

Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

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Based on the motivation we generated during the Refuge and Bodhicitta prayer, we can now engage in the meditation practice without being distracted.

[meditation]

We can generate the motivation for receiving the teachings based on the bodhicitta attitude, which in essence is to engage in the teaching for the sole benefit of other sentient beings.

3.2.1.2.2.1.2. The way of practising after the meditation

This part of the commentary follows earlier explanations that identified the kind of thoughts that constitute jealousy, competitiveness and pride etc. to show how a bodhisattva uses the exchange of self with other to apply antidotes to these thoughts when they arise. We need to take this as personal instruction, as harbouring negative states when associating with others and feeling jealous or competitive or proud, which is feeling contempt for others, makes oneself unhappy and others uncomfortable. Therefore, since there are no redeeming qualities in such negative states of mind, we definitely need to find a way to overcome them. The methods presented here are not difficult to understand, or even to adopt, as a way to counteract negative states of mind. When the teachings present the way to counteract such negative states of mind so simply and clearly, if we don't apply them how else will we ever overcome these negative states of mind? What other methods can we hope to find?

We need to take heed of this advice to find the means to counteract negative states of mind because of the distress they cause to oneself and others. When negative states of mind have been clearly identified within oneself it is a matter of applying the antidotes to overcome them. For example, jealousy is a mind unhappy with others' success; competitiveness is a mind unhappy when others do well with the wish to compete with them, and pride is a mind where one feels one is better than others and condemns them. It makes us uncomfortable when others harbour such negative feelings towards us, so we need to take the initiative to overcome our negative feelings as a way for others not to feel uncomfortable around us. It clearly causes discomfort in one's immediate surroundings and with one's associates. In a community or a workplace, there are many who lament that they feel uncomfortable because a colleague is jealous of them or is competing with them. When others act out of jealousy towards us, it means that they are unhappy with our status or whatever good deeds we may be engaged in. They are jealous because they are unhappy with our success, and a sense of competitiveness also arises. Those who complain that they feel uncomfortable when others express such feelings or attitudes should check whether they themselves have such sentiments towards others. When we ourselves think that others are making us feel uncomfortable, it is good to actually check within ourselves: Am I holding such negative attitudes or not?

We need to understand that putting this advice into practice is a way to avoid causing trouble for others, or hurting others. On top of that, if one can benefit them, then it becomes a practice in line with the deeds of a bodhisattva. So while these are presented as practices for bodhisattvas, if one engages in positive deeds with the attitude of benefiting others, combined with bodhicitta - the mind of enlightenment - then a practice such as generosity becomes a deed of a bodhisattva similitude. When one practises morality combined with the bodhicitta attitude, it becomes a similitude of a bodhisattva deed. Likewise, even reciting a mantra such as OM MANI PADME HUM, combined with the attitude of bodhicitta, becomes a similitude of a bodhisattva deed. The deeds of a bodhisattva have been explained extensively in the earlier part of the text. In summary, it is positive deeds such as practising the six perfections combined with the attitude of the awakening mind. Thus, we need to understand that to be inspired to engage in a bodhisattva's deeds, one needs to secure the bodhicitta attitude in one's mind.

When others express negative attitudes toward us, such as jealousy, we should see the faults and not be affected by it, and also take the initiative to overcome it within ourselves. We clearly need to recognise the faults of jealousy and how jealousy affects us, knowing that from beginningless time this attitude has created negative deeds that have propelled us into cyclic existence again and again. When others express such negative attitudes towards us, having clearly seen it as a fault within us, we should find the antidote within ourselves.

This becomes the means to understand that the other is also blinded by the fact of not recognising the faults of jealousy, and how jealousy harms their own mind. When one sees that, rather than their jealous mind harming oneself, one feels compassion for the other knowing that harbouring such negative attitudes only harms themselves. Thus, rather than retaliating and being upset, one can feel compassion for them. This is how we need to engage in the practice in order to derive the real benefit. As mentioned earlier, these are not obscure practices but something which is really possible, and which changes one's attitude. I personally find these practices meaningful. They are very positive states of mind that I try to make part of my normal way of thinking to counteract negative states of mind. It definitely benefits my mind. I find that practising in such ways lessens negative states of mind within myself, and brings a great sense of joy and happiness within my mind. I don't feel any urge or need to go out of my way to cause others trouble. So while it benefits me, it also prevents me from hurting and causing trouble for others, so there is benefit all round. As the great master Atisha mentioned, the best quality is to benefit others. Thus, benefiting others is the best quality that one could ever have. This is very succinct and profound advice; indeed when one engages in any ways or means to benefit others, one is practising true Dharma. This is good to keep in mind.

The first two lines in the verse read:

144ab. Ethics, view and faults

*Are out of our control as they are powered by
the afflictions.*

I emphasised in our last session that we can apply this knowledge to the very crucial points being presented here – how not to see one's faults as a condemnation but rather arising due to the afflictions within oneself – to others' faults as well. These are meticulously explained.

Keep these points in mind when the mind is entangled with self-loathing and self-guilt. All this can be overcome by recognising that it is the delusions that are at fault, not oneself as an individual person. This is really profound advice on how to feel courageous, as a way to combat the delusions and not to see oneself as the enemy and beating oneself up. One must understand the crucial point of what causes the real trouble and identify these afflictions. As the teachings state, these are *out of our control as they are powered afflictions*: when we are dominated by them it is as if we have temporarily lost control over our own mind; and this is indeed the case. The Buddha said that, '*an uncontrolled mind is an unhappy mind*' the reverse of which is, *a controlled mind is a happy mind*. When one has control over one's own mind, specifically control over the afflictions, they don't dominate one's mind and thinking, so one definitely has a happy state of mind. This is meticulous advice and something we need to try and apply in our own life. That is what I am encouraging you to do.

This is the second year we have been studying the very profound text *The Bodhisattva's Way of Life* from the beginning. This has such great, profound advice for you who have been coming regularly, paying attention, and working hard to try and understand the teachings. I am not saying that I am really skilled in presenting the material, but I have shared whatever understanding I have with the best motivation. With our combined efforts we have definitely worked hard in covering and studying this text. So now if we were to apply some of this advice and put it into practice then that would have made it really worthwhile. Of course, just coming along, listening to the teachings and studying the text itself has been incredibly virtuous. Understanding this is a great way to implant positive imprints in our mind, so it is definitely a deed to rejoice in. But, the main thing is to try and put it into practice, as this is how we derive the real benefit from the teachings. What I am also saying is that I rejoice in your great attentiveness in listening to the teachings.

This is a way to confirm with you that I only rejoice and feel great joy for all the understanding you may have gained. I need to say this, lest there be occasions where one might wonder if the teacher is starting to feel jealous of the understanding one has gained. As a teacher, there is danger for such feelings to occur, so it is important to guard one's own mind. I can definitely assure you that I don't feel any jealousy at all for your understanding, I only feel great joy and happiness. The more you gain understanding and are able to practice, the more joy and happiness it gives me.

3.2.1.2.1.2. *The way of practise after the meditation*

[*Familiarity* would be a more specific term in this case.] So far the focus has been on how to familiarise your mind with overcoming negative states such as jealousy, competitiveness and pride. The text next explains how to practise after that familiarisation.

The last two lines of the earlier verse and the next verse are presented:

144cd. *I need to be restored as much as possible,
And I also need to accept harm.*

145. *However, I am not helped by him,
So why does he criticise me?
What are his qualities doing for me?
And he has qualities!*

The commentary clearly explains the meaning:

'Bodhisattva Devadatta, if you have compassion, then you have to work as much as possible to repair my faults and I need to accept the harm of the austerities to establishing qualities, then why does he even criticise us? What are the qualities of that bodhisattva doing for me? Even though the bodhisattva Devadatta himself has qualities, they have no benefit for us sentient beings.

As a way to further familiarise oneself, using the example of a bodhisattva called Devadatta who places himself as other, the commentary explains *if you have compassion, then you have to work as much as possible to repair my faults*. The faults refer to the degeneration of ethics or the degeneration of views. *If you have compassion*, implies that rather than merely criticising, you should be working to repair the faults of degenerate ethics and views within me. Likewise, if out of compassion you make genuine attempts to repair my faults, from my side I will accept the harm or difficulties of the austere practices to establish the qualities. For example, there might be occasions where you have to reprimand a person with scolding to prevent them from doing something negative. This is an example of harm or difficult austere practices to repair those faults. What is presented here is that, when out of compassion, certain means and methods are used to point out one's faults, one should make the promise to willingly accept them, because if one does not there will be no way to correct one's faults. This sheds light on how a teacher would guide a student, showing the means by which it is done out of compassion. When a student is willing to accept and learn through stern measures, they see the hardships as a way to get rid of faults and gain more positive personal qualities; there has to be mutual effort put in. From the teacher's side there is genuine effort out of compassion, but the student must bear some difficulties and hardships to acquire the qualities. Nothing can be acquired without putting in some effort. This is another point to understand.

Engaging in the practice this way becomes the means to achieve enduring patience of definitely thinking about the Dharma. This type of patience is required when engaging in austere Dharma practices where one encounters hardships and difficulties. In willingly accepting and enduring those difficulties, understanding that they are only for one's betterment, one generates the mind of patience.

As the commentary further explains, *If we sentient beings do not come into the benefit of having our faults repaired by Devadatta*, then why does he even criticise us? This is saying that if his qualities are not used to benefit us then what use are they?

In other words, if your qualities and compassion are not used to benefit us, then why even criticise us? This implies that if words are not said out of compassion, as a means to benefit, then it may just as well be critical remarks. In summary, the essence of the practice is that if we cannot benefit others then at least we should not harm them. The commentary goes on with, *what are the qualities of a bodhisattva doing for me*, implying that if they are not applied as a means to benefit one, then what use are those qualities? *Even though the bodhisattva Devadatta himself has qualities, they have no benefit for us sentient beings* implies that when there are actual good qualities, then they should be used to benefit others in the best possible way, rather than feeling contempt for others and so forth.

The next verse reads:

146. *He that does not have compassion*

*For migrators abiding in poisonous bad migrations,
Purposely wishes to outdo those proficient
Out of exaggerated qualities.*

The commentary explains:

Further, this Devadatta, who has no compassion for the migrators in the lower realms, who are like being held in the mouth of poisonous snakes and ferocious animals, due to degenerated ethics and views, not only does he not benefit us sentient beings, but he purposely wishes to outdo us proficient sentient beings out of his exaggerated view of his own qualities. It is inappropriate to exaggerate and criticise.

Having placed the mind on sentient beings and taken oneself, the bodhisattva, as others, contemplate that it is unsuitable for him to harm oneself.

Again relating to Devadatta as another, the commentary explains the need of compassion for migrators in the lower realms, *who are like being held in the mouth of poisonous snakes and ferocious animals*. The plight of samsara is illustrated with the grave situation where the danger of perishing from either a poisonous bite or being eaten by ferocious animals is prominent. At any moment one could be captured by their fangs of death. If beings are in the lower realms this is all due to degenerated ethics and views, so by understanding that, when Devadatta (oneself as another) does not benefit us, and criticises us and tries to outdo us with his own exaggerated view of his own qualities, that is totally inappropriate. The point being emphasised is that if one exaggerates one's own qualities and feels contempt for others and criticises them, then there is no worth whatsoever in those qualities.

To summarise this point, Gyaltsab Je concludes:

Having placed the mind on sentient beings and taken oneself, the bodhisattva, as others, contemplate that it is unsuitable for him to harm oneself.

He is emphasising here that having engaged in the practice of exchanging self with other, placing oneself as other and others as oneself, then harming others would be like harming oneself, which is unsuitable. When one places oneself as another, then one could not initiate harm to the other, for that would be like harming oneself.

3.2.1.2.2.2. The way of meditating on competitiveness for the equal

This is subdivided into four:

3.2.1.2.2.2.1. Competing for gain and praise

3.2.1.2.2.2.2. Competing for renown of qualities

3.2.1.2.2.2.3. Competing for the number of qualities

3.2.1.2.2.2.4. Being happy about bringing harm to others

3.2.1.2.2.2.1. Competing for gain and praise

This again is another common fault. What needs to be clarified here is that while a sense of competitiveness is seen as a negative attitude, looking up to others as a role model is a virtue. Here in Australia there is emphasis on the need to have a good role model to inspire oneself. From the Dharma point of view, the Sangha Jewel would be the role models we'd see as exemplary, and also who we'd wish to follow in terms of study and practice etc. Using a contemporary context like academic study, the role models would be those who have gone through all the stages of study and reached proficiency, and who may have good academic careers. These people would be role models in their area of study for those trying to attain a similar sort of achievement.

Another illustration would be if one has a good friend who is doing very well in their studies, and one started to feel like one should put more time and energy into one's own study, just like one's friend, then this is not an instance of feeling competitive, it is using the friend as a role model.

Competitiveness arises when one feels one should be better than one's equals on the same level. This sort of attitude, of wanting to do better than the other, is a sense of competitiveness, which is the non-virtue being presented here.

The main point is to differentiate between seeing others as a role model - and a way to inspire one's study and practice, which is fine - and competitiveness, which is the sense of wanting to be better than them.

The verse reads:

*147. Looking at those equal to me,
To be superior
I thoroughly establish
Our gain and praise, even through dispute.*

The commentary explains it in this way:

We shall compete with the bodhisattva Devadatta, who is equal to us in being a sentient being, for status and the like. So that we sentient beings are superior in gain, praise and the like to the bodhisattva Devadatta, we establish our praise and gain even through dispute with the bodhisattva.

When saying, *we shall compete with the bodhisattva Devadatta, who is equal to us in being a sentient being*, the connotation of *equal* here shows that we don't have a sense of competitiveness with someone known to be superior to us, rather it is with those we consider equal to ourselves. Thus it relates to those who surround us, like fellow Dharma students, colleagues, classmates, siblings etc.

For someone one considers an equal, the commentary says, *we shall compete... for status and the like'. So that we sentient beings [oneself] becomes superior in gain, praise and the like to the bodhisattva Devadatta, we establish our praise and gain even through dispute with the bodhisattva*. This indicates that in order to excel, one may do whatever is necessary, such as dispute, to compete with the other to become superior to them. Apply this practice as a way to overcome such attitudes.

3.2.1.2.2.2.2. Competing for renown of qualities

The verse reads:

*148. I shall make my qualities clear
By any means to all the transitory worlds,
And I shall take care
That nobody hears about his qualities.*

The commentary explains the meaning as follows:

I shall proclaim and make clear our qualities by any means to all the transitory worlds and further I shall take care that nobody hears about the qualities of this bodhisattva.

Again, having exchanged oneself with the other, in relation to others one should proclaim their qualities and hide their faults; and in relation to oneself, one should proclaim one's faults and hide one's qualities. This practice highlights that as ordinary beings, we make our qualities clear to the whole world, whilst doing everything possible to hide our faults. But when bodhisattvas exchange themselves with the other, they proclaim their own faults and hide their qualities.

The practice of proclaiming others' faults whilst hiding one's qualities and proclaiming one's own qualities whilst hiding

one's faults, seems a common practice in Australian politics. We can see that even if the opposition has a good project it is not mentioned, but criticised in every way.

We can see that the practice of ruining another's reputation or proclaiming their faults, especially in politics, becomes a real cause for dispute and confusion. We can see it really confuses people's minds because they are left not knowing who to believe anymore. In Australia we are very fortunate that people are generally good-natured and quite intelligent, so it doesn't bring much chaos. However there are many instances in other countries where this behaviour can cause chaos; not only confusion but chaos, because people get really upset and angry. When they hear about the faults of the opposition they believe it is all true, and this causes a lot of angst, which can cause protests or retaliation etc. So we can see this is a malevolent practice that can cause distress in people's minds.

3.2.1.2.2.2.3. Competing for the number of qualities

This verse relates to the point I mentioned earlier and reads:

149. *I shall hide my faults,
I shall be made offerings to and he not
I am obtaining today much gain and
I shall be praised, but he should not have these.*

The commentary starts by explaining:

I shall hide our, i.e. sentient beings' faults, but clearly proclaim his faults and in this way we the sentient beings become an object of offering for others and he will not.

Here we can see how, if we engage in bringing out the faults of others and hiding our own faults, the others will not receive offerings, because they will not be regarded as worthy, while we, who have hidden our faults, will receive offerings.

The commentary continues:

I shall strive in this way. I am obtaining today much good food, clothing and the like, and others should praise me, but he shall not receive these benefits.

I shall strive in this way indicates how a competitive mind arises by constantly trying to proclaim others' faults when they have qualities, and proclaiming one's own qualities while hiding one's faults. This is how the negative state of mind works. The competitive mind says, *I am obtaining today much good food, clothing and the like, and others should praise me, but he shall not receive these benefits.* Normally one would like this out of a sense of competitiveness with others. But here it is used as a way to counteract this approach by placing oneself in the other's position then applying this to oneself i.e. exchanging oneself with the other.

3.2.1.2.2.2.4. Being happy about bringing harm to others

When actually practiced in this way, we can see how all modes of competitiveness with others, and wishing them harm, is what actually brings misfortune, dispute and distress in the world.

The verse reads:

150. *I shall watch joyously for a long time
How he is being treated inappropriately,
I shall take care that he is the laughing stock
Of all migrators and that they abuse each other.*

The commentary explains:

I shall watch joyously for a long time how this bodhisattva Devadatta is being treated inappropriately and is being crushed. I shall take care

that this bodhisattva is a laughing stock for all migrators and they abuse each other by criticising each other's faults.

Having exchanged self and other one thus praises sentient beings and stops to exaggerate one's qualities.

The mind explained here, *I shall watch joyously for a long time how this bodhisattva Devadatta is being treated inappropriately and is being crushed* is indeed a negative state of mind. Feeling joyous when something bad happens to someone you don't like, or when they are suffering in some way, is not good. Furthermore the commentary says *I shall take care this bodhisattva is a laughing stock for all migrators and they abuse each other by criticising others' faults*, so again, when this negative mind arises it harbours an attitude towards others where one feels contempt, or a sense of competitiveness. A way to overcome that is this practice presented by Gyaltsab Rinpoche who summarises the point as *having exchanged self and other one thus praises sentient beings and stops to exaggerate one's qualities.*

3.2.1.2.2.3. The way of meditating on pride for the lower

This has four subdivisions:

3.2.1.2.2.3.1. The aspect of meditating on pride

3.2.1.2.2.3.2. The benefits of meditating on it

3.2.1.2.2.3.3. The way of acting upon having done the meditation

3.2.1.2.2.3.4. Contemplating the disadvantages of lacking such a pride

We will continue with this next time.

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

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