

Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

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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]*

It would be good to adopt this meditation practice as part of our regular daily practice.

Now let us generate the motivation for receiving the teachings along these lines:

For the purpose of all other sentient beings I need to achieve enlightenment. So for that purpose I will engage in listening to the Mahayana teachings, and then put them into practice well.

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

3.2.1.2.2.3. The way of meditating on pride for the lower

3.2.1.2.2.3.1. The aspect of meditating on pride

The verse is preceded with this statement:

A bodhisattva should meditate on pride by holding someone with superior qualities to themselves as self.

Then the verse reads:

151. *This afflicted one is known
To compete with me;
How could he equal me
In hearing, wisdom, body, caste and wealth?*

The commentary explains:

If this inferior afflicted bodhisattva Devadatta proclaims that he wants to compete with us sentient beings, then: 'How could he equal me in hearing, wisdom, body, caste and wealth? He does not equal us in any way.' Meditate thus on pride.

This is a presentation on how to overcome pride, which is, as explained earlier, a conceited mind that looks down with a sense of contempt on those who one considers to be inferior. Pride is a faulty state of mind that needs to be overcome and, as the self-cherishing mind is the basis for pride, this presentation is ultimately about overcoming the self-cherishing mind.

As presented in earlier sessions, when exchanging oneself with someone who is superior, one imagines what it would be like to be superior, and that the superior person holds the lower position of oneself. When one exchanges oneself with someone of lesser wisdom etc., then one places oneself in the inferior's place and places the inferior as oneself. With equals there is a sense of competitiveness, and again one places oneself as the other, and the other as oneself. These are ways to counteract the faulty states of mind of jealousy, pride, and competitiveness respectively.

The presentation here shows how the faulty state of mind of pride arises, and the kinds of sentiments it brings up. As the commentary states, *If this inferior afflicted*

bodhisattva Devadatta proclaims that he wants to compete with us sentient beings, then: 'How could he equal me in hearing, wisdom, body, caste and wealth?' Pride is generated by thinking that one is superior to others either in having more knowledge than others, or having more wisdom or understanding than others, or having a better body and physique than others, or by being of higher caste or status, or by having more wealth than others. Through contemplating these characteristics one generates a sense of pride that one is better than the other.

This shows clearly how the mind of pride arises in relation to the status one believes one has. When one contemplates the fault of pride by seeing how such a conceited mind is generated, then *he does not equal us in any way. Meditate thus on pride*, means meditating on pride in this manner as a way to overcome pride.

Thus pride arises as a result of seeing oneself as superior to those who are inferior or disadvantaged in some way.

3.2.1.2.2.3.2. The benefits of meditating on pride

This is presented with the following verse:

152. *Having thus heard of my qualities,
Well known by all,
Enjoy the bliss and happiness
That makes one's hair stand on end in joy.*

The commentary explains:

As I say, 'As they are unequal, enjoy the bliss and joy that makes one's pore's hair stand on end, derived from hearing about my qualities that are far superior to the well-renowned Devadatta.

When others hear of the great qualities of a bodhisattva, such as their vast understanding of the teachings, having great wisdom and so forth, this causes such great admiration that one's hairs *stand on end*. This is an indication of how just hearing about these great qualities can move one's mind to the point where it causes a physical reaction.

This is a concise explanation of the way the great qualities of a bodhisattva bring such great joy to the minds of others.

3.2.1.2.2.3.3. The way of acting upon having done the meditation

The verse relating to this reads:

153. *However much gain he has,
When I engage in the action
I shall give him only enough to live by,
And take the remainder by force.*

The commentary explains:

Although he has gain of food and clothing, if I engage in benefiting sentient beings today I shall give him just enough food and clothing to survive on, and the remainder I shall take by force.

As explained clearly, *although he has gain of food and clothing, if I engage in benefiting sentient beings today I shall give him just enough food and clothing to survive on and the remainder I shall take by force*. Through pride one may engage in acts of giving others only as much as they need, and taking away by force anything that remains. This is another example of the fault of pride, which is being used as a way to encourage us to use whatever we have as a way to benefit sentient beings. If whatever gain one may

have is used to benefit sentient beings, then that gain is worthwhile and well used.

3.2.1.2.2.3.4. *Contemplating the disadvantages of lacking such a pride*

This section explains contemplating the disadvantages of lacking pride. The following two lines relate to this:

*154ab. I shall take him away from happiness
And continuously expose him to my harm*

The commentary explains:

I shall take this bodhisattva away from his bliss of leisure and order him to carry my suffering. I shall continuously expose him to the harm of eliminating the suffering of sentient beings.

This is a further example of the fault of pride. As explained clearly, *I shall take this bodhisattva away from his bliss of leisure and order him to carry my suffering. I shall continuously expose him to the harm of eliminating the suffering of sentient beings.*

3.2.1.2.2.4. The result of the meditation

This section is divided into four:

3.2.1.2.2.4.1. Contemplating the faults of cherishing self

3.2.1.2.2.4.2. The source for understanding the infinite benefits of cherishing others

3.2.1.2.2.4.3. Explaining that it is only beneficial

3.2.1.2.2.4.4. Advice to strive in cherishing others

3.2.1.2.2.4.1. *Contemplating the faults of cherishing self*

This heading is presented in the following six lines:

*154cd. It causes me harm in all of the
Hundreds of cyclic existences.*

*155. 'Mind, because you wish to act for self,
Although hundreds of eons pass,
With this great hardship
You will only accomplish suffering.'*

The commentary explains:

The cherishing of self that wishes oneself to have perfection causes the harm of the hells and other lower realms while circling in cyclic existence in all of the hundreds of lifetimes. 'Mind, you have caused me great hardship that is meaningless even if hundreds of eons pass. You have caused me thus only the suffering of cyclic existence.' The bodhisattva Devadatta should regard himself in such a way.

This explanation in the commentary relating to the faults of self-cherishing is quite clear so there is no need for much elaboration. As explained previously, the self-cherishing mind is a mind that thinks about only having the best for oneself, with everything going one's way for one's own personal benefit. When the commentary states, *the bodhisattva Devadatta should regard himself in such a way*, the connotation is that the bodhisattva called Devadatta needs to think about how the fault of self-cherishing arises in this way.

Devadatta should reprimand his mind thus: *Mind, you have caused me great hardship that is meaningless even if hundreds of eons pass.* That mind of course is the self-cherishing mind, and 'all you have done is cause me great hardship that is meaningless'. The sufferings that we encounter as a result of trivial worldly activities and gains are, as explained here, meaningless. Any hardship or difficulties that one has endured would not have

brought any real happiness. Therefore they have been meaningless, and even after hundreds of eons they have brought no lasting joy. And, as mentioned further, *you have caused me thus only the suffering of cyclic existence.*

Of course if the suffering experienced is from enduring hardships and difficulties for the practise of the Dharma, then that would be meaningful. Enduring hardships for the Dharma would serve a great purpose and definitely have great meaning. However hardship and difficulties experienced merely for the sake of worldly pleasures and so forth are not a cause for true happiness, but a cause for even more suffering in the cyclic existence.

As a way to reprimand oneself, the commentary begins with *mind, you*. It is good to reprimand oneself on a personal level as part of one's own practice, and it is appropriate to use your own name. 'You [my name], look at what you have done so far with your self-cherishing mind. Whilst I wish for happiness, you have only brought me unimaginable sufferings in cyclic existence. Now it is time you brought me benefit'. When the mind is in a positive state it will be a mind that benefits oneself. Referring to the mind in this way differentiates one's self-cherishing mind from oneself.

3.2.1.2.2.4.2. *The source for understanding the infinite benefits of cherishing others*

The verse relating to this reads:

*156. Therefore, engage intensively
In the purpose of others,
And, as the words of the Able One are infallible
You will see the benefits later on.*

The commentary explains:

Thus one engages intensively into accomplishing the benefit of others upon cherishing others. Since the words of the Buddha are infallible with regards to their subject, one will see later on the result of enlightenment, a quality of cherishing others, based on viewing cherishing of self as the enemy.

Having presented the faults of cherishing oneself, the benefits of cherishing others are now presented. Again, this is a very reasonable and logically sequenced presentation.

Having contemplated the great disadvantages of cherishing oneself, *one engages intensively in accomplishing the benefit of others upon cherishing others*. The explanation of the benefits begins with the statement, *since the words of the Buddha are infallible with regards to their subject*. As the Buddha's teachings are true to their words and are infallible, they cannot be contradicted. Therefore, as the Buddha explained, *one will see later on the results of enlightenment, which is a quality obtained by cherishing others, based on viewing cherishing oneself as the enemy*.

3.2.1.2.2.4.3. *Explaining that it is only beneficial*

The verse relating to this heading is preceded with this hypothetical argument:

Argument: Although one has worked for the welfare of others for a long time one has not seen such a benefit.

If one has not seen any benefit from some kind of work or practice, then doubting its value is a very significant doubt. The following verse shows the way to overcome such a doubt.

157. *If one had earlier
Carried out these actions,
It would be impossible to have an occasion
Without the happiness of complete
enlightenment.*

The commentary explains answer to the doubt:

Answer: If you had earlier carried out the action of exchanging self and others then it would be impossible to experience occasions of suffering, without the happiness of enlightenment complete with the two purposes. Regretting having passed time with meaningless actions one should strive in meditating on the mind of enlightenment.

The commentary clearly explains that *if you had earlier carried out the action of exchanging self and others then it would be impossible to experience occasions of suffering*. In other words, if one had carried out the practices of exchanging self with other, and thus cherishing others, one would not be suffering now. *Without the happiness of enlightenment complete with the two purposes* indicates that the ultimate result of cherishing others is perfecting the purposes of oneself as well as the purpose of others. If one is experiencing suffering now, then that is a clear sign that one has not engaged in the practice of exchanging self with others.

Having contemplated this one develops great regret about *having passed time with meaningless actions*, so *one should strive in meditating on the mind of enlightenment*. In essence, one regrets having wasted such time in the past by not engaging in the practices.

3.2.1.2.2.4.4. *Advice to strive in cherishing others*

Again this is introduced with a hypothetical argument:

Argument: If you say, 'I am not able to habituate myself by meditating on exchanging self and other.'

The verse to indicate the explanation of that is:

158. *Hence, meditate on others
Just as you hold as mine
The drop of semen and blood,
Which belongs to others.*

The commentary explains:

Answer: Since the welfare of others has such benefits one should meditate on cherishing other sentient beings by holding them as self, just as one has familiarised oneself with holding this body as mine, which is established out of the impure semen and blood of father and mother, who are other. By meditating in such a way complete the meditation of exchanging self and other.

The hypothetical doubt says *I am not able to habituate myself by meditating on exchanging self and other*. While one may see the benefits that have been explained earlier, one may still feel: 'How could I ever meditate in such a way? How could I actually engage in the practice of exchanging self with others? It's hard to familiarise oneself with exchanging self and other, and thus I'm not able to familiarise myself with such practice'.

As a response to that, the commentary says, *since the welfare of others has such benefits, one should meditate on cherishing other sentient beings by holding them as self*. This can be accomplished through familiarisation. For example, although our bodies came from others we hold

this body as mine, it is established out of the impure semen and blood of father and mother. Although we have no qualms about cherishing this body as mine, it is actually a body that has been produced by substances received from others, i.e. one's father and mother. Through familiarisation one holds this body as being mine, even though it is produced from substances from others. Thus it is possible to adopt this way of thinking through familiarisation.

By meditating in such a way complete the meditation of exchanging self and other.

3.2.1.3. THE WAY OF FOLLOWING UP IN ACTION

This is subdivided into two:

3.2.1.3.1. Actual

3.2.1.3.2. One should take control of one's mind when following up the exchange of self and other in action

3.2.1.3.1. Actual

This has three subdivisions:

3.2.1.3.1.1. Giving one's perfections to others

3.2.1.3.1.2. Sincerely accepting oneself to be lower for the purpose of others

3.2.1.3.1.3. A summary of how to practise

3.2.1.3.1.1. Giving one's perfections to others

This is further subdivided into two:

3.2.1.3.1.1.1. Actual

3.2.1.3.1.1.2. It is suitable to be jealous of oneself

3.2.1.3.1.1.1. Actual

The verse presented under this heading is:

159. *Having given others great consideration,
Whatever you observe on your body,
Having snatched it away,
Put it to use for others.*

The commentary explains:

Having familiarised one's mind in this way 'I shall give the welfare of others great practical consideration' and having trained in this motivation, bodhisattvas advise themselves: 'Having considered whether one is harming others or not, whatever desired objects one observes on one's body, having snatched them away, give up the grasping at mine and put them to use for others.'

What is being explained here is that one first needs to familiarise one's mind with the practice of exchanging self with other. As presented earlier, that is done by thinking of the faults of cherishing oneself in many ways, and thinking about the benefits of cherishing others in many ways. Then, having familiarised one's mind with these thoughts over a long time, one needs to put them into practice. One cannot possibly put anything into practice without first having familiarised one's mind with the practice, and that is the point that is being presented here.

As explained further, the way to engage in the practice is to recall how the *bodhisattvas advise themselves*, as a way of checking their state of mind. What one checks is *whether one is harming others or not*. This means checking 'Am I harming others or am I benefitting them?', and then constantly maintaining that awareness of how one is conducting oneself.

As a way of putting that into practice, one snatches away *whatever desired objects one observes on one's body*. This indicates that one snatches away from oneself one's possessions, clothing and food, and uses them to benefit other sentient beings. In other words, not feeding and clothing one's body just to maintain oneself, but rather using it for the purpose of others. Furthermore, one gives up *grasping at mine and puts them to use for others*. When one has a strong self-cherishing mind, then one considers possessions such as food and so forth as mine. Giving away these possessions means giving up strong self-cherishing, and using these possessions for the purpose of benefitting others.

3.2.1.3.1.1.2. *It is suitable to be jealous of oneself*

This is another technique to change one's attitude. As a way to overcome the self-cherishing mind one develops a sense of jealousy towards oneself.

The verse that relates to this is:

160. *'I am happy, others not,
I am high, others low
I receive benefit, others not,'
Why are you not jealous of self?*

The commentary explains:

Further, one should also meditate on jealousy: 'I am happy but other sentient beings are not happy, I am superior from the point of view of enjoyments and the like but others are inferior in this way. I practise virtue that benefits me but others do not and therefore I am blissful and others are not. What is the use of that?' Why is one not jealous towards myself who is higher? It is suitable to be jealous.

As the commentary quite clearly explains the meaning of this verse, there is no need to further elaborate on it.

When one acknowledges that one is happy and one has a high status, receives benefits, and so forth, then self-cherishing may arise. Reprimanding oneself if there is any self-cherishing will be an impetus to use these qualities to benefit others. If one actually instils more compassion for those who one sees as being deprived of the qualities that one has, such as happiness, high status, and so forth, then rather than feeling conceit over these qualities, they become even more reason to benefit others.

For those with strong self-cherishing, one's qualities only lead to conceit and pride, but they are a means to benefit others for those who overcome the self-cherishing mind.

We can use the remaining time to recite the dedication or tenth chapter of the *Bodhisattvacharyavatara*.

Of course our dedication can be focussed on those who are experiencing sickness and other difficulties and problems in general. We can also dedicate it to the welfare of all sentient beings, particularly those with whom one has a direct relationship, such as one's parents. For those whose parents who are still with you, dedicate it for their wellbeing so that they are free of extreme sufferings, illness and so forth, and that they have a happy state of mind. Those whose parents have passed away you can dedicate the recitation for their wellbeing wherever they've been reborn, and for them to continuously experience good conditions. As we have a

strong connection with our parents, dedicating our practice in this way will definitely bring them benefit.

When one takes refuge, for example, one envisions all sentient beings around oneself, with one's parents on either side. That is because of the connection that we have with them.

It is good to keep the specific meaning and purpose of the practice in mind. The direct biological connection we have with our parents is not just some hypothetical connection. Because of the biological connection, when we make prayers and aspirations for our parents and siblings, it definitely has a benefit.

The concise motivation that we generate is: I will engage in this recitation to bring benefit for all sentient beings, bringing them happiness and relieving them from all suffering.

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

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