

Shantideva's *Bodhisattvacharyavatara*

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While maintaining the motivation we have just generated, we can now engage in our meditation practice.
[meditation]

We can now generate the bodhicitta motivation for receiving the teachings along these lines:

For the sake of all mother sentient beings, in order to liberate them from all suffering and lead them to the ultimate state of happiness, I need to achieve enlightenment myself. So for that purpose I will engage in listening to the Mahayana teachings and put them into practice well.

2.2.1.2.3.3. The way of relating it to the power of joy

The verse reads:

66. *Therefore, to complete one's actions,
One should engage in the action
Like an elephant tormented at noon
That, when coming upon a lake, immerses itself
in it.*

The commentary explains the meaning:

Because it is an action suitable to engage in, therefore, in order to complete the intended action one should engage in it like an elephant tormented at noon by heat and thirst that comes upon a lake and immerses itself joyfully in it.

This explanation follows the presentation of the previous verse in the commentary about the merit of generosity and so forth, which states:

the cause to attain the temporary happiness and higher rebirth of gods and humans, and the ultimate happiness where all suffering is pacified.

In relation to the practices of the six perfections - generosity and so forth - the commentary explains that a way to actually engage in such actions is by relating them to the power of joy. The commentary states, *because it is an action suitable to engage in*, and here *suitable* indicates that it brings about the practices of the six perfections, such as generosity, ethics and morality, patience etc., which in turn bring about a temporary and ultimate goal for oneself and other sentient beings. Thus these actions are suitable to engage in, and the way to engage in these practices is with a sense of joy, achieved by contemplating the positive results that they will bring. Doing this encourages one to engage in positive actions as a cause for positive results, willingly and joyfully.

If we were given the choice to experience positive results we would not hesitate to accept them. For example, the positive results of generosity and morality are abundant wealth and a good physique, so we'd willingly accept those. But if we honestly ask ourselves whether we are engaging in the causes to obtain these good results, we'd find that we are not. In short, we wish for positive results but we don't pay much attention to creating the causes

for them. While we'd rather not experience the negative consequences of practising the opposite of the six perfections, that is actually what we do, i.e. we practise the opposite of generosity by being miserly and so forth. We find ourselves engaging in negativities willingly and without hesitation.

We need to understand that for as long as we engage in this disparity between the cause and the effect, while we wish for positive results but don't create the causes, then we cannot possibly experience them.

In order to relate to this explanation we need to bring to mind the understanding of karma. When one has a strong belief in karma one is naturally willing to engage in positive deeds, and thus accumulates virtues. Whenever there is an opportunity to accumulate virtue it brings about a sense of great joy, where we feel very fortunate to have the opportunity to do so. Being happy about the opportunity to accumulate good deeds and virtues, rejoicing in accumulating them, and dedicating them to a positive end, is the means to secure and increase the positive merit of those virtues.

With a strong belief in karma one naturally hesitates to engage in negativities, and when one finds oneself engaged in them, one immediately develops strong regret about how unfortunate it is to have succumbed again to the delusions. Such regret enables one to confess the negativities, which is a means to purify them. While at our level now, we may not be able to completely avoid engaging in negativities, the benefit of a strong belief in karma means that one will not idly let one's negativities sit; one actually resolves to purify them with confession.

When one acquaints oneself with karma to the point where towards evening one takes the initiative to purify any negativities created during the day, one can go to sleep with a clear and virtuous mind. This is the way to conduct oneself in daily life to make it more meaningful. And if one has accumulated virtues, one can rejoice and go to sleep in a virtuous state of mind. If the sleep itself can also become virtuous then that is great, and the next morning one can rejoice in having a good sleep. If we find ourselves creating negativities with thought or action during the night, then in the morning we should again take the opportunity to purify them.

It is very difficult at our level to completely avoid engaging in negativities because of the strong delusions in our mind. Habituation with negativities finds us periodically engaging in them, but we have the great advantage of using our understanding of the Dharma to counteract them by developing regret, confessing them, and then purifying the negativities. So even though we might still engage in negativities, knowing the Dharma provides us with the means to practise and purify them.

Also, when we create virtues, understanding Dharma allows us to seize the opportunity to secure them through dedication, and further increase them through rejoicing. If we actually practise the Dharma then this is the great advantage we have. There are those who create negativities but do not know how to purify them, and there are those who create great amounts of virtue and may not be aware of it, as is the case with many non-religious people.

On this point, I want to relate an incident I saw recently on TV where there was a lady who was incredibly kind in making attempts to save an injured kangaroo that had been shot with an arrow. She was holding it as if it was her own child, and nurturing it and caring for the wound. I don't know what eventually happened to the kangaroo but the great extent to which this lady was caring for it really touched me. The perpetrators would have just mindlessly shot the arrow, maybe as a game, not really valuing the life of another living being. So while some exhibit cruelty and mean to destroy life, this lady took it upon herself to try to save the kangaroo's life, and put a lot of time and love into it. Seeing it actually brought tears to my eyes. It's unlikely that she is a religious person, but I thought the extent to which she showed such great concern for another living being was a very compassionate act.

If we consider ourselves 'religious' we might consider doing even better than that! Of course there are different ways and means of putting this into practice, particularly in relation to avoiding negativities, rejoicing in virtue, and increasing our virtues. This is something we have the understanding and the knowledge to do. If we don't use the tools we have then there's no advantage in us gaining this understanding from the Dharma. The main thing is to resolve to take every opportunity to accumulate virtue, and when one finds one is creating negativities, apply methods to purify them. When we think about it, it's not that complicated. Most of it is done through our mental attitude, and our way of thinking; acknowledging negativities for what they are and regretting and confessing them. Whenever we have the opportunity to accumulate virtue we should recognise it and willingly engage in it. When we take these measures it actually starts to become a habit. Acquainting ourselves with accumulating virtue and purifying negativities can definitely lead to a much lighter and more joyous mind.

For those who intentionally engage in negative deeds we can obviously see that their lives are not really happy, and that they are constantly living in fear and worry and complications. The consequences they experience are not farfetched. Temporarily it may seem they are in control and enjoying life, but actually they end up leading very unhappy lives. In contrast, we can definitely see that those who are engaged in kind and compassionate deeds have much more joyful and happy lives. Whether they are aware of it or not, they are actually experiencing the positive consequences of abiding by karma, committing virtues and shunning negativity. On these obvious levels it is good for us to consider the significances of these practices.

As explained in the commentary, having understood the practice as being actions which are suitable to engage in, *therefore in order to complete the intended action one should engage in it*, which indicates that for bodhisattvas engaged in the practices of generosity and so forth, once they engage in them, completing the action should be done with a sense of great joy.

The analogy presented here is that, *it is like an elephant tormented at noon by heat and thirst that comes upon a lake and immerses itself joyfully in it*. This is a vivid example. When an animal like an elephant comes upon a water

hole after walking for a long time on a very hot day, and becomes thirsty, it will rush towards the water and very joyfully drink it and immerse itself in the water. It will take great joy in that activity.

Like this analogy of an elephant taking great joy in coming upon a lake, when a bodhisattva engages in the practices of generosity and so forth, they need to engage in them with a similar great sense of joy because these are actions that benefit other sentient beings.

2.2.1.2.4. The power of relinquishment

This is divided into two:

2.2.1.2.4.1. Temporary relinquishment

2.2.1.2.4.2. Certain relinquishment

2.2.1.2.4.1. Temporary relinquishment

Temporary relinquishment relates to taking a break, or rest.

The two lines of verse read:

*67ab. If one is affected by weakening strength
One should relinquish to start again.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains the meaning:

If one is affected by one's weakening strength, physically and mentally exhausted by one's practice of virtue, then one should relinquish temporarily in order to start again when one is rested.

While the explanation is clear, it is good to take note of the main point which is very good advice for us at our level. When engaging in virtues, when one's *strength* is *weakened physically* with physical ailments like sickness, or *mentally exhausted* when one is a bit overwhelmed or stressed, then at that time one should relinquish the practice temporarily. This is not suggesting that we completely put the practice aside and don't do it anymore. Rather, it means taking a short rest so that one can feel rejuvenated to further engage in the practice of that virtue. So it is with the intention to continue afresh in the practice of virtue that one takes a rest, rather than having a complete break and not doing the practice at all.

2.2.1.2.4.2. Certain relinquishment

The next two lines of the verse read:

*67cd. If it is well completed one relinquishes,
Because one wishes to do it later again and again.*

The commentary explains:

If an action is completed well, then one relinquishes it because one wants to repeat that action again and again in the future.

Relinquishing an action that is completed well, needs to be understood as relinquishing the satisfaction of having done that action well, and to further develop it by striving to engage in the action again and again.

Having completed an action well, if one feels satisfied that it has already been done, then one will not feel the need to do it again. It is this satisfaction, and not seeing the need to do the action again and again that has to be relinquished. If one feels satisfied with the completion, it prevents one from engaging in it again and again. When engaging in the practice of virtue, one needs to make even more effort to increase the means of accumulating

virtue. It is in this way that one progresses from one practice to the next.

Using the example of studies at school, when one finishes the first grade, if one did not relinquish the thought of being satisfied just with that, one would not go on to the next grade, and the following grades after that. When completing first grade one has finished one part of one's schooling, but one needs to relinquish the thought, 'I'm done with my studies now', and continue on to the next grade and so forth.

2.2.2. Being earnest about practising the actions with mindfulness and introspection

This is subdivided into five:

2.2.2.1. One should earnestly be conscientious

2.2.2.2. Being earnest about mindfulness and introspection

2.2.2.3. Not giving an opportunity for faults to arise with mindfulness and introspection

2.2.2.4. If a fault arises one needs to stop it immediately

2.2.2.5. One should strive in suitable actions

All the practices presented here have already been mentioned, but now they are presented in the context of putting them into practice.

2.2.2.1. ONE SHOULD EARNESTLY BE CONSCIENTIOUS

The verse reads:

68. *Like the seasoned warrior that is engaged
In a fencing duel with the enemy
One should avoid the weapon of the afflictions
And look to attack the enemy of the afflictions.*

The commentary explains:

The seasoned warrior that is engaged in combat with an enemy and who is skilled in weapons and the art of war, will evade the enemy's weapons and attack the enemy. Similarly, upon evading the weapons that are one's own afflictions, one should stop them and not be destroyed by them. Instead one attacks the enemy of the affliction with the weapons of the antidotes and cuts them off at the root.

When the commentary explains, *when an experienced warrior that is engaged in combat with the enemy and who is skilled in the weapons and the art of war*, it means that they have all the necessary skills involved in engaging in combat. In combat they will conduct themselves with a twofold method to overcome the enemy: protecting themselves from harm by being able to evade the weapon targeted at them, and at the same time, find the ways and means to actually attack the enemy by using one's own weapons.

Just as this is done in physical combat with an enemy, when this analogy is applied to fighting afflictions, one first needs to protect oneself (make sure the afflictions don't harm oneself), while applying the means (using antidotes) to overcome them.

The significant point here is that if one is just focussed on overcoming the afflictions, there might be occasions where they actually harm oneself, and one is not aware of it. What is being highlighted here is that one needs to apply one's wisdom in both ways: while combating the afflictions in order to overcome them, at the same time ensuring that one is not harmed by them.

Instead one attacks the enemy of the affliction with the weapons of the antidotes and cuts them off at the very root means that in one's attempt to overcome the afflictions one is not satisfied with just overcoming one or two afflictions, or the manifest levels of the afflictions, but effectively attempts to abandon them from their very root. The main practice here is to abide with conscientiousness while applying enthusiasm in virtue to protect one's mind from afflictions. So we apply this twofold approach to conscientiousness: on one hand enthusiastically engaging in virtue, and on the other being constantly mindful of protecting one's mind from the harm of the afflictions.

2.2.2.2. BEING EARNEST ABOUT MINDFULNESS AND INTROSPECTION

The presentation of these practices makes us mindful of them being ways to protect our commitments, particularly one's vows. It is essential to have these tools to protect commitments.

The verse reads:

69. *If one's sword falls down in battle
Then, out of fear, one will pick it up quickly.
Similarly, if one loses the weapon of
mindfulness
Then, out of fear of the hell realms, one should
quickly pick it up.*

The commentary explains:

If one's sword falls out of one's hand in the midst of battle, one quickly picks it up out of fear of being killed by the enemy. Similarly, if one loses the weapon of mindfulness, which does not forget the virtuous object, then out of fear of the hell realms, by remembering how one will be born there if one is destroyed by the afflictions, one quickly picks up the antidote of mindfulness and introspection.

Here Shantideva shows what an insightful master he is in presenting this clear and vivid analogy; *If one's sword falls out of one's hand in the midst of battle, one quickly picks it up out of fear of being killed by the enemy*. This shows an automatic response in battle, where, if the very weapon one is using to protect oneself - e.g. a sword - falls out of the hand, one immediately reacts and picks it up again, in order to protect oneself.

What the analogy explains is that, *similarly, if one loses the weapon of mindfulness, which does not forget the virtuous object*, where mindfulness is the weapon, the state of mind that constantly remembers the virtuous object. One remembers the virtuous object constantly through mindfulness, as encouraged here, *out of fear of the hell realms*. By remembering that if one loses that mindfulness then the afflictions will destroy one, with the consequence of experiencing the hell realms as a result, *one quickly picks up the antidote of mindfulness and introspection*. As just mentioned, this particular type of mindfulness is constantly remembering the virtuous object, while introspection investigates whether one's three doors of body, speech, and mind are in tune with keeping the virtuous object in mind.

When one forgets the virtuous object then that is when it is most likely for the actions of the three doors to engage in negativity. Therefore, having both mindfulness and introspection to constantly keep our mind in virtue is at the very core of our practice. This is why, when

introducing meditation sessions, I constantly emphasise the point about keeping the virtuous object in mind and trying to remember it, and not allowing negativities to completely control oneself, so that one lapses from engaging in virtue.

There might be many virtuous objects, so to simplify one's practice into something one can do, focus on love and compassion as the main virtuous objects. Constantly try and bring to mind the value of love and compassion, the need to develop it, and try to tune one's mind into love and compassion. This protects one's mind from a lapse of love and compassion, and so one's life can become really meaningful.

2.2.2.3. NOT GIVING AN OPPORTUNITY FOR FAULTS TO ARISE WITH MINDFULNESS AND INTROSPECTION

The opportunity for faults to arise occurs during times when one lapses from mindfulness and introspection. So applying mindfulness and introspection prevents opportunities for faults to arise.

The verse reads:

70. *Just as poison will spread
In dependence on the blood,
So faults will pervade the mind
If they find an opportunity.*

The commentary explains:

If one is hit by a poisoned arrow, then just as the poison will spread through one's body in dependence on the blood that is coursing through one's veins, so will the faults of anger and so forth pervade the mind, if they find an opportunity of lapsed mindfulness and such due to afflictions. Therefore one should stop even the smallest affliction.

When the commentary explains that, *if one is hit by a poisoned arrow*, take note that it's not just a normal arrow, but the tip of the arrow is dipped into poison so that when someone is hit by it and it pierces their skin, the poison starts to spread rapidly through the bloodstream. When this happens there's really not much chance for survival, because as the poison spreads it can take one's life.

Using this vivid analogy, if *the faults of anger and so forth pervade the mind*, and *find an opportunity of lapsed mindfulness and such due to afflictions*, i.e. if one lapses from mindfulness and introspection, then afflictions such as anger and so forth will permeate the mind, and thus destroy one's wellbeing. The commentary concludes, *therefore one should stop even the smallest affliction*.

The next verse is presented with a query:

Query: If asked, how should one be attentive?

We'll leave the following verse and explanation for our next session. Briefly, it presents another vivid analogy for applying mindfulness. It is of someone carrying a container, like a basket with different kinds of fruits, by balancing it on the head. As difficult as this is in itself, the threat here is that if one of those fruits falls out of the basket then someone will chop off your head with a sword. With that threat one would be very, very mindful.

The analogy, as presented, consists of a person carrying a container of fruit, or in this case mustard oil, and if one drop spills then their head would be chopped off. When the road itself is uneven, with a lot of slippery gravel, it's

difficult to walk on, so under such conditions we can imagine how difficult and fearsome it would be. The person would have to exert the most incredible attentiveness in order not to spill any of that oil. In the same way, mindfulness must be applied to protect one's mind from the afflictions.

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

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