
Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

བྱང་ལྷན་པའི་སྤྱོད་པ་ལ་འཇུག་པ་བཞུགས་སོ་

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

11 March 2014

As usual we will now spend some time in meditation practice.

[meditation]

Now we can generate the motivation for receiving the teaching along these lines:

In order to liberate all sentient beings from all suffering and lead them to the ultimate state of happiness, I definitely have to achieve enlightenment myself. So for that purpose I will listen to the teaching and put it into practice well.

If we carefully think about the meaning of this very brief motivation, we will realise that it encompasses both the aspirational bodhicitta attitude as well as the engaging bodhicitta attitude. It is aspirational in the sense of making a determination to achieve enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings, whilst listening to the teachings and making a commitment to practise well encompasses engaging bodhicitta.

2.1. Meditating on conscientiousness for bodhicitta

2.1.2. The fault of giving it up (cont.)

2.1.2.2. ONE WILL DEGENERATE FROM THE WELFARE OF OTHERS

It is good to keep the essential points of the chapter in mind by relating to the outline.

There are three sub-divisions under this category:

2.1.2.2.1. If one's bodhicitta degenerates, then it is a heavy downfall and one's work for the welfare of others will degenerate

2.1.2.2.2. Even if one obstructs the virtue of another bodhisattva it is similar to that, and one will go to the lower realms

2.1.2.2.3. The reason why this is so

2.1.2.2.1. If one's bodhicitta degenerates, then it is a heavy downfall and one's work for the welfare of others will degenerate

If one's bodhicitta degenerates, then it is a heavy downfall, because it is one of the eighteen root downfalls of the bodhisattva vows. Relinquishing bodhicitta is said to be one of the heaviest of the eighteen root transgressions. One's work for the welfare of others will degenerate refers to the fact that if one gives up bodhicitta then that entails giving up the pledge to engage in the practice of the six perfections. As the very basis for benefitting sentient beings, i.e. bodhicitta, is uprooted, one will not be able to adequately benefit sentient beings.

The verse relating to this outline reads:

8. *This is for bodhisattvas
The heaviest of downfalls.
Therefore, if one receives it
One harms the purpose of all sentient beings.*

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je gives this explanation:

To degenerate from bodhicitta is for bodhisattvas, out of the root downfalls, the heaviest one. Since the wish to benefit degenerates, if one receives this downfall, then it harms the welfare of all sentient beings, because the basis for practice degenerates.

As the commentary clearly explains, allowing *bodhicitta to degenerate is the heaviest of the root downfalls of the bodhisattva vows*. Giving up bodhicitta *harms the welfare of sentient beings* because one's bodhicitta has degenerated as a result of having given it up. One harms the welfare of sentient beings because one breaks the pledge to help sentient beings. It is good to take note that giving up bodhicitta is one of the three ways in which a bodhisattva's vows degenerate. Another is giving up working for the welfare of even one sentient being; and the third is having an inclination to follow a path of the Lower Vehicle, e.g. the hearer's path.

Gyaltsab Je further explains that *it harms the welfare of all sentient beings because the basis for practice, which is bodhicitta, degenerates*. When bodhicitta degenerates, then the very basis for the practices of the six perfections, which are the means to bring about the welfare of sentient beings, is harmed, and hence the welfare of sentient beings is harmed.

Then the commentary quotes from a sutra:

From the *Superior Compendium*:

Although one has practised the path of the ten virtues
For 10 million eons, if one generates the wish to be a self-liberator arhat,
At that moment morality has received a fault and degenerates.
Generating such a mind is heavier than the defeat of a fully ordained monk's vows.

As explained here, if one generates the wish to be a self-liberator arhat (a state of liberation in the Lower Vehicle) then, at that moment, morality has received a fault and degenerated, even though *one has practised the path of the ten virtues for millions of eons. Generating such a mind is heavier than the defeat of a fully ordained monk's vows*.

Here we need to take note that bodhicitta degenerates the moment one generates the mind of a Lesser Vehicle goal, by thinking, 'Alas, achieving enlightenment for the welfare of all sentient beings is too hard'.

Furthermore, as mentioned previously, one gives up bodhicitta if one develops the thought, 'I will never, ever do anything to bring about benefit for this particular sentient being'. It is mentioned in another text that if one part of something degenerates then the whole is affected. The analogy given in the teachings is that if just one bead of a rosary falls off or is damaged, then the whole rosary is incomplete. Those of you who do the six session guru practice will recall that it mentions that giving up bodhicitta is a downfall of the root bodhisattva vows. Also, the tantric vows are broken if one gives up love for sentient beings.

The promise made in the bodhisattva vows is to achieve enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings, who are as vast as space, and for that purpose one promises to engage in the practices of the six perfections. Thus, taking the bodhisattva vows encompasses all sentient beings. If

the promise made was to help only some sentient beings, then not working for the welfare of one sentient would not necessarily be giving up bodhicitta. But a pledge has been made to work for all sentient beings, so if, at some stage, one decides from the depths of one's heart, 'I am not going to benefit this sentient being or engage in working for their welfare', then the bodhisattva promise has been broken. It's good to know why giving up on even one sentient being is giving up bodhicitta.

Gyaltsab Je then explains the meaning of the quote:

As it is stated, if a bodhisattva with vows gives up bodhicitta, he receives a root downfall. If he has no vows, then his negativity is still heavier than the root downfall of the vows of individual liberation.

In Tibetan the last line of the verse, translated here as *one harms the purpose of all sentient beings*, contains the word *men*, which has a connotation of being inferior. As some commentaries explain, a bodhisattva, overwhelmed by the goal of achieving enlightenment for the purpose of all sentient beings, might change their goal to that of achieving the liberation of the Lower Vehicle. If they give up bodhicitta in that way, and then attain the state of an arhat, they will, of course, still benefit beings to their capacity. However, compared to the buddhas' ability to benefit sentient beings it is quite inferior; after all, buddhas are able to help liberate countless sentient beings with just one ray of light emanating from their body; that is one explanation of the meaning of this verse.

2.1.2.2.2. Even if one obstructs the virtue of another bodhisattva, it is similar to that and one will go to the lower realms

The verse relating to this reads:

9. *When another, even only for one instant,
Obstructs their merits,
They harm the purpose of sentient beings,
There is no other possibility than to go to the
lower realms.*

Gyaltsab Je begins his explanation with:

Whoever obstructs the merits, which are the virtues of a bodhisattva for even just one moment, harms the ability of that bodhisattva to accomplish the welfare of sentient beings. Where else could he go but to the lower realms infinitely?

Here Gyaltsab Rinpoche is emphasising a point made in the teachings, a point that I have presented several times in the past. The meaning of *whoever obstructs the merits, which are the virtues of a bodhisattva for even just one moment, harms the ability of that bodhisattva to accomplish the welfare of sentient beings* is quite clear. The consequence of this is that *there is no other possibility than to go to the lower realms many times over*.

Since any activity of a bodhisattva has the sole purpose of leading all beings to the ultimate state of enlightenment, anyone who obstructs the activities of a bodhisattva is obstructing the cause for the ultimate happiness of sentient beings. Such a person definitely creates the cause to take infinite rebirths in the lower realms. Another way of understanding *obstructing the merits* is that it refers to causing the bodhicitta of a bodhisattva to degenerate. As mentioned previously, that would be a very heavy

misdeed, which will be a cause for infinite rebirths in the lower realms.

The main point being emphasised here is that every deed of a bodhisattva is a cause for the unsurpassable happiness of all sentient beings, and if one obstructs those deeds even for a moment then one is obstructing the unsurpassable happiness of all sentient beings; that incurs great negativity.

To back up this explanation Gyaltsab Je quotes from a sutra.

From the *Sutra of Magical Emanations Definitely Pacifying*:

It is heavier to obstruct the virtue of a bodhisattva of offering one instance of food or drink to an animal, than to rob all sentient beings of Jambudvīpa of their food and kill them.

As the quote says: *It is heavier to obstruct the virtue of a bodhisattva of offering one instance of food or drink to an animal, than to rob all sentient beings of Jambudvīpa (or the world) of their food and kill them*. This clearly explains that obstructing a bodhisattva's deeds incurs much more heavy negative karma than actually robbing others of their food and life.

Then Gyaltsab Je's commentary further explains:

Because there are quotes like that, one should be careful regarding this point. One does not know who is a bodhisattva and so it is very easy to make this mistake. If one is able to protect oneself from this, then one is able to abandon the door of creating most faults with regard to people.

Here Gyaltsab Rinpoche is re-emphasising a point that he makes in his other works. We cannot judge other people from their appearances, and we cannot know another person's status just from their appearance. In other texts he says that one has to be very mindful and careful about judging and criticising others, because it could be similar to walking over a pit of fire that has been camouflaged with branches. If one is unaware of the pit of fire and, based on the external appearance, steps onto the branches, one will fall into the pit of fire and will be consumed by it. This analogy illustrates how we need to be very careful when it comes to judging and being critical of others, because we cannot know who is a bodhisattva. As Gyaltsab Rinpoche emphasises here, we cannot know who is actually a bodhisattva, because real bodhisattvas hide their qualities, and would appear as anything but a bodhisattva.

Here we can consider the example of the great Khunu Lama Rinpoche. When I had the great privilege of meeting him in Bodhgaya, he was wearing very simple clothes, almost rags really, and living very simply with only basic needs. If you saw Khunu Lama Rinpoche walking around in the street, you might think he was an ordinary beggar. People who didn't know him would not see his great qualities, but he was in fact a great practitioner of bodhicitta and a real bodhisattva. Even though I have not received any formal teachings from him I definitely had the opportunity to make a good Dharmic connection with him. When I went to see him he gave me a seed from the bodhi tree, and said I should recite the mantra of the Buddha and eat the seed as, 'That will be really good for you'.

Even though I didn't take particular note of it at that time, when I look back I really feel that it was a very significant gesture. Receiving that seed and instruction from Khunu Lama Rinpoche was almost a prediction that I would really try to take strong interest in teachings such as the *Bodhisattvacharyavatara*. I received teachings on the *Bodhisattvacharyavatara* from His Holiness, who received it from Khunu Lama Rinpoche. So it is a very close lineage—I received the teachings from a bodhisattva who received it directly from Khunu Lama Rinpoche himself. I have had that privilege of studying the *Bodhisattvacharyavatara* and now I have the opportunity to teach and share it with you.

When I met Khunu Lama Rinpoche I definitely had the opportunity to make a good connection with him. Even though I did not have much money I did have a silver coin with me which I was able to offer to Khunu Lama Rinpoche; it was the greatest offering I could make at that time. And in return Khunu Lama Rinpoche gave me that seed from the bodhi tree.

To return to the commentary, since one doesn't know who is a bodhisattva and who is not, if one refrains from this misdeed of criticising and being judgemental of others, or, worse, harming them and their good deeds, one is able to avoid the great misdeed of potentially harming a bodhisattva.

Also, as explained in the *Precious Garland*, harming others who are engaged in virtuous deeds such as Dharma practice is a great misdeed, because one is depriving them of the opportunity to create the causes for their happiness over many future lifetimes. So we also need to be really mindful about not harming the Dharma practice of others by causing them to give up the Dharma and so forth; we really need to be mindful of these points.

So we really need to take on board this succinct advice from Gyaltsab Rinpoche and try implement it in our own lives, then we won't create those misdeeds.

2.1.2.2.3. *The reason why this is so*

Gyaltsab Je begins his commentary on this section with a question.

Why are the abovementioned actions of infinite negativity?

The relevant verse reads:

10. *If one degenerates just by harming the happiness
Of even one sentient being,
What need is there to mention
Harming the happiness of beings infinite like
space?*

Then Gyaltsab Je states:

If one destroys the happiness of abiding with life of just one sentient being, one degenerates from one's high status.

What need is there to mention that one will be reborn in the lower realms if one destroys the cause for the highest happiness of all sentient beings equalling space?

If one destroys the happiness of abiding with life of just one sentient being is basically saying that if one robs just one sentient being of their life, then *one's high status degenerates*. This is an unequivocal statement that the

consequence of taking the life of just one sentient being isn't restricted to the loss of life of the other, but has the inevitable consequences of causing one's own high status to degenerate. That being the case with the life of one sentient being, *what need is there to mention that one will be reborn into the lower realms if one destroys the cause for the highest happiness of all sentient beings equalling space?* Again, we have a very clear explanation of the great negativity that one will incur in that instance; we need to be very mindful of that.

These explanations explain why obstructing the merits and virtues of a bodhisattva are a cause for infinite rebirths in the lower realms. If one creates a great misdeed of harming the happiness of even one sentient being, then by implication, obstructing the happiness of infinite numbers of sentient beings, who are as vast as space, will definitely be a cause for infinite negativity and infinite rebirths in the lower realms.

This is another very meticulous presentation: first there is an explanation, which is followed by logical reasons, which are illuminated with analogies and examples. It is important that when we read a text we are able to make that connection between its earlier and later parts, and so derive the full meaning of the text. It is good for us to know how to relate to the texts we study in this way.

The explanation we have just covered is also a profound explanation of the cause and effect sequence of karma. As mentioned earlier, one's high status degenerates if one destroys the happiness of abiding with life of just one sentient being. The implication is that those who are ignorant of the cause and effect sequence of karma will engage in acts of negativity, such as taking the life of others. It is basically through the ignorance of the law of karma that one incurs the fault of allowing one's high status to degenerate. So we can regard ourselves as being extremely fortunate to have been introduced to the law of karma. Through having some understanding and faith in the law of karma we are protected from creating misdeeds that would be the cause for one's own high status to degenerate.

2.1.2.3. ONE WILL BECOME FAR FROM ATTAINING A GROUND

As will be explained in the verse and in the commentary, it is implied here that if one generates very strong bodhicitta at one point, gives it up later and then strongly regenerates that bodhicitta, one will still be far from attaining a ground.

The verse relating to this heading reads:

11. *Thus, those with the heavy downfall
And with strong bodhicitta,
Should they further alternate in cyclic existence
Shall be far from attaining a ground.*

Here Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

Thus as explained earlier, those who have received the heavy downfall of abandoning bodhicitta, as well as those who re-generate bodhicitta strongly afterwards, will further circle in cyclic existence alternately, by taking alternate rebirths in the lower realms and in the higher realms due to afflictions and karma. It will take a long time to obtain the grounds such as Very Joyous and so forth. Therefore one

should strive to avoid the degeneration of one's bodhicitta, even at the cost of one's life.

This is clearly explaining that for anyone who has incurred the heavy downfall of abandoning bodhicitta, as well as those who regenerate bodhicitta strongly afterwards, will further take alternate rebirths in the lower realms and higher realms due to afflictions and karma. Thus, as explained here, *it will take a long time to obtain the grounds such as Very Joyous and so forth.*

This explanation is quite specific: once bodhicitta has been developed strongly it has to be maintained without degeneration to obtain the intended result of enlightenment for the sake of all beings. Even though this explanation is directed towards bodhisattvas who have developed bodhicitta, it is also relevant to us. We sometimes have a strong aspiration to develop a good attitude and meditate, and we try to practise the Dharma with a lot of zest. But sometimes we completely forget about that and allow the delusions to run rampant. This is particularly the case when we leave this room. During a session we might assume a pious aspect of meditating and so forth, and then as soon as we leave we become completely crazed with attachment. We need to take the advice given here as personal instruction, which is to maintain continuity in our practice. The habit of vacillating between practising and not practising does not bear any fruit.

2.2. Being conscientious in the trainings

This section is divided into three:

2.2.1. Conscientiously abandoning faults

2.2.2. Conscientiously meditating on virtue

2.2.3. Conscientiously abandoning the afflictions

2.2.1. Conscientiously abandoning faults

Here there are five subheadings:

These are quite empirical points; it is good to have a general understanding of the structure and sequence of the sub-headings.

2.2.1.1. If one does not abandon negativity and downfalls one will stay in the lower realms

This shows us the importance of recognising negativities and downfalls. Then we can protect ourselves from committing them, and if they are created, we need to purify them. Otherwise we will have to endure the consequence of staying in the lower realms for a long period of time.

2.2.1.2. The buddhas and bodhisattvas will remain impartial

This indicates that if we don't take the initiative to develop and to uphold the bodhicitta vows and so forth from our own side, then the buddhas and bodhisattvas will remain impartial because there is not much more they can do for us. They can't do anything extra for us if we don't take the initiative to implement these vows in our own practice.

2.2.1.3. The freedoms and endowments will be difficult to find

2.2.1.4. If reborn in the lower realms one has no opportunity to generate virtue

2.2.1.5. Why it is difficult to find freedoms and endowments

2.2.1.1. IF ONE DOES NOT ABANDON NEGATIVITY AND DOWNFALLS ONE WILL STAY IN THE LOWER REALMS

Again, this is a personal instruction; it is really important to ensure that whatever activities we engage in become a cause for attaining liberation and enlightenment. Thus it is important for us to check whether an activity is in line with creating the causes for liberation and enlightenment, or whether it could become a cause to be reborn in the lower realms. One needs to investigate and analyse one's activities in this way to protect oneself from these unwanted consequences.

The verse that relates to this outline is:

*12. Therefore I should practice respectfully
According to my promise.
If I do not strive starting from today
Then I will go from low to low.*

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je explains:

Therefore I should practise respectfully the trainings to attain enlightenment for the welfare of sentient beings according to my promise.

If, after having generated bodhicitta and taken the vows, I do not make an effort, I will continuously go from lower realm to lower realm due to heavy downfalls.

As the commentary clearly explains, because of the reasons explained earlier, *I should practise respectfully the trainings to attain enlightenment for the welfare of all sentient beings according to my promise.* Having considered the consequences of giving up bodhicitta (or allowing bodhicitta to degenerate), one commits here to practise *respectfully*, which means with great reverence, and one practises and engages in the training with *great humility* to attain enlightenment for the welfare of all sentient beings in accordance with the *promise* that one has made earlier. So this is what is clearly explained.

Furthermore, *if after having generated bodhicitta and taken the vows, I do not make an effort, I will continuously go from lower realm to lower realm due to heavy downfalls* reminds us again of paying heed to avoiding the downfalls. Here, downfalls refer to breaching a commitment of the bodhisattva vows. Likewise for those who have self-liberation vows, one incurs a downfall if one breaches a commitment of the self-liberation vows.

2.2.1.2. THE BUDDHAS AND BODHISATTVAS WILL REMAIN IMPARTIAL

The root text is introduced with this rhetorical thought:

One may think: I shall be all right because the buddhas and bodhisattvas will rescue me.

This section indicates that one cannot be complacent and think in this way. It is also indicating the unique manner in which the Buddha's teachings benefit sentient beings. You should take note of this.

The main point presented here is that we cannot be complacent, thinking, 'Even though I've not managed too well to date, things will be better later on'. We often fall into this habit of thinking, 'Oh, maybe I didn't do so well this year, but that's fine. I will do better next year' or 'Next time round, I will do better!' We often procrastinate in this way and rather than taking the initiative to put everything into practice now, we leave it for later.

Here, the fault is along the same lines: even if I have incurred some faults and so forth, the buddhas and bodhisattvas who are comparatively kind, will definitely rescue me and I will have no problem.

The verse which relates to this is:

13. *Although innumerable buddhas benefiting
All sentient beings have passed,
Due to my faults
I was not an object of their help.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary begins with:

Innumerable buddhas and bodhisattvas who have worked for the benefit of all sentient beings have passed already, but due to one's own fault of degenerating bodhicitta and the trainings, one did not become the object of their cure.

As the commentary explains, *innumerable buddhas and bodhisattvas who have worked for the benefit of all sentient beings have passed*, which means that they have come to this world and have passed on. But *due to one's own fault of degenerating bodhicitta and the trainings, one did not become the object of their cure*.

This is also in line with a verse in the *Guru Puja*, which states

Even with the countless buddhas who have
descended,
I have not been able to be subdued.

The implication of the heading *The buddhas and bodhisattvas will be impartial* is that if one allows one's bodhicitta and practices to degenerate then even though they are kind and have descended, one will not be an object of benefit from the buddhas and bodhisattvas.

Then, Gyaltsab Je quotes this line:

From the *Ornament of Clear Realisation*:

Although the king of gods shower rain, and so forth

This is an analogy: even though the gods may send down heavy rains, if the seed in the ground is actually faulty or rotten then no matter how much rain descends, it will not be able to sprout. The fault is not the lack of rain, but lies with the seed. Likewise, the rain of Dharma from innumerable buddhas has fallen, but because of their faults many sentient beings have not benefitted from that, and thus realisations and so forth have not sprouted in their minds.

Then Gyaltsab Je continues his commentary with this:

One may then think: I will be all right because they will rescue me later.

Then follows the second verse under this sub-heading:

14. *If I continue to act like this
It will be the same again and again.
I will experience sickness, bondage,
Being cut and mutilated in the lower realms.*

Gyaltsab Je's explanation of the meaning of the verse reads:

If I continue to act recklessly, I shall not become the object of their cure and will have to experience suffering continuously. I will have to take rebirth in the lower realms and even if I take rebirth in the happy realms I will have sickness and lack of freedom.

Either that or I will have sickness in the lower realms, and experience innumerable sufferings there, such as my arms and legs being cut off, and my body being lacerated.

This is explaining that after having made the pledge and generated bodhicitta, if one actually gives it up and acts recklessly, then one will *not become an object of their cure*. Rather, one will have to experience suffering continuously.

In relation to the ripened results, one *will have to take rebirth in the lower realms*. The environmental results are that, *even if I take rebirth in the happy realms*, such as the human realm, *I will have sickness and lack of freedom*. Even when reborn in the human realm, one may still *experience innumerable sufferings such as arms and legs being cut off and my body being lacerated* and so forth. So these are the types of sufferings that can be experienced even in a higher rebirth.

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

*Transcript prepared by Bernii Wright
Edit 1 by Adair Bunnett
Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe
Edited Version*

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