
Shantideva's *Bodhisattvacharyavatara*

༄༅། །བྱང་ཆུབ་སེམས་དཔའི་རྒྱུད་པ་ལ་འཇུག་པ་བརྒྱལ་སོ།།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

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As usual, let us spend some time in our meditation practice. [*meditation*]

As done regularly, we can generate the motivation for receiving these teachings along these lines: for the sake of all mother sentient beings I need to achieve enlightenment, and so for that purpose I will engage in listening to the Mahayana teachings, and put them into practice well.

Familiarising our mind with the wish to benefit others is indeed a very noble intention, which serves a great purpose. To do this one can generate the very strong intention "I will not harm any living being, and I will extend benefit to any living being that I come across". As we familiarise our minds with this intention, our way of thinking becomes more and more imbued with that sentiment. Then it is definitely possible to reach a stage where we actually embrace the quality of only benefiting others and not harming others in the slightest.

Leaving aside the fact that this noble intention is a cause for enlightenment and buddhahood, just on a human level how wonderful it would be to be someone who does not harm any living being, and whose only intention is to benefit other sentient beings! And it is definitely possible to become such a person. Through familiarity, this motivation will carry on from one life to the next. As we progress through each life, familiarising ourselves more and more with this noble intention, we will definitely become an embodiment of love and compassion.

The reality is that we will not live forever. In fact we are getting closer by the day to the end of this life, which means getting closer to our next life. At death we don't disappear into nothingness; we will actually take rebirth again. So if we ensure familiarity with this noble intention through our practice, then we can secure being reborn as human again with these noble intentions. If we have this inborn quality in our next life then that will be wonderful. This is how we can prepare for our next life, which will come much sooner than we think. It will also ensure that our practice becomes a pure Dharma practice.

As explained in the presentation on refuge, there are two types of refuge: causal refuge and resultant refuge. The resultant refuge is the future states of one's own liberation and enlightenment. No-one else can bestow these resultant states of liberation and enlightenment on us; we have to create the causes to achieve that resultant state ourselves.

Although aspiring for enlightenment in order to benefit sentient beings is a noble intention in itself, that aspiration has to be in relation to one's own resultant state of enlightenment. The significant point here is that one aspires to achieve the resultant state of enlightenment oneself in order to benefit other sentient beings.

[To explain the context of the next chapter we need to return to the subdivisions introduced in chapter 1.¹

2. THE ACTUAL EXPLANATION OF THE STAGES OF THE PATH

2.2. The method for taking the essence

2.2.2. *Explaining the individual meanings*²

2.2.2.2. THE WAY OF TRAINING IN THE PRACTICES OF GENERATING THE TWO MINDS

2.2.2.2.2. *The Way of Training in the Actions, the Perfections*

2.2.2.2.2.1. The way of meditating on conscientiousness, the limb preventing the degeneration of the training in the mind of enlightenment³

2.2.2.2.2.2. Explaining the way of training in morality, by relating it to introspection and mindfulness, the methods for keeping virtuous dharmas pure⁴

2.2.2.2.2.3. Explaining the way of training in the remaining four perfections:

This is subdivided into four:

2.2.2.2.2.3.1. The way of training in patience⁵

2.2.2.2.2.3.2. The way of training in enthusiasm⁶

2.2.2.2.2.3.3. The way of training in the common and uncommon mental stabilisations that are contained in calm abiding⁷

2.2.2.2.2.3.4. The way of training in wisdom that is the nature of superior insight

CHAPTER 9: THE WAY OF TRAINING IN WISDOM THAT IS THE NATURE OF SUPERIOR INSIGHT

What is the nature of superior insight? More specifically, what is the entity of superior insight? What does it actually mean?

We have just completed the chapter with the presentation on calm abiding. What is the nature or entity of calm abiding? As presented earlier, the entity or nature of calm abiding is a concentration that is obtained by relying on the nine stages of developing mental stabilisation, and which is able to focus on a chosen object for as long as one wishes, accompanied with the bliss of physical and mental pliancy.

The nature of special insight is, based on calm abiding, an analysis on the focused object, which induces the bliss of physical and mental pliancy. Some mistakenly refer to special insight as a state of mind that sees something more or extra than calm abiding. This is a wrong interpretation. Both focus on the same object: calm abiding is merely stabilising the mind single-pointedly on the object and that single-pointed focus on the object induces the bliss of physical and mental pliancy; while abiding on the object single-pointedly special insight is able to simultaneously analyse and investigate the object, which induces the bliss of physical and mental pliancy.

The chapter has two parts

I. Explanation of the chapter

II. Explanation of the title

¹ See the teaching of 26 March 2013

² Introduced in the teaching of 2 July 2013

³ Covered in chapter 4, introduced on 25 February 2014

⁴ Covered in chapter 5, introduced on 20 May 2014

⁵ Covered in chapter 6, introduced on 23 September 2014

⁶ Covered in chapter 7, introduced on 12 May 2015

⁷ Covered in chapter 8, introduced on 29 September 2015

I. EXPLANATION OF THE CHAPTER

The explanation of the chapter is subdivided into three:

1. Showing that those wishing to attain liberation need to generate the wisdom realising suchness
2. The method of how to generate the wisdom realising suchness
3. Therefore an advice to strive in generating this wisdom

1. SHOWING THAT THOSE WISHING TO ATTAIN LIBERATION NEED TO GENERATE THE WISDOM REALISING SUCHNESS⁸

This is subdivided into two.

- 1.1. General meaning
- 1.2. Auxiliary meaning

1.1. General meaning

In the Tibetan version of the text the verse is not quoted directly under this heading, and the words 'argument' and 'answer' are not specifically used in Tibetan text. These have been added by the translator of the text. We need to pay careful attention to the material in this heading as it explains a succinct point.

Argument: Because we need to attain enlightenment, to pacify all suffering in the continuum of others, we need to realise suchness. But if one wonders why would one need to realise suchness to merely pacify the sufferings in one's own continuum?

The answer to that hypothetical query is:

Answer: The protector Nagarjuna said,
For as long as there is grasping at the aggregates,
For that long there is grasping at 'I'.

This, of course, is a well-known quote from Nagarjuna's *Precious Garland*, which we studied some years ago. As I explained at the time, it is used in many teachings, and we see it here again. It is a very important point.

As the commentary explains, Nagarjuna is saying that:

For as long as there is true-grasping at [or grasping at the true existence of] the aggregates, for that long one will not stop the transitory view grasping at inherent 'I' and 'mine'.

Nobody here asserts that hearer and self-liberator arhats have not completely abandoned the transitory view, but as one needs to stop true-grasping at the aggregates to that end, it is asserted that they realise the non-true existence [some translations use the term 'lack of true existence'] of the aggregates.

This master [referring to Shantideva] also asserts as well that one needs to realise suchness in order to pacify the sufferings of cyclic existence, which is explained further below.

As explained here, *for as long as there is true-grasping at the aggregates*, which is grasping at the true existence of phenomena, one will have the *transitory view grasping at the inherent existence of 'I' and 'mine'*, which basically refers to grasping at the inherent existence of the individual self. What is being explained is that without overcoming the wrong conceptions of holding onto the inherent existence or the true existence of phenomena, one cannot possibly overcome the wrong conception of grasping at the inherent existence of the individual self or 'I'.

Grasping at true existence of the aggregates is the misconception that perceives the aggregates as being truly existent. This is our normal perception of the aggregates. Rather than seeing the aggregates as being an entity that is dependent on many parts, their causes and conditions, we perceive them as being independently existent, existing from their own side, without depending on anything else for their existence.

As the aggregates appear to us in this way we apprehend the aggregates as being truly existent without depending on causes or conditions or parts and so forth. Believing in that perception is called true-grasping at the aggregates. Grasping at the aggregates as being truly existent then leads onto grasping at the self and 'I' and what belongs to me as 'mine'.

The complete verse from *Precious Garland*, part of which was quoted earlier reads:

For as long as there is grasping at the aggregates,
For that long there is grasping at 'I'.
For as long as there is grasping at the 'I'
One creates the karma.

We need to understand how grasping at a truly existent 'I' produces grasping at 'mine'. From 'mine' comes my friends and my enemies and strangers. Strong grasping at my friend then produces the state of mind of attachment, and through that strong attachment a lot of negativities are created. Thoughts of 'my enemy' give rise to anger or aversion, and out of that aversion or anger one also creates a lot of negativity. In relation to strangers one generates a mind of indifference and lack of interest for their wellbeing.

As the commentary further explains

Nobody here asserts that hearer and self-liberator arhats have not completely abandoned the transitory view, but because one needs to stop true-grasping at the aggregates, to that end it is asserted that they realise the non-true existence [or lack of true existence] of the aggregates.

In order to overcome grasping at the true existence of the 'I,' one has to overcome grasping at the true existence of the aggregates. As indicated in the commentary, arhats have definitely overcome grasping at the true existence of the aggregates. One needs to try to understand this explanation as best as one can, because this really is the pith of the unique presentation that makes the Buddhist tenets different from non-Buddhist tenets.

In Buddhist doctrine **the view is selflessness** while the **conduct is non-violence**. Other doctrines practise non-violence, but the view of selflessness is unique to the Buddhist tenets, and within Buddhism there are different presentations of this view of selflessness. There was no presentation of the view of selflessness before the Buddha's time in this world.

The way to understand selflessness is that all things that are produced can be understood as having causes. Most would understand that the suffering that everybody experiences must have its causes; there must be reasons and causes for suffering. Some might assert random suffering without a cause, but most logicians and realists would accept that there are causes for suffering.

⁸ The numbering recommences with the new chapter
Chapter 9

As presented in the Lam Rim, the suffering that one experiences depends on karma, karma depends on afflictions, and afflictions in turn depend on the ignorance of grasping at true existence. So when we look into the causes of suffering we find that the root of all suffering is grasping at a self.

Having identified the root cause of suffering, which is grasping at a self, what then needs to be examined is whether grasping at a self can be eliminated. If grasping at the self can be eliminated, then by default the product of that grasping at the self, which is suffering, will also naturally cease. This is how it should be understood.

In this investigation, one investigates whether this state of mind of grasping at a self is a correct perception, or whether it is a false perception. The way to understand that this grasping at a self is a faulty perception - and thus is not based on any truth - is that it is not supported by reality. Once it is understood that the self does not exist in the way that it is perceived by the self-grasping mind, then it can be asserted as being a faulty perception. Then one comes to understand that the grasping at a self is a faulty state of mind, or false perception, because what it perceives does not exist in that way.

When one understands that what is perceived does not exist as perceived then, at that point, one is coming to an understanding of selflessness. The self that is perceived by the self-grasping mind does not exist, and therefore it is void of a self.

One thus comes to understand that the wisdom realising selflessness is what destroys the faulty mind of grasping at a self. When that realisation of selflessness and emptiness becomes very vivid and strong, then that becomes the antidote that overcomes this false perception of grasping at a truly existent or inherently existent self. When that faulty perception of grasping is completely eradicated, then the very root cause of our sufferings is completely eradicated. Then the negativities, afflictions and so forth that arise from that misconception will all cease as well. This is how one needs to understand the view of selflessness and emptiness as being the ultimate antidote for overcoming the afflicted states of mind and all that they produce i.e. suffering and so forth.

One needs to actualise this understanding of selflessness and emptiness in relation to one's own grasping at one's own individual self. Grasping at a truly existent self needs to be overcome on a personal level. Thus the selflessness and emptiness of one's individual being has to be understood. Gaining just a mere intellectual understanding may have some weight, but it does not really serve as means to completely eradicate and overcome the erroneous view of grasping at a self. In order to overcome the erroneous view of grasping at a self, one needs to fully actualise and realise selflessness in relation to oneself. That then becomes the ultimate antidote for overcoming all the mental afflictions. This is the uniqueness of the Buddha's presentation of the ways and means to overcome suffering.

In this way one can understand how suffering is something that can be overcome, because it depends on causes and conditions. When those causes and conditions are overcome, then suffering naturally subsides. If

suffering were to occur randomly without any causes and conditions there would not be much one could do to avert it. But because it depends on causes and conditions, which can be identified, one can apply the antidotes for overcoming those causes. Then one can eradicate suffering. So this is how it should be understood.

Of course the logical assertions for establishing selflessness and emptiness will be presented further on. As the commentary presents:

Those that wish to understand this presentation more extensively should do so in dependence on the great commentary by the great divine omniscient Lama Tsong Khapa, who is the guide of all the worlds, on the *Introduction to the Middle Way*.

Of course, we studied *Introduction to the Middle Way* in previous classes.

Please dedicate the recitation of the Tara Praises recitation to David Hope, an old student and Member who worked very hard for Tara Institute in its early years. Apparently he is going to be having surgery soon.

Because of his connection with Tara Institute, the students of Tara Institute and myself, when we dedicate our prayers for the successes of his treatment, it can definitely be of benefit. Keep that in mind.

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

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