my own happiness. Even though I don't wish to experience suffering, I have already created the cause of so much suffering'. Relating these lines directly to ourselves can really encourage us to find the means to overcome such a situation.

Worldly or samsaric beings who have no control over the afflictions cannot achieve even their own purpose. Let alone being able to achieve their ultimate purpose of liberation and enlightenment, it is very difficult for them to create even the causes for obtaining the conditions for a good rebirth in the next lifetime. For as long as living beings are under the control of the afflictions, this is their reality. As the commentary further explains, *Hence migrators cannot strive in virtue for the purpose of others like one can*. We need to understand that the *one* here refers to a bodhisattva, i.e. one who has all the right conditions to be able to strive for the purpose of others.

The commentary further explains that, *even if one were to rely on them it will be meaningless*. Therefore think, 'I have to do the actions for the benefit of others all by myself'. While this is a bodhisattva's resolve, we can relate this to our own personal practice. As mentioned previously, even generating a positive motivation for whatever one does, such as listening to the teachings, and engaging in and

¹ Last week it was listed as The Reason for Doing This
Chapter 7

² See the teaching of 28 May 2013

practising them, becomes a means to resolve to engage in positive actions for the benefit of others.

2.2.1.2.2.2.1.3. Practise the pride that also carries the burden of the inferior actions of others

It is good to note that in a worldly context many would say, 'Oh, you need to have pride in order to achieve things'. Yet even though there may be no distinction between deluded pride and virtuous pride in that worldly context, some forms of pride are considered as not being suitable, while pride in a courageous mind that can accomplish things is talked about in a positive way. So we can see that, even conventionally, there is a reason why the pride that is mentioned here refers to a noble pride, and is not a deluded pride, which is an abandonment. The two types of pride have a similar strength of mind, but one is based on ignorance and the other on wisdom.

The verse under this heading reads:

**51. When others engage in inferior actions
How can one remain?
Acting without pride,
Not to have pride one is supreme.**

Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains the meaning as follows:

When others engage in inferior actions such as fieldwork, how can one, who has accepted to carry the great burden of sentient beings on one's head, remain with leisure? One should work.

When others engage in inferior work one may think, 'I should act with pride and engage in purer actions'. Do not engage in these actions with such pride, as it is supreme not to have afflicted pride. It should be abandoned because through it one will go to the lower realms.

When the commentary says that *when others engage in inferior actions such as fieldwork, how can one, who has accepted to carry the great burden of sentient beings on one's head, remain with leisure?* There are two different ways to interpret this.

One way to understand this is that worldly beings engage in inferior actions, which are worldly actions that are associated merely with obtaining food, clothing and fame. In other words, their actions are focussed only on worldly concerns; day and night, samsaric beings are constantly striving to achieve worldly gains. Seeing that, and having taken on one's head, the pledge to benefit sentient beings, meaning having made that pledge oneself, how can one remain with leisure without engaging in work? Here *one should work* refers to engaging in the actions of a bodhisattva—engaging in virtuous actions, such as the six perfections and so forth.

Another way of interpreting *remain with leisure* is not to remain idle when others are engaging in inferior work, thinking, 'That doesn't really concern me'. To understand this fully, one needs to make a distinction between general worldly actions and actions that, by their very nature, create negative karma. One should avoid engaging in negative actions and if others engage in them, one should not help them to do so. Other worldly actions, such as carrying a load, are not, by their very nature, negative. So when one notices that someone is struggling to carry a load and helps them to carry it, that

then becomes a virtuous action. Thus, considering such actions as being lowly and inferior, and not engaging in them would be a fault. One should help others to engage in such actions if one can do so. This is how we need to make the distinction.

The next part of the explanation identifies deluded pride. The commentary states, *When others engage in inferior work one may think, 'I should act with pride and engage in purer actions'*. If one thinks, 'Oh, this kind of inferior work doesn't apply to me. I need to be engaging in purer actions' then, as explained here, that is a deluded pride. As the commentary explains, *do not engage in these actions with such pride as it is supreme not to have afflicted pride*. If one engages in any kind of action with an attitude of feeling superior, looking down on menial work and thinking, 'I only engage in pure activities', then that is deluded pride.

Even in a worldly context, people who are proud are scorned. No-one appreciates people who act as if they are superior, and who look down upon others, considering that certain jobs do not apply to them and are only for the lowly. That kind of attitude is definitely recognised as being unsuitable, even in a worldly context. As explained in the commentary, one should avoid this deluded pride, as it only creates negativity for oneself. Indeed, anyone who feels superior and who looks down upon others, is definitely not appreciated and is not a welcome guest anywhere. Such pride makes others feel uncomfortable around you. We often hear comments like, 'Oh, so and so looks down on me and treats me like dirt'. Such an experience makes people feel as if they are inferior.

Harbouring this sort of deluded pride is also a cause for disharmony. Others don't appreciate such pride, and it leads to disunity within groups of people. The virtuous pride that expresses the strength of mind that resolves, 'I will take on the responsibility of benefitting others' is completely different to deluded pride. Instead of looking down upon others it makes one cherish others and wish to benefit them.

Previously I shared a story as an example of how, when one is free from such deluded pride, one can benefit others. I was once in a bank and saw a new teller having difficulty in opening a drawer. One of the senior staff came over and said, 'Oh, I used to struggle with that', and then he showed her how to open it. In this case, the senior staff member acknowledged the difficulty of the new teller and helped her, rather than looking down on her. Someone with a lot of pride might have ridiculed her saying, 'Oh, don't you even know how to open a drawer?', but here the senior staff member helped her by saying that he used to have the same problem himself.

We need to keep in mind that, when we see others struggling, extending a helping hand is of real benefit to them. Whatever the environment, in the workplace or wherever, whenever someone else is struggling with something about which one has knowledge, then the greatest benefit one can offer is to give them a helping hand. When we resolve to practise Dharma, we need to keep that in mind that, when we free ourselves from pride, there are many practical ways to benefit others.

Here at Tara Institute, many have said that when they first came here there were some who were really helpful, taking the time to explain things well, and made them feel very comfortable and welcome. They were really touched and moved to receive such help, when they were new and a bit nervous. That also might imply that there might have been others who were a bit pompous, or who didn't really pay attention or offer a helping hand, even when they saw someone who was new to Tara Institute. So here we need to apply Shantideva's advice.

The Buddha's teachings are said to be all means to overcome pride. Those of us who are following the Buddha's teachings need to ensure that we don't allow whatever study and practice we do to become a cause to further increase pride. Although we might not be able to completely overcome pride just yet, at the very least we need to ensure that, whatever we do, we are not increasing our pride. Pride is of no use whatsoever in Dharma practice.

2.2.1.2.2.2.2.2. Pride in ability

Here again we are talking about virtuous pride. Having explained that there is pride in action, next comes taking pride in one's own ability. This has five subdivisions:

2.2.1.2.2.2.2.2.1. The fault of not having pride in one's abilities

2.2.1.2.2.2.2.2.2. The benefits of being proud

2.2.1.2.2.2.2.2.3. Abiding in the pride that is the antidote

2.2.1.2.2.2.2.2.4. It is unsuitable to generate afflicted pride

2.2.1.2.2.2.2.2.5. The benefits of the pride that is the antidote

2.2.1.2.2.2.2.2.1. The fault of not having pride in one's abilities

This again refers to strength of mind. Pride in this context is the fault of not having belief in one's ability to overcome the despondent mind that feels, 'Oh, I am not able to do this'. In order to overcome that feeling of being discouraged by the task at hand, or other challenges that have to be faced, we need to have a courageous mind of great strength.

The verses under this heading indicate that if one doesn't have pride in one's ability, then one will be discouraged in the face of even the slightest of difficulties or challenges.

52. *When they meet a dead snake
Even crows act like garudas.
If one is humble
Even small downfalls will harm.*

53ab. *The discouraged who have given up striving
How can they be liberated from destitution?*

The commentary explains:

One should generate the force of the antidote to destroy the afflictions, because even crows act like garudas when they meet with a dead snake. Similarly, if one's antidotes are weak, then even small downfalls will harm the path with obstruction. When one is destitute due to having given up the striving for the purpose of self and others due to discouragement, then how can one be liberated? Being destroyed by laziness, one's actions of body and mind degenerate.

As the commentary explains, *one should generate the force of the antidote to destroy the afflictions.* In order to destroy the afflictions, one needs to generate the strong force of

the antidote, one can then combat and overcome the afflictions. This is explained with the analogy of *crows that act like garudas when they meet with a dead snake.* A garuda has the courage to face a live snake with a great majesty, while crows do the same thing when they come upon a dead snake, behaving as if it was a live snake. Crows act like that with a dead snake, because there is no threat. They act as if they are mighty, when in fact they are afraid of live snakes.

The point of the analogy is to illustrate that if the *antidotes* are *weak*, then even a small downfall will harm the path with obstruction. If one's antidote is weak, one will immediately feel daunted and discouraged by even small afflictions, which will become an obstruction on the path.

The commentary asks, *When one is destitute due to having given up the striving for the purpose of self and others, due to discouragement, then how can one be liberated?* If one were to easily fall victim to even small afflictions and thus become discouraged, then, as explained in the commentary, *how can one fulfil the purpose of self and others, and how can one be liberated? Being destroyed by laziness, one's actions of body and mind degenerate.* We can relate this to our own experience where we feel a bit daunted by some task. That's when we are most likely to think, 'Oh, I don't think I can manage that' and then start to become despondent. The laziness of despondency actually arises when one feels a bit discouraged. Therefore, as explained here, one needs to develop that courageous mind.

From this presentation we can see how we need to refrain from even small negative karmas, and not neglect to recall their severity by thinking, 'Oh, it is not all that grave, so it is OK if I engage in that action', because as explained by the Buddha, a spark can cause a great raging fire. Conversely one should not neglect even the smallest of virtues, thinking, 'Oh, I need not bother with small virtues', because, as the Buddha explained with another analogy, even small drops of water can fill a large container. So one accumulates great virtue by combining many small virtues. We need to pay heed to this advice and adopt it. By reflecting on these analogies, one needs to resolve on abandoning even small negativities, and adopt even small virtues as a way to further develop and progress along the path to enlightenment.

Otherwise, if one resorts to thinking, 'Oh, that's too hard and too difficult, and I had better not engage in it', then one is actually resorting to laziness. As explained in the commentary, one will be *destroyed by laziness* and *one's actions of body and mind will degenerate.* This means that when one becomes lazy one feels weighed down mentally, and is physically lethargic, not wanting to engage in any kind of activity. That is how both mental and physical degeneration occur.

The conclusion is that one needs to abandon this kind of laziness, and engage in positive actions.

2.2.1.2.2.2.2.2.2. The benefits of being proud

This relates to the benefits of applying one's strength of mind. The lines of verse relating to this are:

53cd. *Through generating the effort of pride
It will be difficult to be overcome even by
something great.*

54cd. *Therefore, with a steadfast mind*

*One should destroy all downfalls.
If one is conquered by a downfall
The wish to conquer the three realms is
laughable.*

Here, the commentary reads:

Through the pride that generates a forceful antidote and the generation of striving through application it will be difficult to overcome even the great objects of abandonment. Therefore, with a steadfast mind one should destroy the downfalls, because if one is overcome by the downfalls then the wish to conquer the three realms will make one a laughing stock.

As explained in the commentary, the pride that one needs to develop is *the pride that generates a forceful antidote, and the generation of striving through application*. Generating and applying a forceful antidote is the means to overcome the delusions, and *it will be difficult to be overcome, even by great objects of abandonment*. When one applies this forceful antidote and generates striving through application, one will not be overpowered by strong and powerful delusions.

Therefore with a steadfast mind one should destroy the downfalls, because if one is overcome by the downfalls then the wish to conquer the three realms will make one a laughing stock, clearly explains that one needs to generate a strong antidote and overcome the downfalls from one's own side. If one allows downfalls to overpower oneself, and says that one has pledged, 'I will overcome the downfalls, and I will conquer the three realms', one will become a laughing stock, and an object of ridicule.

2.2.1.2.2.2.2.3. Abiding on the pride that is the antidote

The relevant verse reads:

*55. I should conquer everything
And nothing should conquer me.
I, the child of the lion king,
Shall abide in this pride.*

Here, the commentary states:

Thus, one should abide in the supreme pride that thinks, 'I should conquer all my faults but I should not be conquered even by one of the objects of abandonment of the three realms.'

If it is asked: Who is doing this? It is oneself, the child of the lion king, who frightens the animals that are demons³ and forders⁴.

The commentary clearly explains that having shown the disadvantages of not having virtuous pride, one needs to resolve to abide in the supreme pride that thinks, '*I should conquer all my faults, but I should not be conquered even by one of the objects of abandonment of the three realms*'. As previously explained, one generates the strength of mind and courage that resolves, 'I will be the one who conquers faults, and the faults of the three realms will not conquer me'. That is the kind of pride that needs to be generated here. Such a resolve comes from understanding the response to the rhetorical question, *Who is doing this?* which is that *it is oneself, the child of the lion king*. Here *lion king* is actually a reference to the Buddha, the Conqueror. A lion king is feared by all other creatures, who, on merely seeing the lion king, are afraid and then slink

away. Likewise the Conqueror, the Buddha, *frightens the demons and all forders*.

As a child of the Conqueror, the Buddha, one resolves to abide in the supreme pride that conquers all faults of the three realms. Rather than allowing the faults to conquer oneself, one resolves, 'I, a child of the Buddha, will develop this supreme pride'.

2.2.1.2.2.2.2.4. It is unsuitable to generate afflicted pride

We will continue with this in our next session.

As you are aware next Tuesday is the discussion night. As I have mentioned previously, it is good to come with a positive mind of wanting to share and learn from each other. The following week will, as usual be the exam, and it is also good to complete that in a good manner.

As I reminded you last week, the seminar is on Sunday week. It is good for you to develop a virtuous mind of wanting to share whatever understanding you have with others. Likewise, you can benefit from the understanding of others. With that attitude, the time spent together will be really meaningful. Having an attitude of, 'Oh, I might be able to impress others with my knowledge', is the wrong sort of attitude.

As we have seen, Shantideva gives profound advice and many instructions on how to practise. So it is good to really pay attention to them, and try to think about these points, familiarising yourself with them and becoming really acquainted with them. It would be really meaningful to resolve that that this is a good way to practise, and dedicate oneself towards that end. While we may not be able to see the immediate benefit now, through familiarity with these teachings, and by following as much as possible the personal advice they offer, the time will definitely come where we will find that we can apply what we have learnt and put it into practice. But if we don't pay much attention now and just skim over these presentations, then when the time comes where we need to resort to these practices, we will not have any material with which to practise. Therefore it is important to really pay attention to Shantideva's advice now, and put it into practice as much as possible.

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

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³ Maras

⁴ Non-Buddhists holding extremist views