

Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

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

Now we can generate the motivation for receiving the teachings along these lines:

For the sake of all sentient beings I need to achieve enlightenment. So for that purpose I will listen to the teachings, and put them into practice well. That will be a means to subdue my mind.

This would be a good way to generate the motivation for listening to the teachings.

2.2.2. Being sincere about practising actions with mindfulness and introspection

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

We covered the first verse under this heading last week. The next verse is preceded by this query:

If asked: How should one be attentive?

In response to this the verse reads:

71. *Just as a person that is carrying a jar filled with mustard oil
In front of someone wielding a sword
Will be careful not to spill anything out of fear of death,
In the same way should an ascetic be attentive.*

Then the commentary explains the meaning of the verse.

Answer: A person that is carrying a jar filled with mustard oil along a slippery road in front of someone carrying a sword, under the threat of being killed if they spill even just one drop, will be very attentive. A practicing bodhisattva should be similarly attentive in holding the antidote of bodhicitta and so forth with mindfulness and introspection.

This is a vivid analogy. It relates to a person who is carrying a jar filled with mustard oil (which is produced from white mustard seed, as opposed to black mustard seed). We need to visualise the container as being more like a bowl with a wide top, rather than a jar with a narrow neck. If a bowl-like container is filled to the brim with oil then it would be extremely difficult to avoid spilling the oil. In the analogy, the person carrying this container has to walk on a rough, slippery road that could easily cause them to slip or trip. The threat in the analogy is that if this person so much as spills one drop of oil, he will be beheaded. With such a threat the person would be extremely careful not to spill even just one tiny drop of oil out of fear for his own life. Far from being careless and mindless, their level of attentiveness and mindfulness in such a situation would be extremely high.

Then the commentary explains the meaning of the analogy. A practicing bodhisattva should be similarly attentive in holding the antidote of bodhicitta and so forth with mindfulness and introspection. As explained here very precisely, a practicing bodhisattva who has bodhicitta vows, and possibly ordination

vows as well, needs to be similarly attentive in holding the antidote to breaching those vows. In particular, the bodhicitta vows need to be applied with great mindfulness and introspection.

While this advice is directed at practicing bodhisattvas, we can also take this advice as an instruction for ourselves with respect to the commitments we have taken. We should not take this analogy lightly thinking, 'Oh this is a very unlikely situation' or 'This analogy seems a bit far-fetched'. In fact, the analogy indicates that we should see that breaching one's vows and commitments would be as grave as losing our own life. So the degree of attentiveness, mindfulness and introspection that we need to adopt should reflect that gravity. We need to understand that this is the level of mindfulness that needs to be applied in protecting our vows.

We also need to relate this passage to other practices as well. When the commentary refers to holding the antidote of bodhicitta and so forth, it is implying that we need to apply mindfulness and introspection so that we do not engage in the opposite of bodhisattva practices like the six perfections. This means using mindfulness and introspection to protect our minds from miserliness as a way of not hindering our practice of generosity, practising patience in order to protect our mind from anger, and practising morality as a way of refraining from harming others.

In this way, practices with a bodhicitta motivation become the ultimate antidote to the self-cherishing mind. By protecting all levels of our practice of generosity, morality, patience, joyous effort and so forth, we ensure that our actions are not tainted with the self-interest of a self-cherishing mind, which is a means to actually benefit others. That is how bodhicitta serves as an antidote to the opposite of the practices of a bodhisattva. This is also related to the cause and effect sequence of karma. So in order to fully embrace it, we need to relate this analogy to a broader perspective.

I have previously emphasised how we need to protect our mind from negativities. As emphasised here, we need to protect our mind from negativities such as miserliness, harmfulness, a lack of joyous effort and so forth. This need for mindfulness and introspection also applies to combatting strong attachment and anger. We need to apply mindfulness and introspection constantly in order to be ready to apply the appropriate antidote whenever there is a chance that negativities might arise.

As I have also mentioned previously, we also need to be mindful of the virtuous object. The real implication of the practice of meditation is to always be mindful of the virtuous object, because remembering virtuous objects lessens the opportunity for negativities to arise. So being mindful of the virtuous object in general actually serves as an antidote that overcomes negativities. This is how we need to apply this practice at our level.

2.2.2.4. IF A FAULT ARISES ONE NEEDS TO STOP IT IMMEDIATELY

I have reflected on these points previously. The first verse under this heading reads:

72. *Therefore, just as one leaps up quickly
If a snake comes into one's lap,
If sleep and sloth come
One should stop them quickly.*

Then the commentary explains the meaning of the verse:

Since one will go to the hell realms if one's virtue is destroyed by afflictions, one should, out of fear of the hell realms, quickly stop sleep and sloth, which cause one to withdraw involuntarily if they come, just as one would leap up quickly if a poisonous snake would come into one's lap.

Since one will go to the hell realms if one's virtue is destroyed by the afflictions refers to the root virtues. The virtue of non-attachment is destroyed by attachment, the virtue of non-anger is destroyed by the affliction of anger, and the root virtue of non-ignorance is destroyed by the mind of ignorance. Likewise, the root virtue of generosity is destroyed by miserliness, the root virtue of morality is destroyed by the lack of morality, and so forth. When one reflects on the explanation of karma, one sees that if one adopts miserliness, then there is no way that one can obtain good resources in future lives. We cannot hope to be reborn with good resources and good conditions in our next rebirth if we are affected by the negativity of miserliness now. Likewise with other non-virtues. If root virtues are destroyed by their opposing afflictions then that will destroy our prospects of enjoying good results in our future life.

As I have explained in previous sessions, if we find ourselves engaging in negativity during the day, then we should take the initiative to confess them and purify those negativities that night. We also need to purify whatever negativities we have created during the night the next morning, so that our root virtues are not completely destroyed by these negativities.

As explained in the commentary, *one should, out of fear of the hell realms, quickly stop sleep and sloth*. Sleep can be neutral or even virtuous, depending on one's state of mind. However the *sleep* that is initiated with an ignorant state of mind destroys a lot of opportunities for accumulating virtues. If sleep is established with a virtuous state of mind, then it is virtuous sleep, but if sleep is affected by *ignorance* it can become non-virtuous.

Although the act of sleeping seems harmless, it can rob us of a great opportunity for accumulating virtues. Sleep takes up a lot of our time. We can spend up to half of our lives sleeping, so if we do not use sleep in a virtuous way then we rob ourselves of a great opportunity for accumulating virtues.

Sloth is a state of worldly idleness when we are not engaged in accumulating virtues, and the consequence of being robbed of the opportunity for accumulating virtues is having to go to unfortunate rebirths such as the *hell realms*.

Here, *involuntarily withdrawn* refers to the state of our consciousness being withdrawn during sleep, and thus not able to focus on virtue.

The manner of how one should actually overcome such obstacles to accumulating virtue is explained with another vivid analogy, *just as one would leap up quickly if a poisonous snake dropped into one's lap*. If a poisonous snake were to drop onto our lap we would not just sit there doing nothing. Out of the fear that at any given moment the snake could bite us, and its venom kill us, we would immediately get rid of that poisonous snake from our lap. In the same way one needs to overcome obstacles, such as sleep and sloth, which destroy one's virtues.

The next verse under this heading is preceded by a query.

Query: How then should one stop them?

73. *With each fault that arises
One should reprimand oneself
And motivate strongly:
'I shall act so that this never happens again'.*

Then the commentary explains:

Answer: With each fault that arises one should reprimand oneself, saying 'When I acted like this in the past, many unwished-for things happened, and I did not achieve what I wanted. Do I still want to act like this?' Then one confesses with the four powers and motivates for a long time: 'I shall make an effort so that this fault never arises again.'

The explanation is quite clear. Actually, Shantideva is supporting what I regularly emphasise. As the commentary states, *with each fault that arises one should reprimand oneself*. As presented here, one investigates one's actions, and for every fault that arises one should engage in an inner dialogue, and reprimand oneself.

If what one wishes for has not materialised, and one has experienced what one does not wish for—problems, difficulties, and various types of turmoil and suffering—then that is the result of engaging in negativities in the past. Recognising that, the measure one takes is that, as soon as some sort of negativity arises to immediately remember, 'Allowing my mind to be controlled by this negativity is the cause of all the problems that I experience now, that I have experienced in the past, and that I will continue to experience for as long as I don't take control of it'. *Do I still want to act like this* is a rhetorical question which implies, 'If I don't want to experience unwanted consequences of problems and difficulties then I can't remain idle and not do anything about the faults and negativities that are the cause of those unwanted consequences'.

As I have shared with you in the past, the way that I apply this to myself is that as soon as a negative or tainted mind starts to manifest, I take the initiative and say to myself, 'Geshe Doga be careful! I have to be cautious here, because a negative state of mind is about to arise, and if I am not careful I will fall victim to this negativity'. Many people have found this advice very useful in their day-to-day lives.

The way to overcome the faults and negativities one has created in the past is by applying the practice mentioned in the commentary. *One confesses with the four powers and motivates for a long time: 'I should make an effort that this fault never arises again'*. As I have emphasised previously, for every fault that arises one needs to immediately apply the purification practice. If we don't like the negative consequences that we are experiencing now, which are the results of previous faults, then as soon as we find ourselves engaging in faults it is in our own best interests to apply the purification practice. That will stop the negativity from increasing, and from being experienced as a negative consequence in the future.

We know how to engage in the purification practice. We have knowledge of the Dharma, so the advantage of knowing the Dharma comes from putting it into practise. If we don't apply the Dharma that we know - such as applying the purification practices - then our knowledge of the Dharma would not have served any purpose for ourselves. As mentioned here, the first part of purification is confessing the faults that one has created, then comes generating the mind of strong regret and taking whatever purification

measure is needed and, at the end, resolving not to engage in these negativities again.

As I have mentioned previously, the stronger the regret is, the stronger the resolve to not commit those negative actions again will be. This is the way to implement this advice into one's practice.

2.2.2.5. ONE SHOULD STRIVE IN SUITABLE ACTIONS

The verse relating to this outline is:

74. *Say: Thus I shall meditate on mindfulness
On these occasions.
Through this cause, when meeting or otherwise,
I shall desire suitable action.*

Then the commentary explains the meaning of the verse:

'Thus, in order for faults not to arise, and to eliminate those already arisen, I shall meditate on mindfulness on these occasions that call for earnest conscientiousness and introspection.' By thinking in this way, through the cause of this motivation, when I meet with the Mahayana guru, or even if I do not meet a guru immediately, I shall desire to engage in suitable actions in accord with the teachings.

This is actually quite clear. As mentioned in the commentary, *for faults to not arise and to eliminate those already arisen I shall meditate on mindfulness on these occasions that call for earnest conscientiousness and introspection.* As I have presented previously, one combats the faults that have arisen now, and to eliminate those that have arisen in the past, one meditates on mindfulness, and then applies conscientiousness and introspection.

By thinking in this way, through the causes of this motivation, i.e. with this motivation in one's mind, if one has met with a Mahayana guru, or even if one has temporarily not met with a guru, one resolves, I shall desire to engage in suitable actions that are according to the teachings, just as explained in the teachings.

2.2.3. Empowering oneself to achieve the actions

This is subdivided into two:

2.2.3.1. Being light in taking up virtue due to mental and physical pliancy

2.2.3.2. Relating the example to the meaning

2.2.3.1. BEING LIGHT IN TAKING UP VIRTUE DUE TO MENTAL AND PHYSICAL PLIANCY

First one obtains physical pliancy which then induces mental pliancy. When one obtains both physical and mental pliancy that will remove the natural defects of body and mind that cause fatigue and tiredness. It then becomes very easy to engage in virtue very joyously. That is the great benefit of attaining this pliancy.

The verse under this heading is:

75. *In order to have strength for anything
Before engaging in an action
By remembering the advice regarding
conscientiousness
I shall arise lightly.*

The commentary reads:

In order to have the power of strong enthusiasm for any virtuous action beforehand, I shall remember the advice regarding conscientiousness and arise lightly in the virtuous action free from being hesitant about performing that action due to the defects.

In order to have the power of strong enthusiasm for any virtuous action beforehand, means that first of all one needs strong enthusiasm for any virtuous action. So the main driving force behind engaging in any virtue is enthusiasm, or joyful effort. Without this joyful effort, one's interest in engaging in virtue would be lacking.

I shall remember the advice regarding conscientiousness and arise lightly in the virtuous action free from being hesitant about performing that action due to the defects, means that one needs to always be conscientiousness about engaging in virtuous actions, free from hesitation due to physical and mental defects. Arising lightly can be understood from the analogy in the next verse. So this verse indicates how to engage in virtuous actions joyfully, and without any hesitation or resistance.

2.2.3.2. RELATING THE EXAMPLE TO THE MEANING

76. *Just like the coming and going
Of the wind controls the cotton,
Letting oneself be controlled by joy,
One will achieve.*

Query: How should one act then?

Answer: Just like the coming and going of the wind controls the cotton, letting one's actions of body and speech be controlled by joy in virtue one will achieve one's virtuous actions of the three doors quickly.

The analogy in the commentary, *just like the coming and going of the wind controls the cotton, is another vivid analogy. A piece of cotton moves effortlessly when the wind blows back and forth from one direction to the other. So, moved by the wind without any effort, the cotton drifts back and forth.*

This analogy is used to explain how, when *one's actions of body, speech and mind are controlled by the joy of virtue, one will achieve one's virtuous actions of the three doors quickly.* When there is a joy in applying effort to accumulate virtue through one's body, speech and mind, then one's speech and one's actions will naturally be followed by a virtuous and joyful state of mind. That is why, as emphasised here, joyous effort is essential if one is to engage in virtue.

Then the commentary continues with:

In short, as it says in the *Sutra of Close Placement by Mindfulness,*

The one basis for the afflictions
Is laziness; who has it?
Wherever one laziness exists
There all dharmas become non-existent.

The commentary then explains the meaning of this verse:

One should strive in the enthusiasm that stops laziness.

As quoted in the earlier verse, no Dharma can exist for the lazy. Therefore one needs to overcome laziness with enthusiasm.

To this end one needs to make an effort to clear the opposing factors of enthusiasm and to generate the conducive conditions of the four powers, [which have been explained previously].

As a summary, the commentary is reiterating what has been previously explained. Having mentioned that one needs to make an effort to remove the opposing factors to enthusiasm, the commentary continues:

The opposing factors are that, though seeing that one is able to engage in a virtuous action one does not do so, or one thinks, 'How could I be able to do this?'

Not engaging in virtue when one is able to do so is one of the types of laziness explained previously. It takes two forms.

The first again has two: procrastinating by thinking, 'I still have time', and being overwhelmed by attachment to negative actions.

These are the two reasons for laziness.

1. The antidote to the first is:

The first one should abandon with the antidote of contemplating that one's body will soon disintegrate, that after death one will fall into the lower realms and that the freedoms and endowments are difficult to find.

2. The antidote to the second, which is being overwhelmed by attachment to negative actions, is:

... to reflect on how the holy Dharma is the cause for infinite joys in this and future lives, and that the distractions of meaningless talk and so forth harm the great purpose of this life, and are the source of many sufferings in the future.

As this is a summary of what has been extensively explained in the chapter, it is easy to relate to these explanations.

With respect to discouragement, the commentary states:

With regard to discouragement there are again three:

1. Thinking, 'I cannot attain the infinite qualities of a buddha';
2. Thinking, 'I cannot accomplish the infinite difficult actions such as offering arms, legs and so forth';
3. Thinking, 'I cannot bear the sufferings of the infinite births in cyclic existence that I would have to take.'

1. Having presented these three types of discouragement, the antidote to the first is explained.

The antidote against the first is to think, 'Also the buddhas had not completed the path from the start but in the beginning were just as myself. Then they evolved and became buddhas ...

As I have regularly explained, the resultant state of becoming a buddha is the result of having overcome each and every negativity, one at a time, along the path, and acquired each and every virtue along the path. Initially buddhas are ordinary beings just like ourselves. Having engaged in the practices of overcoming each and every fault, and acquiring each and every virtue, one at a time, they gradually, and step by step, overcome all adversities and negativities and acquire all the qualities, and attain the state of buddhahood. When it is presented in this way it gives us great hope: 'Yes, there is a real possibility that I can also become a buddha'.

Further:

... Since the Buddha taught that even beings much lower than me can attain enlightenment, then why should I not attain enlightenment as long as I do not stop practising?'

Again, these are points that were mentioned in the root text, explaining why beings from the lower realms, such as animals and insects, also have the potential to become a buddha because of their buddha nature. By reflecting on that fact, we understand that we too have that possibility.

2. The antidote to being daunted with the prospect of having to give up one's limbs and so forth is then explained.

The antidote against the second is to think, 'As long as it appears difficult for me to give up arms, legs and so forth, it is not the right time to do so.

When there is a hesitation about giving one's limbs, then that is an indication that that is not the right time. So one is advised to not engage in the practice of giving one's limbs and so forth at that time. The suitable time is then presented:

Only when I can give them up as easily as a vegetable, then it is the right time to do so.'

When bodhisattvas reach the higher grounds, they have perfected their practice of generosity to the point where they are able to give anything without hesitation.

3. As mentioned previously, there could be the thought that one could bear the suffering entailed in being born in cyclic existence again and again. This relates to the courage of the bodhisattva in coming back again and again to benefit sentient beings. If one feels daunted by that prospect, then:

The antidote against the third is to think, 'Bodhisattvas do not experience suffering because they have abandoned its cause, negativity ...

This was explained in detail previously as well.

... They also do not have mental suffering because they realise that the sufferings of cyclic existence are like an illusion, lacking inherent existence. Since one is strengthened by mental and physical happiness there is no reason to be tired despite remaining in cyclic existence'.

A bodhisattva at that level does not experience physical and mental unhappiness, so they are not affected by the sufferings of samsara, and are therefore not daunted by having to be reborn in cyclic existence again and again.

Summarising verse

The author of the commentary, Gyaltsab Rinpoche, then presents a verse that summarises the chapter.

To sincerely achieve the aspiration for liberation
Depends on the practice of enthusiasm to
Complete what one initially started and is engaged in.
Hence one should generate enthusiasm complete with
the four powers.

This is an encouragement to actually develop enthusiasm or joyous effort with the aid of the four powers.

II. THE NAME OF THE CHAPTER

This is the seventh chapter from Introduction to the Actions of the Bodhisattvas, called Explaining Enthusiasm.

Then commentary concludes:

This is the commentary on the seventh chapter called 'Explaining Enthusiasm' from the commentary on the *Introduction to the Actions of Bodhisattvas*, called *The Entrance for the Children of the Conquerors*.

This completes the seventh chapter. In our next session we will start the eighth chapter, which is on *Mental Stabilisation*.

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