

# Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

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14 June 2016

Based on the motivation generated during the refuge and bodhicitta prayers we can now engage in our regular meditation practice. [meditation]

The practice we've engaged in is incredibly worthwhile, so we should familiarise ourselves with it again and again. The teachings present that initially the way to engage in the practice of the ton-glen is to familiarise oneself with the words. Thus we recite the verse and contemplate the meaning. It is essential to engage in this practice as much as possible as it serves as an optimum means to overcome negative states of mind that cause so much turmoil.

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

**3.2.1.3.2.1. How to subjugate abiding with excitement (cont.)**

Verse 168 highlights the need to subjugate the self-cherishing mind. By reading these words, and reflecting on the meaning, the way to take personal instruction from it is to acknowledge the fault of one's own self-cherishing mind.

The suggestion here is to look within oneself to pinpoint the faults caused by one's own self-cherishing mind; not to find fault in others. Faults include afflictive minds such as anger, attachment, jealousy, pride and competition. The self-cherishing mind is the cause for all of these negative minds to arise. When one takes the initiative to look within, and acknowledge the self-cherishing mind as the actual cause of all one's mishaps, one begins to really embrace the reality of this. That's when our mind begins to shift and a real transformation takes place.

**3.2.1.3.2.2. The faults of working only for one's own purpose**

This is subdivided into three:

3.2.1.3.2.2.1. Giving up establishing only one's own purpose after understanding the faults

3.2.1.3.2.2.2. Putting it to work for the purpose of others

3.2.1.3.2.2.3. Short summarising explanation

3.2.1.3.2.2.1. *Giving up establishing only one's own purpose after understanding the faults*

The next verse and a half read:

169. *The time when you destroyed me  
Is past; it was another time.  
Now that I see, wherever you go  
I shall destroy your arrogance.*

170ab. *I will destroy the thought of:  
'I still do have my own purpose.'*

The commentary explains:

The time when I did not see that you—my self-cherishing—are the root of my problems and when you destroyed me, is past and another time. It was when I

did not understand this. Now that I see you as the root of all faults, you will be powerless in generating faults as I shall destroy your arrogance wherever you go.

If there is the thought 'I still have the power to achieve only my own purpose', I shall destroy and completely eradicate that thought.

This passage shows that the way to subjugate the self-cherishing mind is by having a dialogue with it: *the time when I did not see that you — my self-cherishing — are the root of my problems and when you destroyed me, is past and another time.* What is being explained here is that up until now one has experienced continuous difficulties and problems by not having recognised the self-cherishing mind as the root cause of all faults. It goes on, *it was when I did not understand this*, meaning that when I did not previously see the self-cherishing mind at fault I was influenced by it and became a victim to it. This created many negativities, the consequences of which I had to experience.

*Now that I see you as the root of all faults* implies that through the aid of the Mahayana teachings in general, and in particular through this incredible text by Shantideva, I now clearly see self-cherishing as the root of all faults. Without relying on such a text as this it would be very difficult to recognise the self-cherishing mind as a fault. As such, studying and contemplating this text is a most powerful way to reveal the self-cherishing mind as the main cause of all faults. The commentary concludes thus, *you will be powerless in generating faults as I shall destroy your arrogance wherever you go.*

To re-emphasise the point I made earlier, when it indicates *now that I see you as the root of all faults*, the referent 'I' here is oneself, not others. It is not suggesting that we lecture others saying 'you need to recognise self-cherishing as the root of all your faults', rather it is directed to oneself, seeing one's own self-cherishing as the root of all faults. Having accepted the self-cherishing mind as the cause of all faults, the commentary recommends a stern affirmation dealing with it: *you will be powerless*, 'you', meaning the self-cherishing mind, will not have power over me. 'You' will not dominate me anymore and be a cause for more faults because *I shall destroy your arrogance wherever you go.* This means that having seen 'you' as a fault, I am not going to give you power anymore, and I'll completely destroy you. This is the way to subjugate the self-cherishing mind.

To ensure the self-cherishing mind is made powerless, the commentary further emphasises, *If there is the thought 'I still have the power to achieve only my own purpose'.* Here we can see that the dialogue with the self-cherishing mind is presented very meticulously as if you were dealing with someone you're attempting to overpower. 'If you still think you've got some power over me to achieve your own purpose *I shall destroy and completely eradicate this thought'.* One takes a strong stance in not giving the slightest chance for the self-cherishing mind to become dominant.

When we contemplate these points, we see that it is through the dominance of the self-cherishing mind that we have engaged in so many misdeeds and pursued actions with only our own self-interest in mind. It has

prevented one from engaging in benefitting others because the self-cherishing mind only seeks to engage in activities which benefit one's own self interests. Thus, recognising that, one takes a stance to completely eradicate it.

It is good to take note that the faults of the self-cherishing mind are presented here in a similar way to the faults of grasping to the self. While there is a distinction between them, the faults that incur from these two states of mind are actually the same. This analogy can help us to understand the distinction between self-grasping and the self-cherishing mind; self-grasping is like a king, whereas the self-cherishing mind is like the minister who carries out every command of the king. The incurred faults are the same because they ultimately come from the same source. The Lam Rim confirms this presentation.

### 3.2.1.3.2.2.2. Putting it to work for the purpose of others

The next six lines of the two verses read:

170cd. *I shall sell you to others and thus  
Offer my ability without any mind of regret.*

171. *If, due to lack of conscientiousness,  
I do not offer you to others  
You will definitely hand me over  
To the guardians of hell.*

The commentary explains:

Know that I have sold you to others and thus offer without any mind of regret my ability to sentient beings in any way they desire. If I do not offer you to sentient beings due to lack of conscientiousness and think of my own purpose alone, then you will definitely hand me over to the guardians of hell through the karma of negative actions. Hence, my dear self-cherishing, I will destroy you.

The opening line says, *know that I have sold you to others*. Again, in dialogue-form, you tell the self-cherishing mind, *know that I have sold you* - meaning that one has given oneself completely up for the benefit of other sentient beings. I offer myself *without any mind of regret my ability to sentient beings in any way they desire*, is saying that having engaged in the practices of exchanging self with other, one has completely given oneself to others. Having exchanged oneself with others, one takes others' benefit into account rather than one's own self-centred needs.

The next part of the explanation explains further and refers to the consequences of not offering oneself to other sentient beings, *if I do not offer you to sentient beings due to lack of conscientiousness and think of my own purpose alone, then you, (the self-cherishing mind), will definitely hand me over to the guardians of hell through the karma of negative actions*.

This dialogue with the self-cherishing mind is effectively saying that 'if you claim that you have concern for my welfare then it is best to offer me to sentient beings, because if you don't, then due to a lack of conscientiousness, and starting to think only of one's own purpose again, you (self-cherishing) will actually be handing me over to the guardians of hell where I'll experience extreme sufferings. The best option therefore is to offer myself to other sentient beings. Hence, my dear

*self-cherishing*, having seen the faults *I will destroy you*. This again emphasises the main point.

### 3.2.1.3.2.2.3. Short summarising explanation

This is presented with two verses, and the first reads:

172. *Therefore, because you offered me thus,  
I suffered for a long time.  
By remembering the past with vengeance,  
Destroy the thought of only self-purpose.*

The commentary explains:

Therefore, since previously you offered me to the hell guardians, in this way I experienced suffering for a long time. Now I remember my previous grief and with the thought of reaping vengeance I will destroy you, the thought of sole self-purpose, which is the root of all faults.

The explanation here is quite clear; it is from the faults of the self-cherishing that one has to experience the ill effects of the sufferings of being reborn in the hells etc. for a long time. In recalling that, one takes a stance and resolves, 'having seen the faults that you have created in the past, I will completely destroy you'. Once you have reached the point of recognising self-cherishing as the root of all one's problems, then the explanation given here will be very clear.

The next verse reads:

173. *Hence, if one desires joy  
One should not make oneself happy.  
Hence, if one wishes to protect oneself  
One should always protect others.*

The commentary explains:

Hence, if you desire to have perfect joy and happiness for a long time, then you should not make yourself happy on the basis of cherishing self. Hence, if you wish to protect yourself from suffering, you should always protect other sentient beings on the basis of cherishing them.

This means that if for all the logical reasons presented earlier, if you desire perfect joy and happiness for a long time, then you should not make yourself happy on the basis of cherishing the self, as this approach only leads to experiencing the opposite - unhappiness and faults. Therefore, if you desire to have real joy and happiness, you need to avoid engaging in your own purpose with the self-cherishing mind.

Accepting, with all the logical reasons presented previously, that one wishes to protect oneself from suffering, the text further exhorts, *if you wish to be protected from suffering, then you should always protect other sentient beings on the basis of cherishing them*. This is the succinct summary of the disadvantages of cherishing oneself and the advantages of cherishing other sentient beings.

Again the dialogue is meticulously presented in a similar manner to resolving a conflict with an unreasonable and irrational person. When it states, *hence, if 'you' desire to have perfect joy*, it is saying to the self-cherishing mind that if it really wants to make oneself happy, *experiencing perfect joy and happiness, then it should not be on the basis of cherishing self*.

Furthermore, *if it wishes to protect one from suffering*, then one should always protect other sentient beings on the basis of cherishing them.

The way that we relate to the self-cherishing mind, is that it appears as though it is actually protecting us, by taking care of one's needs and fulfilling one's desires. Thus, we believe in, and are completely submissive to, the demands of the self-cherishing mind. As such we are not to blame for blindly following it without question.

However having now seen the disadvantages and faults of self-cherishing, one needs to take a stance and not allow it to dominate and control oneself.

It would be very useful if we can remember this dialogue whenever we feel the self-cherishing mind starting to take over and dominate us. The way to overcome negative states of mind is to adopt the opposite positive state of mind, which serves as an antidote to overpower it. For example, the mind of grasping at the self is overcome by understanding selflessness. For other manifest levels of delusions, for example miserliness, one should think about the disadvantages of miserliness and the advantages of generosity, the mind of giving. When we start thinking about the advantages of generosity, then miserliness will naturally reduce.

Likewise when a mind of anger manifests, we need to think about the virtues of patience. The combination of thinking about the disadvantages of anger and the advantages of patience makes one begin to see the real value of patience and the faults of anger, and then the mind of anger naturally subsides. Similarly, to overcome the mind of harmfulness, we need to think about the advantages of morality, refraining from harming others, then the mind of harmfulness will be overpowered. When the faulty mind of laziness occurs, one needs to overcome it by contemplating the virtues of enthusiasm or joyous effort. In thinking about the benefits of joyous effort, the mind of laziness starts to decrease and one naturally starts to feel enthusiastic again. The teachings indicate that the fault of laziness is that whoever is consumed by it will not accomplish whatever they set out to do; laziness prevents one from achieving one's goal. Similarly they will not attain any results in Dharma. Thus, by applying joyous effort one overcomes laziness.

Likewise if one is consumed by corrupt wisdom one needs to apply the correct wisdom or intelligence as a way to overcome it. If one is consumed by distractions, one needs to practise concentration, which will help to overcome the distracted mind.

Thus, when one thinks about the benefits of these virtuous states of mind they become specific antidotes for overcoming the opposite faulty state of mind, and one naturally becomes encouraged. By thinking in this way and applying it to the best of our ability, we get the benefit. If we were not presented with these means from the teachings, then we cannot resort to doing anything about it and will continue to be at the mercy of the negative states of mind.

The way to deal with the afflictions that arise in our mind is succinctly explained in the *Eight Verses of the Mind Training*, where it reads: "as soon as afflictions arise, endangering myself and others, may I firmly face and avert them".

The great masters of the past advise us to protect ourselves from the destruction caused by the afflictions

by nipping them in the bud. So as soon as an affliction arises, one should immediately recognise it and apply the antidote.

Previous masters have presented the ways and means of engaging in practices to overcome faulty states of mind, from their own experience. Having applied the antidotes and seen the results clearly, they have found them to be great means to overcome the afflictions. As such we need to try to apply this ourselves and find the means to overcome the afflictions in our own mind.

### 3.2.1.3.2.3. Investigating the faults of the body

This is subdivided into three:

3.2.1.3.2.3.1. The fault of not knowing contentment

3.2.1.3.2.3.2. The fault of being motionless

3.2.1.3.2.3.3. The fault of being deluded

#### 3.2.1.3.2.3.1. *The fault of not knowing contentment*

This is further subdivided into two:

3.2.1.3.2.3.1.1. The faults of craving the body

3.2.1.3.2.3.1.2. Thus, it is appropriate to meditate on non-attachment for the body

#### 3.2.1.3.2.3.1.1. *The faults of craving the body*

The commentary starts with a hypothetical argument:

Argument: Since one wishes to work for others one should support the body on the basis of craving.

The verse reads:

174. *However much we work  
At supporting this body,  
That much it falls  
Into a state of extreme fragility.*

The commentary explains the meaning of the verse by providing an answer to the hypothetical question:

Answer: This is unsuitable. However much we work at supporting this body with food and such, on the basis of cherishing it that much through craving, while not achieving the slightest of one's wishes, one will in fact receive great suffering. It will be very hard to support it because one falls into the very stage of extreme fragility that makes it hard for it to bear even small sufferings.

This hypothetical argument is a continuation of the dialogue with the self-cherishing mind. Here the self-cherishing mind is saying that *since one wishes to work for others one should support the body on the basis of craving*. In other words, it is saying that craving and providing ones self with beautiful clothes, nice food, and taking care of one's every need is good, because it supports one in benefitting others.

This is a strategic move from the self-cherishing in saying 'oh, I'm being considerate. There's a reason why I'm craving these good things, such as nice food and clothing etc. – it is to help others.' This perspective does occur to us. We may start thinking that if it's for the benefit of others then it must be fine to crave good things.

The answer of course is that it *is unsuitable* to crave things in order to take care of the body. The commentary explains that it is unsuitable because *we work at supporting this body with food and such, on the basis of cherishing it*. This means that we will strive to support the body with the most pleasant food we can possibly acquire - the most tasty, the most nicely presented, nice smelling, nice

tasting and with clothing that looks nice, and feels soft and pleasant on one's body - while all the time the mind of craving just wants the best for the sake of gratification.

So *while not achieving the slightest of one's wishes, one will in fact receive great suffering*. The point here is that when the mind of craving desires the best of everything (food, clothing, dwelling etc.), whilst it does not achieve even the slightest of its wishes, one will instead experience great suffering. This is the point emphasised here. It is very true that through the mind of craving we are so used to wanting the best for ourselves that when the slightest thing goes wrong, it causes so much discomfort and unhappiness in the mind.

To further emphasise the point the commentary explains that *it will be very hard to support it*, meaning support the body with craving, because one *falls into the very stage of extreme fragility that makes it hard for it to bear even small sufferings*. So as a consequence of craving the best for oneself, when the slightest thing goes wrong, we immediately cannot bear it and so experience great suffering. Then, when something goes well, we feel elated. So we go through these extremes of either elation or disappointment and unhappiness. The state of going through these extremes comes from the strong craving we have for sustaining ourselves.

The next verse reads:

175. *If the desires of  
That fallen thus cannot be fulfilled  
By all the whole world,  
Then who can fulfil its wishes?*

As the heading indicated, these are the faults arising out of craving for the body.

The commentary again explains the meaning with a hypothetical question:

Question: If asked, how will it be then?

The meaning of the verse is presented in the answer:

Answer: Having increased the craving of that fallen thus, even all the enjoyments on this earth cannot fulfil their desires. If that is so, then who can fulfil the desires of this craving? There is no satisfaction in craving sense objects. For example, the King Mandhata had use of the four continents and half of Indra's seat, yet he was not satisfied.

The commentary's question queries how would it feel in that fallen state of not being able to be satisfied and feeling fragile. How would it be when one falls into that state of fragility?

The commentary explains, *having increased the craving of that fallen thus, even all the enjoyments on this earth cannot fulfil their desires*. It explains that there is no way to fulfil the desires. If by experiencing sensual desires one could be satiated and feel content, then it may be reasonable. But the fact being explained here is that those desires cannot be fulfilled.

The passage, *if that is so, then who can fulfil the desires of this craving?* implies that there is no-one or nothing that can fulfil the desires of craving. To illustrate this point it explains, *for example, the King Mandhata had use of the four continents and half of Indra's seat, yet he was not satisfied*.

This shows how a king, with access to much wealth, could still not be satisfied. A point to be emphasised in

the next verses is that if one doesn't practice contentment there'll be no end to one's desires and no amount of wealth etc. would make one feel satisfied.

The next two lines from the verse read:

176ab. *One cannot, yet desire generates afflictions  
And degenerated thoughts.*

The commentary explains:

One cannot fulfil desire, yet by craving desire objects the afflictions such as anger and attachment are generated, thoughts belonging to the virtuous side degenerate and only mental unhappiness is produced.

A hypothetical question asks, who can fulfil these wishes or desires? And the response explains, *that one cannot fulfil desire, yet by craving desire objects the afflictions such as anger and attachment are generated*. So while the desires cannot be fulfilled, in craving for them, afflictions such as anger and attachment are generated. All the faulty states of mind are generated, and while afflictions are generated, positive thoughts on *the virtuous side degenerate and only mental unhappiness is produced*. This is the consequence of craving.

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

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