

Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

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28 June 2016

While maintaining the motivation we generated during the prayers, we can engage in our meditation practice.
[meditation]

We can generate the motivation for receiving the teachings along these lines: "For the sake of all mother sentient beings, I will need to achieve enlightenment. For that purpose, I will listen to the teachings and put them into practice well to further develop my meditation practice".

When one generates such a motivation, whatever positive action one engages in will actually become a cause to benefit other sentient beings.

3.2.1.3.2.3.3. *The fault of being deluded (cont.)*

3.2.1.3.2.3.3.2. Deluded with regard to what is high and what is low

The verse relating to this is:

182. *Angry when derided due to something
And happy when praised due to something;
But if it has no awareness of this,
For what does one exhaust oneself?*

The commentary explains:

One becomes angry when this body is criticised due to a fault, and one is happy if it is praised due to a quality. But if the body has no awareness of this praise and criticism, mind, to what end do you exhaust yourself with attachment and anger? It is pointless.

The point here is that, when the body is criticised it makes one's mind unhappy, so one becomes angry. When the body is praised, due to attachment one's mind becomes happy and elated. Therefore, being overly attached to the body makes the mind either angry due to criticism, or makes the mind elated due to strong attachment.

However, the body itself has no awareness of the praise and criticism that the mind experiences. Because the body itself is not a consciousness, it is not able to have this distinct awareness: basically the body itself is an inanimate object which does not experience praise or criticism. So why unnecessarily strain the mind with anger or attachment when the body is criticised or praised? When the mind is unhappy, that is when it is most prone to becoming angry. Whereas, when the mind is feeling elated and joyous – by experiencing worldly pleasures – that's when one is most vulnerable to developing attachment.

The teachings on equalising and overcoming the eight worldly dharmas explain that, when difficulties arise, one should welcome them so that one's mind does not become unhappy. This prevents anger from arising. And when good conditions arise, one should be wary and not

become too elated, because that will cause attachment to arise.

The practice of equalising and overcoming the eight worldly concerns is, in fact, a profound practice. Some of you may take it lightly and think 'Oh, the eight worldly dharmas. That's a common teaching'. In fact, I personally consider the practice of counteracting the eight worldly dharmas as very important, the pith of one's practice.

As I have explained previously many times, the way to counteract the eight worldly dharmas is by 'equalising and exchanging'. So when you experience conditions that would normally cause you to feel happy and elated, you practise not being joyous; and when you experience problems that cause you distress, you actually welcome those problems and become happy with that situation. This is how you counteract the eight worldly concerns; this is what you need to understand. Indeed as the Lam Rim explains, until one has overcome the eight worldly dharmas, one will not be able to practise the Dharma purely.

3.2.1.3.2.3.3.3. Refuting arguments in this regard

The verse which relates to this heading is:

183. *If, 'I desire this body
And I am friends with it.'
As everybody likes their body
Why does one not like them as 'mine'?*

[While we see the terms *argument* and *answer* here in this translation, they are not in the actual Tibetan text. I think the translator has put them there for emphasis.]

Argument: Although the body itself does not understand this, I desire this body, and find it attractive because we are both friends. Therefore I like it.

The next part of the commentary serves as the answer:

Answer: As all sentient beings desire their body, why does one not regard the body of others and its happiness as mine? It is unsuitable to be attached to one's body and deride the body of others.

As mentioned earlier, the body itself has no way of comprehending or understanding praise and criticism. After we accept that point, the commentary offers a further rationale as to why one would desire the body: *I desire this body, and find it attractive because we are both friends. Therefore I like it.* This is how we normally think and relate to our body; we consider it as a close friend and good companion. So, our worldly mind works to find excuses for attachment to the body.

As the commentary further explains, *why does one not regard the body of others and its happiness as mine?* Since you say you desire and like your body because it is your friend, then since all sentient beings similarly desire and like their bodies, so why do you not consider their bodies as mine as well? If one finds a reason to be attached to one's body because one likes it, then it would be reasonable to cherish other's bodies as well and not deride it.

This reasoning relates to the earlier presentation of the practice of exchanging self with other. When one takes up the practice of equalising and exchanging self with other, one carries the attitude towards others' bodies that one previously had towards one's own body. There's no

difference. If one finds one's body attractive, by that same reason, one should find others' bodies attractive as well and cherish them. Thus, since one engages in the practice of equalising and exchanging oneself with others, *it is unsuitable to be attached to one's body and deride the body of others.*

3.2.1.3.2.3.4. Although craving for the body is the source for many faults, it needs to be protected to take the essence of the freedoms and endowments.

It is good to derive the meaning from the heading itself, as clearly presented here. *Although craving for the body is the source of many faults* – one should overcome desire and attachment to one's body because it is the source of many faults – however, *it needs to be protected to take the essence of the freedoms and endowments.* Because of the great purpose - of what we can achieve having obtained this body with the *freedoms and endowments* - one has to protect it.

The verse relating to this outline:

*184. Therefore, without attachment
I shall give up this body to the purpose of
migrators.
Then, although it has many faults,
I shall protect the body in its actions.*

As the commentary explains:

Therefore, as it is unsuitable to have attachment for one's body, without attachment I shall practise generosity with my body for the purpose of migrators.

From the *Four Hundred Stanzas*:

One views the body of course as an enemy,
Yet one looks after it.
From living long according to the rules
Many merits will be generated.

Since one achieves a lot of the purpose of others in dependence on this body, although it has many faults, it needs to be protected for the purpose of others, just like worldly beings grasp on to a chariot and use it to carry a burden.

As presented in the commentary, while overcoming attachment to one's body, one sees the purpose of benefiting others, so one needs to protect one's body and engage in the practices of generosity, and so forth.

As I have said before, whenever we nurture our body by partaking of food and drink, we can practise generosity by always first offering it to one's gurus and the Three Jewels. When partaking of food and drink and so forth, we need to always remember: By nurturing my body, I will use it for the benefit of the Buddha's doctrine and of sentient beings". Furthermore, we can utilise this body to engage in the practices of great purification, such as doing prostrations and so forth; and in the practices of collecting merit, such as making extensive offerings and so forth.

The meaning of the verse from *Aryadeva's Four Hundred Stanzas* is quite clear. When one uses one's body as a means to accumulate merit and avoid non-virtue – such as avoiding the ten non-virtues and engaging in the ten virtues, and thus benefiting sentient beings — then this body serves a purpose.

In my personal practice, I always think of how, by nurturing this body so that it can be used to benefit other

sentient beings, it will be worthwhile for me to live as many years as possible by sustaining and feeding it, but without the mind of attachment. As soon the mind of attachment arises, whatever one does to nurture one's body becomes a non-virtue. But if one can constantly remind oneself that the purpose of nurturing and sustaining the body is to benefit sentient beings then, as mentioned in the teachings, whatever actions one does, accompanied by the bodhicitta attitude, will become an optimum means to accumulate merit.

The line in the *Four Hundred Stanzas* that refers to living *according to the rules* basically refers to observing morality. Observing morality serves as the ground or basis for our spiritual development. Just as we need fertile ground to grow crops, one needs to observe morality as a way to generate all the other qualities and realisations. If one leads an ethical life by practising morality and has a long life, one can accumulate a lot of merit and benefit other sentient beings.

The commentary further explains that this body *needs to be protected for the purpose of others, just like worldly beings grasp onto a chariot and use it to carry a burden.* In this analogy, the chariot itself may not have much actual value, but because it is useful for carrying and transporting a burden, human beings will value and look after it. Similarly, while the body itself may not have much value, as a way to benefit other sentient beings, it can be utilised to achieve a great purpose.

3.2.1.3.2.4. Taking control of one's mind

3.2.1.3.2.4.1. Reversing the obstacles to virtue

3.2.1.3.2.4.2. Generating the method of striving in the antidote

3.2.1.3.2.4.3. Placing the mind in single-pointed equipoise on a virtuous object

3.2.1.3.2.4.1. *Reversing the obstacles to virtue*

*185. Therefore, being fed up with childish actions,
I follow those proficient.
Mindful of the advice on conscientiousness
I stop sleep and fogginess.*

As the commentary reads:

Therefore, being fed up with the actions of the childish, who engage in the obstructing conditions for calm abiding such as craving for sense objects, covetousness, harmful intent and the like, I follow the buddhas and bodhisattvas, who are proficient in what has to be done and what has to be abandoned. Mindful of the advice to be conscientious of virtuous dharmas I strive in pacifying and abandoning the obstacles to calm abiding such as sleep, fogginess and the like, as explained in the *Letter to a Friend*:

Mental excitement, regret, harmful intent and
fogginess,
Sleep, aspiration for sense objects and doubt,
These five obscurations are the thief that robs
The wealth of virtue.
Hence know them well.

As explained clearly here, having reflected on the earlier points, one generates a sense of disenchantment for *the actions of the childish* or worldly beings *who engage in obstructing conditions for calm abiding, such as craving for sense objects, covetousness, harmful intent and the like*, so *I follow the buddhas and bodhisattvas, who are proficient in what*

has to be done and what has to be abandoned. One develops this mind of completely overcoming such cravings. So *mindful of the advice to be conscientious of virtuous dharmas I strive in pacifying and abandoning the obstacles to calm abiding such as sleep, fogginess and the like.*

The need for being conscientious was explained extensively in Chapter Four. The advice here is a way to further overcome the *obstacles to calm abiding, such as sleep, fogginess and the like* – one practises *as explained in [Nagarjuna's] Letter to a Friend.*

3.2.1.3.2.4.2. *Generating the method of striving in the antidote*

As a way to overcome these obstacles, one needs to generate the mind of applying the antidote. The verse relating to this heading is:

186. *Like the great compassionate ones
I shall start suitable actions.
If I do not practise continuously day and night,
Then when shall I leave suffering behind?*

As the commentary explains:

Think: Like the great compassionate ones I shall start suitable practices that generate the power of the antidote. If I do not practise continuously day and night, then when shall I leave suffering behind?

One should strive in meditating on the common and uncommon kinds of calm abiding.

This is clearly presented, so there is no need for further explanation. 'Think' here means one makes the resolve: *like the great compassionate ones I shall start suitable practices that generate the power of the antidote* for overcoming all the obstacles to developing calm abiding.

If I do not practise continuously day and night, then when shall I leave suffering behind? This rhetorical question implies that if one wishes to leave suffering behind, one needs to practise continuously, day and night.

Then, one *should strive in meditating on the common and uncommon kinds of calm abiding* — 'common' here being the calm abiding practices common to some of the non-Buddhist schools and tenets, while the uncommon ones belong specifically to the Buddhist presentation.

3.2.1.3.2.4.3. *Placing the mind in single-pointed equipoise on a virtuous object*

187. *Therefore, to eliminate the obscurations
I take the mind away from wrong paths
And place it continuously in equipoise
On a correct object.*

The commentary explains:

Therefore, in order to eliminate all afflictive obscurations and obscurations to knowledge, one needs to generate superior insight. Before that, one needs in turn to achieve calm abiding, and therefore I turn my mind away from all wrong paths, such as disturbing thoughts of sense objects, which obstruct the generation of calm abiding. By way of the eight abandoning recognitions I shall place the mind continuously in equipoise on a correct object.

Having contemplated the reasons presented earlier, one strives to *eliminate* both the *afflictive obscurations* – which include the six root delusions of attachment, anger, pride, ignorance, wrong views and doubt, and the seeds of those delusions, as well as the *obscurations to knowledge,*

which are the latent imprints of the obscurations.¹ To do that one needs to generate *superior insight* in order to overcome the seeds of the delusions, as well as their imprints. *Before that, one needs to in turn achieve calm abiding, and therefore I turn my mind away from all wrong paths.*

The point here is that one needs *to generate superior insight*, which is to be presented in the next chapter, and before that, *one needs in turn to achieve calm abiding.* So, having been presented with all the conditions for developing calm abiding, *I turn my mind away from all wrong paths, such as disturbing thoughts of sense objects.*

Further, one turns one's *mind away from all wrong paths, such as the disturbing thoughts of sense objects, which obstruct the generation of calm abiding.* The actual method for developing calm abiding is referred to here; *by way of the eight abandoning recognitions I shall place the mind continuously in equipoise on a correct object.* The eight abandoning recognitions are as presented in the Lam Rim.² As I have presented earlier, the definition of calm abiding is: a concentration that is able to focus single-pointedly on a chosen object for as long as one wishes, and which is combined with the bliss of physical and mental pliancy. Then Gyalsab Rinpoche advises:

In short: How to attain the common calm abiding is explained extensively in the Hearer Grounds and the way of attaining the uncommon calm abiding is explained in this text and in Master Kamalashila's *Stages of Meditation*. Understanding the method from these texts and by contemplating the benefits of meditating on calm abiding and the disadvantages of not meditating on calm abiding, one should strive in meditating on calm abiding by way of the eight stages of calm abiding and so forth.

The eight stages of calm abiding and so forth are presented very clearly in Lama Tsong Khapa's great and medium Lam Rim texts.

Indeed, many years ago [when I taught on the extensive Lam Rim], I presented in detail what calm abiding means, its definition, and how to develop it, as well as what special insight entails. Of course, if I were to repeat those presentations it might serve some purpose, especially to refresh the mind of the older students, and for the newer students. However, since it has been presented earlier, you can refer to that. I will not go into further detail here.

In fact, when His Holiness the Dalai Lama teaches he often says, "I will repeat this point again, even if you have heard it before". His intention is for the newer students to be able to comprehend and understand it, and for older students not to just go to sleep thinking they've heard it already! These are important points His Holiness is mentioning; there is always a need to hear these points again, so this repetition serves a purpose.

Basically, as presented here it is the three higher trainings that are the basis for our development. Morality, which includes the precepts we take, is the very basis, like the ground or foundation. The next training is meditation, specifically the development of calm abiding. Finally, the

¹ Also known as obscurations to omniscience

² *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand*, pp. 653-66

training in wisdom enables us to develop special insight. Again, we will not go into much more detail now.

The summarising verse by Gyalsab Je himself succinctly presents these points.

SUMMARISING VERSE

The destruction of the two obscurations from the root
With superior insight to which reality is obvious,
Depends in turn on immovable concentration.
Hence, one should first become proficient in attaining
calm abiding.

Here, *the two obscurations* refer to the deluded obscurations and the obscurations to omniscience. To completely overcome them *from the very root*, we need to develop *superior insight to which reality is obvious*; with superior insight one obtains the direct perception and realisation of emptiness. Thus, developing superior insight becomes the ultimate means to destroy the two obscurations. Achieving that, in turn, *depends in turn* on developing *immovable concentration*, or indestructible concentration. *Hence, one should first become proficient in attaining calm abiding*. So this is the point of this pith instruction.

II. THE NAME OF THE CHAPTER

This is the eighth chapter called Explaining Mental Stabilisation from the Introduction to the Actions of Bodhisattvas.

This is the commentary on the eighth chapter called Explaining Mental Stabilisation from the commentary on the *Introduction to the Actions of Bodhisattvas*, called *The Entrance for the Children of the Conquerors*.

This concludes the Eighth Chapter. In the next sessions, we will continue with the Ninth Chapter. I think the Ninth Chapter is a bit longer than the Eighth Chapter, with a few extra verses, but otherwise almost the same length. I have also taught on the Ninth Chapter, as many of the older students are aware.

So far we have done very well with going through the text, and my intention is to try to complete the text this year. If we can do that, it would be good.

The exam we can leave for August, when I'm doing a retreat. It will be good to do the exam at that time. Also, there's the seminar coming up in August, so it's good for you to do your preparation for that now.

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

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