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# 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 we generated during the refuge and bodhicitta prayers, we can now engage in our regular meditation practice. [meditation]

During the meditation practice we will have further strengthened our motivation. Generate the motivation for receiving the teachings along these lines:

For the sake of all mother sentient beings I need to achieve enlightenment myself. So for that purpose I will listen to the Mahayana teachings and put them into practice well.

Generating such a motivation, even for a few moments, will definitely establish very strong positive imprints in our mind.

### 3.2.1.1.1.3. Contemplating the faults of holding self as the most important and the benefits of holding other as the most important

3.2.1.1.1.3.1. A list of the faults and benefits of cherishing self and other

3.2.1.1.1.3.1.1. Extensive explanation (cont.)

3.2.1.1.1.3.1.3. From the point of view of praise and fame

The verse reads:

127. Due to the wish to attain it oneself  
One will have lower rebirth, inferiority  
and stupidity.  
If one transfers it to others,  
One will attain honour in a happy rebirth.

The commentary explains:

Wishing to be elevated by praise and fame, one will take a lower rebirth in the next life. Even if one takes rebirth as a human, one will be of low caste, bad appearance and stupid. If one habituates oneself in transferring the wish for elevation to others, one will have a happy rebirth in the next life where one will receive perfect praise and honour.

*Wishing to be elevated by praise and fame* relates to wishing to be elevated by praise and fame just for oneself. When one has this attitude, the text explains the result is that *one will take a lower rebirth in the next life*. Then *even if one takes rebirth as a human, one will be of low caste and bad appearance*, which means not having an appealing appearance, and have a *stupid* mind.

What needs to be understood from this explanation is that when the focus of *wishing for elevated praise and fame* is merely for oneself, and while it may not seem like such a bad thing, what occurs when one focuses mainly on oneself when pursuing elevated praise and fame, is that a lot of afflictions arise in one's mind and thus one creates negativity. For example, out of jealousy one criticises those who are doing well or doing better than oneself; one sees others as one's rivals and a sense of

competitiveness arises; one has contempt towards others and puts them down and feels a sense of pride toward those who appear to be inferior to oneself. This is how we create negativity as a result of pursuing praise and fame merely for oneself. If the intention of pursuing praise and fame is a means to benefit others, that's different. But here the commentary emphasises the consequences of the negativities that occur when one pursues this aim only for oneself.

Most of our faults actually arise from a wish to become famous or well known or to be praised. This becomes a downfall for us because in pursuit of fame and praise a lot of the other negativities follow.

We need to take heed here of Shantideva's very succinct and precise advice on how to engage in a practice that will benefit oneself ultimately and not harm oneself. Again, many may wonder about what's wrong with being famous or being praised, but the key point to understand is that when the focus is merely on one's own gratification, one's own selfish gain, then the pursuit of that incurs many negativities.

The consequences are explained in that, *one will take rebirth in the lower realms in the next life, and even if one were to be reborn as a human* then all of the following disadvantages would occur. This is similar to what Shantideva mentioned earlier in the text when he said, 'while wishing to be free from suffering, beings run towards the very causes of suffering. And although they wish for happiness, they destroy their own happiness like an enemy'. These same points are being presented here, which is in essence a succinct presentation of karma.

When one focuses just on oneself, then even though one wishes for a good outcome, the actual consequences one experiences are negative. But if one practices the opposite (explained next in the commentary) and, *if one habituates oneself in transferring the wish for elevation to others*, i.e. wishing praise and fame for others, one actually transfers the focus to others and the consequences are that *one will have a happy rebirth in the next life, where one will receive perfect praise and honour*.

When one engages in the practice of offering praise to others, and wishing fame for them, this stops a lot of negativity from arising in our minds, because there's no chance for jealousy etc. to arise when one truly wishes others to have praise and fame. For example, when others are doing well one would be very happy for them, because that is exactly what one has wished for.

Jealousy arises when one is not happy with others' good fortune, when good things happen for them such as praise and fame. If we are keen to actually practise Dharma we need to put into practice offering praise and fame to others. At first glance this concept may sound strange, however one will begin to understand that when one engages in a selfish pursuit one creates a lot of negativity, and if one practises the opposite and wishes wellness for others, then that is when one actually practises virtue. This is the main point.

We need to understand this very good advice, given to us in very simple terms. It points out that if you harbour feelings based on selfish interest, it will only bring about negative results rather than good ones. However, if you

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harbour good attitudes and positive states of mind, this allows one to accumulate virtuous deeds, which ultimately brings about good results for yourself. This is the very compassionate advice being presented to us by Shantideva.

### 3.2.1.1.1.3.1.4. From the point of view of inducing action

This heading refers to the type of actions one takes.

The verse reads:

128. *If one commands others for the purpose of self,  
One will experience being a slave and the like.  
If oneself works for the purpose of others,  
One will only experience being a lord and  
master.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

If one enslaves others, taking their freedom, for the purpose of self, then one will experience later inferior status; being a slave and the like. If one works and commands oneself for the happiness and benefit of others, one will later be a lord and master, and experience higher status, having a good appearance and the like.

Again this explanation relates to the disadvantages of cherishing just oneself and the great advantages of cherishing others. We can see that this situation, *enslaving others and taking their freedom, for the purpose of self*, occurs a lot even in these times, where people completely take advantage of others. Employers at times take complete advantage of their employees, making them work for many extra hours with minimal or no extra pay.

So at this time and age there are still those who are enslaved, basically working for almost nothing, required to do too much work and under too much pressure. Unfortunately we see this taking place. So when this is done out of self-cherishing, the consequence is that, *one will experience later, an inferior status, and being a slave and the like* in the future oneself.

The opposite is, *if one works and commands oneself for the happiness and benefit of others, one will later be a lord and master, and experience higher status, having a good appearance and the like*. This explains that good attributes will come about naturally and spontaneously without exerting oneself, when one puts oneself into the service of other sentient beings with an attitude of cherishing them.

You may feel like this explanation doesn't relate to you now because you're not a master enslaving others and making them work, thus there is no danger of these negativities. But one needs to keep in mind that this can occur at any time. If one reaches such a position of being in charge under whatever circumstances, then this is when the danger of misusing power and taking control of others can occur. Therefore one needs to be mindful and engage in practices now so that in the event one gains power one will avoid mistreating others.

A prevalent fault or downfall is where we become obsessed with getting higher status, wanting to be recognised, and having a high calling. When we think about the various types of problems we have, and the different suffering we experience, it really does stem from a strong clinging on to me: my individual happiness; I want things to be my way; I have to achieve my goals; I want everything to be perfect just for me.

When we harbour such attitudes, the stronger we hold the feeling of wanting things to go well just for me, harbouring the attitude of – me, me, me all the time, then when things don't go our way and our expectations are not met, we feel totally overwhelmed with disappointment and suffering. All the problems we experience are really due to a singular focus just on oneself.

If you were to make an attempt to actually shift your focus and think about the welfare of others, how they also need happiness and want to be free from suffering, and contemplate their sufferings, then the moment you actually shift your focus you will find from your own experience that you get an immediate release. Your mind becomes much more expansive, and as your own problems start to become less significant you get a release from your own problems.

If one doesn't pay attention, and continuously thinks about one's own problems and difficulties, and whether things have been going according to your own wishes, then the problems just perpetuate, and it's one problem after another. However, while we may not have overcome the root of our problems yet, when we shift our focus onto others, even that temporary release we get gives us some solace and some space to think more clearly. We gain courage and insight from that experience, and this gives us the impetus to practise further. This is how we see the benefit of the practice.

We experience difficulties and problems that are clearly created by our own self-cherishing mind. In this abundant country we all have a nice place to live in and have food at our table every day. None of us here have to worry about not getting our next meal, or not finding a place to stay. So in terms of the general external conditions for our sustenance, everything is adequate. However we all have complaints of one sort or another and how things are not right. This shows that the problems are caused by an ego-centric self-cherishing mind not getting its own way and never satisfied; in essence, being obsessed with one's own needs and wanting things to be one's own way.

In a relationship between two people, if one partner starts to have an attitude that things have to be their way, when the other makes a suggestion they reject it feeling it 'doesn't accord with my wishes'. When one person asserts their strong, opinionated mind then that's the moment conflict arises. Conversely, the moment a partner says, 'If it's OK with you then it's fine with me' and is happy with that, the potential friction immediately subsides and there is no room for conflict or agitation.

We can see clearly from this example that the moment there's a strong opinionated mind where a person won't accept something the other wants, because it doesn't accord with their own personal wishes, then that creates conflict. We can learn something from the simple statement: 'if it's OK with you then it's fine with me' because the opposite 'even if it's fine with you, it's not ok with me' is how problems begin. This is the point to keep in mind.

To share one incident, last Thursday on my regular visit to the sea-baths, as I was bathing there, one elderly

person came to me and commented, 'you're a Buddhist monk aren't you?' And I said yes. Then he said 'I've actually seen you on many occasions from a distance and seen you are very joyful and happy. It occurred to me that it might be because you are a Buddhist. I thought if I could be like you, who always seem to be happy and joyful, then that would be really good. I'd be fulfilled if I could be happy as you are'. Then he said, 'I actually started going to a Buddhist centre to go to some teachings'. Actually it turns out to be one of the Kadampa centres.

So although he didn't confirm that he's a Buddhist he said he'd started to go to a Buddhist centre. He was showing a genuine interest, and that is the point. The moral of this incident is that when people use their intelligence, they want to follow the example of someone who is happy and joyful, rather than wanting to be rich and famous.

Previously I've also shared a story about a merchant who sells fruit and his comments to me. I used to occasionally go to Southland and have coffee at a particular cafe. Opposite to where I sat down and had coffee was a merchant selling fruit; I think he was of Italian background. He would smile at me and occasionally come up and greet me and say 'Hello, how are you?' Once when he greeted me, I asked him 'How are you?' he said 'Oh, not so good'. I asked him if business was going well. I thought maybe he had financial problems. He said 'No, business is going quite well, but I'd rather be like you. That would be nice'.

I have many such stories about people just coming up to me and sharing their thoughts and telling me about their life. Someone came up to me in the Southland Shopping Centre once and said 'I haven't seen anyone as nice and as happy as you', and shook my hand.

All these anecdotes illustrate the main point presented here which is that if one starts to really familiarise one's mind with cherishing others, then that's something that brings a great sense of joy within oneself. It attracts others and they seem to acknowledge you and be happy in your presence. These are the positive results we start to gain when we make a genuine attempt to practise cherishing others and overcome self-cherishing.

### 3.2.1.1.1.3.1.5. From the point of view of benefit and happiness

The verse reads:

129. *Whatever happiness is found in the transitory worlds  
Came from the wish for the happiness of others.  
Whatever sufferings are found in the transitory worlds  
Came from the wish for self to be happy.*

The commentary explains:

In short, whatever happiness there is in the transitory worlds, it all came from the wish for others to be happy and from working for others. Whatever sufferings there are in the transitory worlds, they all came from the self-cherishing that wishes happiness for the self. Therefore, one should stop the self-cherishing with effort.

The commentary again emphasises the point that all the happiness seen in the world is actually the result of

working for the sake of others, from cherishing others. Whereas *whatever sufferings* one experiences in the *worlds* actually comes from the *self-cherishing* mind, which is in essence presenting the natural cause and effect sequence of karma – how one experiences the results of all the karma one creates.

### 3.2.1.1.1.3.1.2. Summary of the meaning<sup>1</sup>

Shantideva is saying here: I do not have to elaborate too much on the faults of self-cherishing and the advantages of cherishing others; the following example clearly illustrates the difference between the two.

The verse reads:

130. *What need is there to say a lot?  
The childish work for their own benefit  
And the Able One works for the benefit of  
others,  
Look at the difference between the two.*

The commentary goes on to explain:

What need is there for extensive elaborate explanations? The childish receive all they do not wish for because they cherish their own well-being, while the Able One works for the welfare of others and perfect all that is good. Just look at the difference between these two and generate belief.

The point the commentary explains here is that without having to use *elaborate* and *extensive explanations*, by simply looking at the difference between the *childish*, or ordinary beings, and the *Able One*, who is the Buddha, we can see the clear difference.

It indicates that once the Buddha was an ordinary being like us, with all the faults and shortcomings we now have. However through engaging in the practice, particularly the attitude of cherishing others and developing bodhicitta, this path led the Buddha to become a renowned enlightened being. We can see how the Buddha is completely free from all these faults and endowed with all great qualities. Whereas we ordinary beings are still harbouring self-cherishing attitudes, and experiencing all the shortcomings and sufferings of the negative consequences of our actions.

This clearly shows the disadvantages of self-cherishing and the great advantages and benefit of cherishing other sentient beings. When one looks at it in this way one will be able to *generate belief*, meaning that one will strongly believe in the advantages of cherishing others and the disadvantages of cherishing oneself.

### 3.2.1.1.1.3.2. It is appropriate to abandon self-cherishing

This is subdivided into four:

3.2.1.1.1.3.2.1. The unseen faults

3.2.1.1.1.3.2.2. The faults that one can see

3.2.1.1.1.3.2.3. A summary of the faults

3.2.1.1.1.3.2.4. It is suitable to give up self-cherishing

### 3.2.1.1.1.3.2.1. The unseen faults

The verse reads:

131. *If one does not perfectly exchange  
One's happiness for the suffering of others  
One will not achieve enlightenment*

<sup>1</sup> Last week this heading was introduced as 3.2.1.1.1.3.1.2. Short summary

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*And one will also lack happiness in cyclic existence.*

The commentary explains:

If one does not exchange perfectly the happiness of self for the suffering of others and reverse from the initial attitude of working for the happiness of self and eliminating the suffering of self, by cherishing others, i.e., working for their happiness and striving with effort to eliminate their suffering, then one will not achieve enlightenment.

One may think, 'Even if I do not achieve enlightenment and remain in cyclic existence that would be OK', but one will also lack perfect happiness in cyclic existence.

The first part of this explanation states, *if one does not exchange perfectly the happiness of self for the suffering of others and reverse from the initial attitude*, which as explained earlier, is giving one's happiness to others and taking the suffering of others upon oneself. The commentary then further explains the exchange of one's own happiness for the suffering of others where it reads that, *and reverse from the initial attitude of working for the happiness of self and eliminating the suffering of self, by cherishing others, i.e., working for their happiness and striving with effort to eliminate their suffering*, meaning that if one does not engage in that *then one will not achieve enlightenment*.

From this one may start thinking that, *Even if I do not achieve enlightenment and remain in cyclic existence that would be OK, but one will also lack perfect happiness in cyclic existence*. If one were to think 'it's fine to remain in cyclic existence joyfully and with happiness', as mentioned here, *one will also lack perfect happiness in cyclic existence*. Thus one will not experience any true happiness while remaining in cyclic existence.

The phrase, lacking perfect happiness in cyclic existence, refers to uncontaminated true happiness. We experience general happiness as humans, and the god realms also have a certain level of happiness, but the happiness the text is referring to here is ultimate happiness.

I wonder if there's a difference in the term 'happy' and 'happiness'. There was a comment made in the Happiness conference by one speaker who said 'I don't really know what happiness means'. That just brought to my mind that maybe happiness is something that is a little bit more obscure, whereas happy, we can talk about being happy or sad.

### **3.2.1.1.1.3.2.2. The faults that one can see**

This refers to the most obvious faults one can relate to even in this life.

The verse reads:

*132. Leaving aside the world beyond,  
Servants and helpers will not work and  
Masters will not pay wages,  
One will not even achieve the purpose of this  
life.*

The commentary explains:

If one does not meditate on giving up self and cherishing others, then, leaving aside the faults of future lives, also in this life one's servants and helpers will not work and the master one did work for will not pay wages. One will not achieve even the purpose of this life.

The meaning of this verse is that, *if one does not meditate or familiarise on giving up self and cherishing others, then, leaving aside the faults of future lives*, which means leaving aside the consequences to be experienced in future lives, even in this very life, the disadvantages would be for example that, *servants and helpers will not work and the master one did work for will not pay wages*. So *one will not achieve even the purpose of this life*.

This example illustrates that the master needs workers (or employees) to work for them, and if they don't work, the master's purpose will not be fulfilled. Also, as the servants' goal in life is to achieve wages to live, if they are not paid then their purpose is not achieved. In short, if you don't change your attitude these are the consequences to be experienced. My interpretation of this example is that if from the workers' side they only work with minimal interest, and are negligent and not putting their heart into it in order to fulfil the master's wishes, and are only interested in getting their wages, then of course the master will be unhappy and not pay their wages. Therefore the servants will lose their wages and lose the goal they wished to achieve. Whereas if they changed their attitude and took a genuine interest in their work and did it wholeheartedly to fulfil their duties, with the attitude of making the other happy, they would naturally get their wages. That is something that one would gain as a by-product of the work. So from the servants' side if they changed their attitude toward the work, and did it more willingly and wholeheartedly, then they'll fulfil their own purpose too.

If the master is miserly about paying the wages and tries to avoid paying the workers in a timely manner, then of course the servants won't be happy either. Therefore if the master maintains that attitude they will lose their workers or servants and their purpose will not be fulfilled. However if their attitude changes and wages are given willingly and in a timely manner, then that would make the servants happy and the master would fulfil their own purpose. The example is about the need to change one's attitudes to gain the ultimate benefit.

### **3.2.1.1.1.3.2.3. A summary of the faults**

The verse reads:

*133. One gives up the perfect bliss and happiness  
That establishes the seen and unseen happiness.  
Due to the cause of harming others,  
They are deluded and take on frightening  
suffering.*

The commentary explains:

As one does not put great purpose into the welfare of others one has given up exchanging self and other; the method for achieving happiness in this life and in future lives. Thus, one has thoroughly abandoned perfect happiness. The childish that are deluded with regards to what is the method for happiness and suffering, due to the cause of inflicting the harm of suffering onto others, have taken into their continuum frightening and difficult to bear suffering.

It is quite clearly explained here that, *as one does not put great purpose into the welfare of others one has given up exchanging self and other; which is the method for achieving happiness in this life and in future lives*. If *one does not put great purpose into the welfare of others and gives up*

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*exchanging self and other*, then the consequences are that, *one has thoroughly abandoned perfect happiness*, as one has actually abandoned the very cause of one's happiness.

So, *the childish that are deluded with regards to what is the method for happiness and suffering, due to the cause of inflicting the harm of suffering onto others, have taken into their continuum frightening and difficult to bear suffering*. It's as if they've taken upon their own suffering by accumulating the causes of suffering.

Earlier there was mention of being mistaken about what one wishes for, and the causes for achieving it. While one may wish for something, one often fails to engage in the appropriate causes to achieve it.

### 3.2.1.1.1.3.2.4. It is suitable to give up self-cherishing

The first verse reads:

134. *Whatever harm there is in the transitory worlds,  
Whatever danger and suffering come into existence,  
If all that arises from self-cherishing,  
Then what does this demon of self-cherishing do for me?*

The commentary to this verse reads:

If all the human and non-human harm in the transitory worlds, all the mental fears and physical sufferings that come into existence, arise from self-cherishing, which has taken the self as object, then what good is this great demon of self-cherishing for oneself? It causes all that one does not desire, and one should abandon it.

This reiterates what was presented earlier but provides more detail on how all the fears of *humans and non-humans* in this world, such as *the mental fears and physical sufferings that come into existence, arise from self-cherishing*. So we can see that even the fear generated by a small insect, like an ant for example, when you start shaking something near it, it immediately starts running away to protect itself, due to its self-cherishing.

It is said that this is true for every kind of fear and every kind of mental or physical agony we experience – all arise from self-cherishing. This verse further emphasises the faults of self-cherishing.

If one has caused others fear or pain etc., as a consequence it returns as your experience of mental agony. All fear stems from the self-cherishing mind.

It emphasises that, as all the fears and unwanted sufferings arise from that, then what use is self-cherishing to oneself? This is a rhetorical question implying that there is no use whatsoever.

The next verse reads:

135. *If one does not give oneself up completely,  
One will not be able to abandon suffering;  
For example, if one does not let go of fire  
One is unable to stop being burned.*

The commentary explains:

If one does not completely give up cherishing oneself then one will not be able to eliminate the suffering of all sentient beings. For example, like not being able to stop being burned if one does not let go of fire in one's hand.

The example here shows that if you have something hot and burning in your hand, such as fire, if you don't let go of it then your hand will be burned. If you want to protect your hand from the burning you have to let go of the fire. The moment you let go your hand is protected from being burnt.

What is being explained here is that as long as one holds on to self-cherishing, one will not be able to eliminate the suffering of other sentient beings. In order to eliminate others' suffering one actually has to let go of one's own self-cherishing attitude. As soon as one does it will be possible to eliminate their sufferings. This is the point. When it's so hard to give up self-cherishing it's no wonder that it's so difficult to become a buddha.

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

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