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# *Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara*

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

12 August 2014

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As usual we can spend some time in meditation.  
[meditation]

Generate the positive motivation for receiving the teachings along these lines:

For the sake of all sentient beings I need to achieve enlightenment, and so for that purpose I will listen to the teachings, and put them into practice well.

### **1.3.2. The way of training in the morality of accumulating virtuous dharmas**

In our last session we identified what the morality of accumulating virtuous dharmas means.

This section of the text has two sub-headings:

1.3.2.1. Abandoning attachment to the body, which is the cause not to train in morality

1.3.2.2. To be skilful in practising virtue

#### **1.3.2.1. ABANDONING ATTACHMENT TO THE BODY, WHICH IS THE CAUSE NOT TO TRAIN IN MORALITY**

Here we need to understand that this refers to abandoning attachment to the body, and that it is not suggesting in any way that one should abandon caring for and looking after the body. This distinction will be explained in more detail later on.

What we need to understand here is that attachment to the body needs to be abandoned because it is a cause to prevent one from training in morality. In order to practise morality we need to overcome the obstacles that prevent us from training in morality. Here, the obstacle that needs to be overcome is attachment to the body. This text, as well as other teachings, tells us that the method for abandoning attachment to the body is to contemplate and meditate on the imperfections of the body.

First of all we need to understand how attachment to the body arises. One perceives the body as attractive or appealing, and when that perception is overlaid with attachment, it sees qualities superimposed on the body, which make it more appealing than it actually is.

We have presented this distinction many times in the past. If the question is whether there are some appealing features of the body, then of course the body does have attractive and appealing features. However the mind of attachment exaggerates those qualities and then superimposes those exaggerated qualities on the perception of the body. So the perception goes beyond the limits of the reality, and one becomes attached to the body. Hence we need to overcome the wrong perception that exaggerates the qualities of the body by focussing on its natural imperfections.

We need to reflect on the shortcomings of being attached to the body, because it can lead to a lot of unethical behaviour. Thus, being overly attached to the body

causes one to not practise morality. While this section presents the impurities of the body and how to overcome attachment, more detailed explanations will be given in the eighth chapter on concentration.

We have a very strong sense of cherishing our body due to our attachment to it, and the stronger the sense of cherishing and clinging to the body, the more likely it is that we will experience the shortcomings of this attachment. So training our mind in overcoming strong attachment to the body will reduce our clinging to and cherishing of the body, which will definitely have a significant impact on our practice, particularly at the time of death.

It is possible to experience great agony and suffering at the time of death—not so much on the physical level but mental suffering. Therefore, if we train our mind now so that we don't have strong attachment to the body, then that will really help at the time of death. Even though there might be some physical discomfort, there will definitely be less mental agony, because of our mental training and practice of reducing attachment to the body. Then one will not experience the intense sufferings of being separated from one's body.

As mentioned in the teachings, by training now to reduce strong attachment and cherishing of the body, at best one will experience great joy in discarding this body and moving on to the next existence. That of course occurs at the highest levels of this practice. But even at our level, if we can secure a mind where at least we have no regrets at the time of death, then that would be a significant achievement. These are really important points for us to consider—if we practise now we will definitely reap great results later on.

To the extent that we have trained our mind to reduce attachment to our body, then, at the time of death, fear and anxiety about having to leave the body will not be experienced. Otherwise there can be great suffering at the prospect of having to be separated from one's physical body. Through understanding the Dharma one develops the understanding that naturally the body will be discarded at the time of death, and that what continues on is the individual self, and the mind that accompanies that self or 'I'. Thus, whatever merits and virtues we have accumulated will accompany the mind and self.

Thus, as I emphasise regularly, our real protector is the positive state of mind of virtue, and it is this positive state of mind that will protect us at the time of death. So if at that time we recollect the Three Jewels, thinking about the essence of the Buddha's qualities of love, compassion, and wisdom, then there is no doubt that one will be saved from an unfortunate rebirth in the next lifetime.

We really need to contemplate and understand these essential points. The benefits of doing the *tong len* (giving and taking) practice now will also be reaped at that most crucial time. If, at the last stages of our life we experience any physical ailment or difficulties, or mental suffering at the prospect of having to discard our body, and we apply the *tong len* practice, taking in the sufferings of all beings, and giving our virtues and merits to them, then what a wonderful state of mind to be in at that time! That would be the best preparation for our transition to the next life.

As the teachings explain, at that time we leave behind everything that we are familiar with in this life. Our physical body will not protect us at that crucial time; whatever possessions we have will not be able to protect us at that time; even our relatives, close and dear ones will not be able to protect us at that time. The only thing that can help us at that time is, as explained in the teachings, Dharma practice. Therefore we need to identify the essence of the practice that will help us at that time.

This is important not just as preparation for the time of death, but the practice we engage in now will also be a great solace as we age. The best preparation for old age, as well as for the time of death, is to familiarise ourselves with these practices now.

As I regularly emphasise, if we were to boil all the teachings down to their essence, then it is love and compassion. That practice of generating love and compassion and trying to implement it in our daily lives is, as I regularly mention, our unfailing friend and companion, and our real protector. It helps to protect us in this life, it helps and protects us at the time of death, and it will help and protect us in our future lives. In all aspects of our existence—now, at the time of death, and in future lifetimes—kindness, love and compassion are our unfailing friend and protector.

We need to understand that, as the teachings mention, death can occur at any time. We have just heard the news that Robin Williams was found dead this morning. He was someone who brought a lot of laughter and joy to others by being humorous, and was really appreciated by many people. Apparently he was also a nice person too. He was not even very old, just sixty-three, but his life ended suddenly and abruptly. However he definitely had a worthwhile life because he made many people happy. He made people laugh and feel joyful, so he made a really significant contribution to the happiness of others. Even the American president seemed shocked and was struggling with words when he was giving his condolence speech. So, it would be appropriate that we repay Robin William's kindness by doing some prayers for him.

This is a reminder that age does not determine the time of death. The point here is that one cannot hold on to the body forever. Inevitably, we have to discard it. What we need to derive from the advice given here is that while we need to abandon attachment to the body, we still need to protect it and put it to good use by practicing the Dharma. This of course will be explained in more detail later on.

The presentation here is about how to contemplate the natural imperfections of the body. By following these methods of reason and logic one is able to overcome the mind of being overly attached to the body by seeing it as an overly appealing or attractive object.

There are five sub-divisions under this heading:

1.3.2.1.1. An example of why it is unsuitable to be attached to the body

1.3.2.1.2. Meditating on the impurity of the body

1.3.2.1.3. Contemplating the lack of essence of the body

1.3.2.1.4. The reason why it is unsuitable to be attached to the body

1.3.2.1.5. Because the body disintegrates quickly it is suitable to practise virtue

*1.3.2.1.1. An example of why it is unsuitable to be attached to the body*

*59. Vultures, out of their attachment for flesh,  
Push and pull it back and forth amongst them.  
If you do not have any dislike then,  
Why do you cherish it now?*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary on this verse reads:

When one is dead, although the vultures push and pull the body back and forth amongst them out of attachment to it, if you mind do not generate dislike at that time, then why are you attached to your body and cherish it now? It is unsuitable to be attached.

This explanation is, of course, quite clear. However, to reflect on some of the main points, what is being explained here is that when one is dead, the body becomes food for vultures, who tear it open and pull it around. It becomes quite repulsive, so nothing remains of the body that the mind could be attached to. If that is the case, then 'why do you have strong attachment and cherish your body now?' The conclusion is that it is not suitable to be strongly attached, because the nature of the body is the same as that of a corpse. The impermanence of our body is a really significant point to contemplate.

When we really think about it, the body that we seem so attached to now will, in the end, become a repulsive corpse. Contemplating that now will help to reduce attachment to our body.

Next comes the reason for that attachment, which is presented in these two lines:

*60ab. Having claimed the body as mine  
Why mind do you guard it?*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

Hence, why mind do you guard it, having claimed the body as mine and cherishing it, since much that is unwanted arises from attachment to the body?

As presented here, it is through our strong familiarity with the body as being 'mine' that we have a strong sense of our body as being our prized possession. Amongst all our possessions we consider our body as being the most intimate and cherished possession. We have an instinctive notion of the body as being 'mine', and with that strong attachment the strong sense of clinging to the body arises.

This point is presented in the commentary as a dialogue with one's own mind:

Why mind are you so attached to this body when so many unwanted things arise out of that attachment?

The hypothetical response as presented in the commentary is:

Because I definitely require it.

Of course this response is not unreasonable, because we are attached to our body, and when that is challenged then we might instinctively feel 'but I really do need my body'. The rejoinder to that is contained in the next two lines of verse:

*60cd. Since both of you are distinct  
What is it doing for you?*

The commentary presents a very logical point in its explanation of these two lines:

Answer: Since both you and this body are distinct from each other, you will leave this body behind very quickly, and the body will also abandon you. Hence, what is it doing for you? It is unsuitable to hold it as 'mine'.

Here, further reasons as to why it is not suitable to be attached to the body are presented. The fact is that the body and oneself are not the same; at death your mind leaves the body, and when you leave the body behind, it will disintegrate.

Since you will be abandoning the body, and the body will in effect be abandoning you, then what is it doing for you? As one has to eventually discard it, the body gives no real lasting benefit. So it is unsuitable to hold the body with a very strong mind of possession, viewing it as 'mine'. So the point of impermanence is being presented once again. It is inevitable that one will have to be separated from one's body, so reduce strong attachment to the body from now on.

We need to familiarise our mind with these significant points, and incorporate them into our practice.

#### 1.3.1.1.2. *Meditating on the impurity of the body*

A further means to overcome attachment to the body is to contemplate the natural defects of the body. This particularly relates to attachment to the bodies of others, such as when men are attached to a woman's body or a woman to a man's body. This attachment seems to arise purely by focusing on attractiveness of the body itself. One needs to bear in mind however that it is possible to see the qualities and perfections of the person while also contemplating the natural imperfections of their body, as a way to overcome attachment to that body. In most cases the attachment to a member of the opposite sex seems mostly related to the appearance of their body. Some even make comments such as 'they don't really love me, they just like my body'. This can be very true! In this case there is no real concern about the individual, just attraction to the appearance of their body.

In this context one needs to understand that while one overcomes attachment to the body by seeing its natural defects and impurities, that does not in any way undermine seeing the person themselves as being warm-hearted and appealing, and feeling love and compassion for them. So here the training is to reduce attachment to the body, whilst still cherishing the person. This is important to understand.

As I regularly relate, when two people come together and wish to live together, their initial reason may well be out of attachment. In fact, it is attachment that causes the initial attraction to one another and then a feeling of fondness for each other develops. Having decided to live together in a committed relationship, if they start to practise genuine love and compassion for each other, then this is the key to a genuine relationship.

Even in the event that attachment for each other ceases or differences in opinions arise, and a couple consider to live separately, if genuine love and compassion was practised mutually, then a good relationship can still be maintained. While the intimate physical relationship

ceases, they can still have a mutual fondness for each other. In fact, some have confided in me that their relationship had improved after separation took place and they were better friends.

As lay Dharma practitioners, you really need to take this important point into consideration. When you have a relationship with another you really need to go beyond mutual attraction and attachment, and develop a genuine sense of love and compassion for each other. That will then be a significant relationship.

These are really important points that you need to take into consideration. As many of you are in committed relationships it is really important to have a genuine harmonious relationship with your partners. If, as mentioned previously, one takes initiative to really base the relationship on genuine concern, love and compassion for each other, then that will definitely contribute to less arguments, and fewer reasons to become angry and upset with one another. The fewer the occasions of anger, the more it helps to protect the virtue in one's mind. A relationship maintained with a virtuous frame of mind, where one does not have to become angry, argue, bicker and so forth, will be a worthwhile relationship.

[Geshe Doga says in English, 'If I'm happy, with love and kindness, then angry less and argue less. Together less angry, then more happy! More angry, more arguments, then lose all happiness'.]

Gyaltsab Je begins his commentary on this section with a hypothetical argument:

Argument: It is unsuitable to give it up because I have held it to me as 'mine' for a long time.

The argument is that it is unsuitable to give the body up because it has been 'mine' for a long time. This is another significant point. Because we have had this body for as long as we remember, it is our prized possession. So giving up our body seems to be quite unthinkable. It's hard to even contemplate that one can give up attachment to the body.

61. *Deluded mind, why do you  
Not grasp at the clean form of wood?  
This machine that is an accumulation of filth,  
These bones, to guard this now, how is it  
appropriate?*

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je explains:

Answer: If you, the deluded mind that holds that which lacks a self as having a self, holds the impure as 'mine' then why do you not hold a clean piece of wood as 'I' as well?

Instead you guard this machine, which is an accumulation of filth and bones. How can this be suitable?

It is unsuitable to be attached.

The point here is that it is a *deluded mind that holds something that lacks a self as having a self*. Similarly, it is also a deluded mind that holds something as pure when in fact it is impure. So if the mind were to hold something that is impure by nature as pure or clean, *then why do you not hold a clean piece of wood as 'I' as well?* This is the significant point being made here.

Then as further explained, *instead you guard this machine of the body, which is an accumulation of filth and bones. How can this be suitable?* This implies that it is not suitable.

Our bodies are, in effect, like a machine that produces filth. We can understand this when we think about the clean substances going in, and how what comes out is foul, putrid, and rotten. As this is the natural condition of the body, how can we consider it as being pure? Therefore it is not suitable to be attached to it.

### *1.3.1.1.3. Contemplating the lack of essence of the body*

This has two sub-headings

1.3.1.1.3.1. If one separates the different parts of the body and analyses them one will not find any essence

1.3.1.1.3.2. It is unsuitable to be attached to that without essence.

What we need to derive from this explanation is that it is a logical presentation of the way to contemplate the natural defects and imperfections of the body. Rather than giving a general instruction to meditate on the impurities of the body, the instruction is to analyse the natural circumstances of the body. Then through that analysis one comes to understand and accept that the body is indeed impure. By meditating on the natural defects and imperfections of the body in this way one will be able to implement it into one's practice.

#### *1.3.1.1.3.1. If one separates the different parts of the body and analyses them one will not find any essence*

Here essence refers to the essence of purity. The relevant verse is:

62. *First peel off this sheath of skin  
With your awareness.  
Then also separate the flesh from the grid of bones  
And place it apart with the scalpel of wisdom.*

Gyaltsab Je's explanation of the meaning of this verse is:

First of all, if you mentally peel off this sheath of skin from the rest of the body, then it does not have any essence. Then remove the flesh from the grid of bones with the scalpel of wisdom, and analyse whether there is any essence.

This is another very logical and systematic presentation of the way of looking into the body. Where is its essence?

What is being suggested is that the analysis begins with first peeling off the skin that covers the body and then looking at what is beneath that. In most cases attachment arises through being attracted to a beautiful face, in which case you would start the analysis by removing the skin from the face, and then look beyond that.

The way to investigate the essence of an appealing nature is to begin with the attraction to the skin, which is indeed what you are looking at when you are attracted to the body. However the skin is of course not the body. So when one goes beyond the skin one looks at the flesh. If one feels there might be some essence beyond that, one goes further and takes the flesh away, leaving the grid of the bones. Then, when one goes further into the bones, there is marrow.

This analysis is done with the scalpel of wisdom. Just as a scalpel is able to dissect these layers of the body, one uses the wisdom of analysis like a scalpel to look through

these layers to find whether there is any essence. Then one will find that there is no essence at all.

The next verse shows how to further analyse with the scalpel of wisdom. It reads:

63. *Then divide the bones as well  
And scan all the way down to your feet.  
Analyse and ask yourself,  
'Where is the essence in this?'*

Here Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

Then divide up the bones as well, scan all the parts down to your feet and ask yourself, 'Where is there the essence that could bear analysis?'

Analyse like this with your own wisdom. There is not the slightest essence that can be relied upon.

This second verse is also quite clear. Even when the bones have been divided and one looks into the inner parts of the body from the feet upwards then one asks *where is the essence that could bear the analysis?*, which implies that there is no real essence to be found. So as the commentary says *analyse like this with your own wisdom. There is not the slightest essence that can be found and relied upon.*

This meditation is a means to contemplate the natural impurities and defects of the body. The fundamentally unclean nature of the body will help one to reduce attachment to one's own body. And, when one applies this to others who appear attractive and thus an object of attachment, this is a way to reduce attachment to the bodies of others as well. So it is more practical to train our mind by first looking into our own body and accept its natural defects, and then we will understand that it's the same with the bodies of others. If one trains the mind in this way, it will definitely help to reduce strong attachment.

These verses present an analysis that can be used to look for the essence of the body, leading to the conclusion that there is no essence to be found.

#### *1.3.1.1.3.2. It is unsuitable to be attached to that without essence*

The verse relating to this reads:

64. *If, even when looking with effort  
You cannot find any essence in this,  
Then why do you persist  
In guarding this body with attachment?*

Here Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

If, even when looking for any essence with effort, you mind, do not see any essence, then for what reason do you mind, continue to guard this body due to being attached to it and grasping at it?

This excessive grasping is unsuitable.

This reflects on the fact that if one has not given up the object of attachment from the depth of one's heart, then attachment will continue to exist despite employing these methods of analysis. Having a theoretical understanding that, 'Yes, it is obvious that the nature of the body is impure', is not enough if one does not actually give up attachment to the body. Even with that analysis and understanding, one could still be holding on to the object of attachment. That is because deep inside, one still holds the object of attachment and sees it as appealing and having essence.

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These points are quite clear.

*1.3.2.1.4. The reason why it is unsuitable to be attached to the body*

Again, this heading begins with a hypothetical argument.

Argument: However, if you say that it is suitable to be slightly attached to this body?

One may question, 'Is it OK to have a little bit of attachment to the body?' So as a way to overcome this doubt the next one and a half verses say:

*65. You are unable to eat filth  
As well as unable to drink blood,  
And unable to suck the innards.  
What is the body doing for you?*

*66ab. At second best, it is suitable to be guarded  
As food for foxes and vultures.*

The commentary to these lines reads:

Answer: It is unsuitable to be attached to the body because the body is an impure aggregate. You cannot eat the impure substances of the body and you can also not drink the blood. Likewise you cannot suck the innards, so what action is the body doing for you that is of use? If you were to protect it then at second best the body is only suitable to be guarded as food for foxes and vultures.

As the commentary explains, *it is unsuitable to be attached to the body because it is an impure aggregate*. Further reasons for the body's impurity are that we do not have any use of this body for ourselves: we cannot consume our own body to nourish ourselves; we cannot drink our blood; and we cannot suck our innards. So what real benefit does the body give us?

As one would not consider consuming one's own body, the only other good reason to protect it would be that the body is suitable as food for foxes and vultures. This means that if our body can help other beings such as foxes, vultures and so forth, then it might be worthwhile to protect it. Otherwise it has no personal benefit.

A significant point being made here is, while it is inappropriate to protect one's body merely out of attachment to it, if it can be used for the benefit of others then it is worthwhile to protect the body.

We conclude here for the evening. Let us recite the *Eight Verses of Mind Training*, and dedicate it to the late Robin Williams. I have seen some of his shows which were very funny; they made me laugh and laugh. Some people have that natural gift of being amusing and funny just by the virtue of being seen. Whatever the circumstances of his death, it is sad to lose a person who has benefited others. So it is appropriate that we dedicate some prayers for him.

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

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Edited Version  
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## *Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara*

བྱང་ཆུབ་སེམས་དཔའི་སྤྱོད་པ་ལ་འཇུག་པ་བཞུགས་སོ།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

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If, prior to taking refuge, you generate the following motivation, 'in order to liberate all beings from all sufferings and lead them to the ultimate state of happiness I need to achieve enlightenment myself, so for this purpose I take refuge in Buddha, Dharma and Sangha', this then becomes what is called 'special refuge'.

When we add to this special refuge the intention to achieve enlightenment quickly, very quickly, then it becomes what is called a 'special bodhicitta' intention.

I convey this to you now so that when you come across practices where it indicates taking special refuge and generating special bodhicitta, you will know what it means.

So, based on the refuge and bodhicitta motivation we generated earlier, along with this profound understanding, we can now engage in the practice of meditation.

*[meditation]*

We can now generate the following motivation for receiving the teachings: In order to free all sentient beings from all sufferings and lead to them to the ultimate state of happiness, I need to achieve enlightenment myself. So, for this purpose I will listen to the teachings and put them into practice well.

The very meditation practice that we engaged in earlier is a practice to further enhance and develop the love and compassion within ourselves. If we were to really take the initiative to put this into practice rather than leave it as a mere wish, and really develop practising love and compassion within ourselves, the benefit would be unimaginable. It is incredible benefit for oneself as well as for others. There is only a positive result to be gained from developing love and compassion in one's heart.

You might find it hard to detect how extending love and compassion to all living beings actually directly benefits them or yourself. The positive effects take place over a long period of time, so the benefits are experienced more in an indirect way. However we can relate to the more direct experiences with our immediate relations, who we deal with on a daily basis. If one has really taken the initiative to cultivate genuine love and compassion, then due to familiarity with the practice, and the positive impact it has on one's mind, it will definitely contribute to less agitation and less anger—particularly with our close relationships.

In relation to close relationships we have now, or from the past, we are easily affected by what they say and what they do. As such, anger can arise if we have not taken the initiative to develop a genuine sense of love and compassion towards them. The way to develop love and compassion towards them is to really understand that

when they express inappropriate gestures or words etc. it is because they are influenced by the delusions, and thus affected by a troubled state of mind. When one understands that they don't have control over what they are saying and doing, and that their mind is completely confused (which is why they are expressing inappropriate gestures and so forth), one doesn't take it too personally. Instead one can feel a sense of love and compassion towards them.

We can notice that when inappropriate gestures are laid upon oneself, or *vice versa*, it is because of the fact that we have a close relationship with the other, now or from the past. It would be quite unlikely that we would express our feelings openly, especially feelings of agitation etc., to strangers. If we were to approach strangers and start relating what we have on our mind, we might even get punched and start a fight. So we usually express what's on our mind to those with whom we are closest, which at times may be agitation and unease, and this can create discomfort between oneself and the other.

Knowing that it is because we have a close relationship with the other, it is most appropriate that one generates genuine understanding based on a sense of love and compassion. If one practises in this way then it becomes a supreme method to transform agitation and anger into love and compassion. If one takes the initiative to practise love and compassion then, if the other was to utter inappropriate words or make inappropriate gestures, one would not take it personally and it would be able to express even more understanding and concern for them. This is how their negative attitudes or gestures can be transformed into something more positive due to the love and compassion in our heart.

As we know from the Buddha's life story, when the Buddha was in the indestructible concentrated state of meditation, and evil forces such as demons attempted to harm the Buddha out of jealousy, their arrows and spears transformed into flowers. The deep concentration and love and compassion in the Buddha's heart overpowered the destructive weapons, and transformed them into something beautiful. We need to understand the significance of the Buddha's great feats, and be encouraged to practise similarly oneself.

When we really take the initiative to practise in this way, with the understanding that inappropriate gestures and words are due to the negative emotions or delusions in the other's mind, one should not take it personally but rather think of the other as an object of compassion, because of the afflictions in their mind. When we practise in this way, what would otherwise be a very uncomfortable situation can be transformed into something more meaningful, and becomes a means to enhance our love and compassion towards them. So turning unwanted things, such as difficulties and problems into the path means precisely this practice. Otherwise what other practice would there be? Beginning with the hardships and unwanted things we experience now, we can learn to transform anger into love and compassion. This is the practice: in a situation where one would have otherwise reacted out of anger, one feels love and compassion instead. Doing that shows how our mind has been transformed.

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We need to understand that this is the very foundation of the mind training teachings. The main emphasis here is turning unwanted situations, difficulties and problems into the path. So we need to understand that.

It is as presented in this verse from the *Guru Puja* practice:

Should even the environment and the beings therein  
Be filled with the fruits of their negative actions  
And unwished-for sufferings pour down on me like  
rain,  
I seek your blessings to take these miserable  
conditions as a path  
By seeing them as causes to exhaust the results of my  
negative karma.

So when one next recites these lines from *the Guru Puja*, it is good to reflect on the meaning.

#### ***1.3.2.1.5. Because the body disintegrates quickly it is suitable to practise virtue***

From the heading itself we can derive a sense of the profound advice being presented here. Since death is inevitable, and our body disintegrates and nothing is left behind, then while we have this body, it is suitable to employ it in order to accumulate virtue as much as possible.

The practice here is to contemplate the certainty of death. The time of death is uncertain, and that time our body can't help us, as it will be destroyed. The Lam Rim teachings explain in detail that when death occurs none of the things we cherish now can protect us, e.g. our body, our possessions and relatives. None of that can help us at that time. So if we can really contemplate on death and impermanence, and take it to heart, then the practical benefit will be that our attachment to our body, possessions and relatives will reduce to the point of having no attachment to them at all. If one has not even the slightest attachment to these cherished objects, then this will be a cause for so much relief and ease in our mind—not only at the time of death but even in our daily lives now. If we don't take the initiative to let go of the attachment to our body, possessions and relatives, then this can cause a lot of mental agony. When one has strong attachment to close and dear ones in particular, and if they let go of us first, prior to us having trained our own mind to let go of the attachment to them, then that will cause so much agony in one's mind. So to prevent a painful situation like this from happening, you need to take the initiative to train your mind to let go of attachment to these objects. Then you will have great solace.

Most of you would have the experience of being abandoned at one time or another by someone who is close and dear to you. If you can recall the pain and hurt you felt at that time this will be a good impetus to practice the Dharma.

Apparently psychologists have stated that one of the greatest sufferings someone can undergo is the suffering of being abandoned by loved ones. This suffering can be so great that someone who is experiencing that kind of hurt would even consider taking their own life, because they are not able to bear it. Many of you might already be familiar with psychology, and may have heard those explanations. I would say that it is definitely true. The

suffering of being abandoned and unloved is a great suffering. So if situations like this were to occur, then the best way to avoid experiencing the sufferings is to train our mind now to let go of the attachment to others. It is in this way that we can see how we can derive practical benefit from these practices: letting go of the attachment to these objects and possessions (particularly other beings) will be of benefit even in this very life.

The point of this subheading is that the body disintegrates quickly and death occurs quickly. Reflecting on the inevitability of death is something which really becomes a strong impetus for one's practice of Dharma. As the teachings and some of the great masters have mentioned, we need to practise to the extent that we generate fear of death now as a way to prevent fear of death at the actual time of death. In other words, cultivating a fear of death now can become the impetus for us to practise the Dharma in a way that actively prepares us for the actual time of death. When there is no fear at that time then there is no hesitation in our mind, and we will be able to joyfully or peacefully go on to the next existence. The fact and reality is that none of us will survive forever—death will definitely occur. The longest one could possibly hope to live for would be 120. Apparently in the past some have lived up to 140. I am not sure of this, but no-one could live much longer than that.

We might aspire to live up to 100, but even that is not a very long time. In terms of the number of years we live, no matter whatever significant older age we might hope to live for, the reality is that the years go by very quickly. In relation to my own experience, it doesn't seem long since I arrived in Australia. When I look back, the time seems to have gone quite quickly, but it is over 30 years. As a reminder of that, someone came to a Geelong teaching last month and showed me pictures saying 'Remember this picture?' It was a picture of this individual taken with me 30 years ago. He told me that the photo was taken in his kitchen, and he has it with him all the time. When he showed the picture, I actually couldn't even recognise the person right away, and that was a reminder of how much time has passed since then.

He had lived in Japan for many years and that is why he was not around here. Apparently he had come to His Holiness' event last year at the Quang Minh temple and he said that he noticed me from a distance, and immediately remembered 'Oh, that is Geshe Doga'. He said he could recognize me right away from a distance.

Referring back to the point about generating fear of death as an impetus to practise the Dharma, if we can really improve our Dharma practice so that we are prepared for the time of death, then this will be of great benefit at the inevitable time of death. In the number of years that I have associated with others here, there have been a few examples of individuals who have faced death with great ease and peace of mind. So there is real significance in this point that we need to pay attention to.

Under this heading *Because the body disintegrates quickly it is suitable to practise virtue* there are four subheadings.

1.3.2.1.5.1. A body that will soon be destroyed by death is suitable to be ordered to practise virtue

1.3.2.1.5.2. An example of how it is inappropriate to do nothing and procrastinate due to grasping

1.3.2.1.5.3. Having given a wage one should get what one wants

1.3.2.1.5.4. It is appropriate to work for sentient beings by adapting the recognition of a boat

**1.3.2.1.5.1. A body that will soon be destroyed by death is suitable to be ordered to practise virtue**

The verse reads:

*66cd. This human body  
Is only to be used.*

*67. Even if you protect it,  
The lord of death, without any mercy,  
Will take it away and give it to the birds and  
dogs.  
At that time what can you do?*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains the meaning of the verse.

There is no real purpose of the body from the point of view of its nature. This human body that is intact with its freedoms and endowments is only suitable to be put to work to accumulate virtuous karma.

Although you protect it without achieving this purpose, the merciless lord of death will take it from you and, having separated it from life, will offer it to the birds and dogs. Mind, at such a time what will you do, as you do not have the slightest power to prevent that separation.

The main point the commentary expresses is that there is no real purpose for the body from the point of view of its nature. Its actual composition is a contaminated aggregate so there is no real, substantial pure nature. However the human bodies that we have obtained are intact with the freedoms and endowments, enabling one to pursue the Dharma. Only this kind of body is suitable to put to work to accumulate virtuous karma. This is the only purpose of having obtained a precious human body.

Verse 67 explains that if we were to try to protect our body, without trying to achieve a virtuous purpose, the reality is that the Lord of Death, (which is a mythological being used as a euphemism for death) is merciless and will separate our consciousness from our body. One has to experience death, and once our bodies are separated from this life, it will be offered to the birds and dogs. The point is that our bodies will naturally decompose and be of no use for oneself. So, if we don't reflect on this now, then at the time of death we won't have the power to do anything.

We put great measures into protecting our body by feeding and clothing it etc. If the body didn't age, decay and eventually disintegrate, then perhaps there would be some point to protect it in such a way. However the reality is that our body naturally starts to decay no matter how much we protect it. It will gradually fail us and eventually completely disintegrate, and we will have to separate from it. Taking this natural decay of our body into account, putting in all that time and energy just to protect it, without using it for any great purpose, would be meaningless.

The personal instruction to derive here is to contemplate the inevitability of death and really take the initiative to engage in a greater purpose. The mind, or the individual

self will go on, while the body will be left behind at the time of death. This is something that will definitely occur and trying to ignore it will not prevent it. It is better to acknowledge it and actually prepare for the time when it occurs by practising to the best of our ability. Then, when the actual event takes place, it will definitely lessen unnecessary anxiety and fears and benefit us at that time.

**1.3.2.1.5.2. An example of how it is inappropriate to do nothing and procrastinate due to grasping**

It is natural that we experience birth, aging, sickness and death. This is part and parcel of our existence. Ignoring this and not acknowledging it will not prevent it from happening. The very fact that we are born means that we have to experience death. This is part of our natural existence of suffering.

We can derive the meaning from the heading itself: *An example of how it is inappropriate to do nothing and to procrastinate due to grasping.* Doing nothing here refers to doing nothing to practice the Dharma, not doing nothing in general. This can be misunderstood if people think 'I am not just doing nothing and sitting around, I am actually very busy, I have a job and so forth, so I am really busy – this advice does not apply to me'. So to clarify, here, doing nothing means doing nothing to generate the causes for one's liberation and enlightenment, or more immediately, doing nothing to prepare for our future life. At the very least, Dharma practice involves practices to prepare oneself for one's next life. If we don't engage in any practice towards achieving the goals of our future lives, ultimately liberation and full enlightenment, then this would be referred to as doing nothing from the Dharma point of view, and this is inappropriate.

The verse reads:

*68. You would not give cloth and so forth  
To servants that cannot be ordered around.  
Hence, if this body leaves you despite your care,  
Why do you build up your flesh to make it firm?*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary quite clearly explains the meaning of this verse.

If in the world, for example, slaves and entourage are not able to do the work or if they do not serve food, clothing and so forth to their master, then they are punished.

As this body will leave you, without your control, despite having nourished and cared for it with effort, then why do you build up its flesh to make it firm?

It is unsuitable.

The example presented here refers back to ancient times when great kings or masters had slaves and an entourage of people (for example a king would have an entourage of ministers and so forth). If slaves who worked for the lords were not actually able to do the work, such as serving food or making clothing etc., then they would be punished or even expelled. Similarly if the ministers didn't do the work required of them, they could be punished or even expelled from their position. Even these days we can see people fired from their jobs if they don't work properly, so we can relate to this example.

The commentary further explains that: *as this body will leave you, without your control, despite having nourished and*

*cared for it with effort, then why do you build up its flesh to make it firm?*, implying this is unsuitable. What is being explained here again reflects the reality that we have to discard this body. No matter how much we nourish it and care for it, it will have to be discarded and left behind. With no intention to achieve a greater purpose with this body, merely eating and consuming as a way of protecting its flesh is futile and of no real benefit. The personal instruction here is that while we do need to protect our body by consuming, eating, clothing it, drinking and finding shelter for it etc., we should do it with the intention that the very purpose of feeding and clothing our bodies etc. is so that we can engage in the practice of the Dharma to benefit other sentient beings. With a sense of love and compassion in one's heart, one can perform the numerous normal daily activities as a practice of Dharma, by remembering to make appropriate offerings each time one eats or drinks. After that one should generate the mind that thinks, 'May consuming this now become a means to nourish my body so that I can use it to engage in Dharma practices to benefit other sentient beings'.

With this intention in our mind, our normal activities of drinking and eating become a great means to accumulate merit to further enhance love and compassion. In this way you can see that by just changing one's attitude towards normal activities, it can turn them into a great practice. These are the instructions for those who really want to take the initiative to try and engage in the practice of Dharma. Make it part of your life: turn whatever you do into a Dharma practice. This instruction is very, very valuable. I personally definitely try to remind myself of this point each time I drink and eat. I don't eat mindlessly, I try and use it for this purpose.

If we can remind ourselves of these points, then whatever activity we engage in to sustain ourselves will become an activity that acquires the conditions for the practice of Dharma. When we talk about the conditions for Dharma practice, we might think of something grand, or something which is beyond our normal activities, but if we can understand that the appropriate conditions for practising Dharma begins with a sound body, then whatever helps to nourish a healthy body definitely becomes the conditions for practising Dharma.

#### **1.3.2.1.5.3. Having given a wage one should get what one wants**

Again, using the example of work and wages, if you give a wage to someone to work for you then you expect them to do their service.

The verse reads:

*69. After giving the body its wage,  
Put it to work for your purpose.  
Without any return  
Do not offer everything to it.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary clarifies the meaning.

Having given the body its wage of food, clothing and so forth one should put it to work now for one's purpose of creating virtuous karma. Without the slightest benefit one should not offer the body all this food, clothing and so forth, without getting any benefit in return.

The commentary explains that when we feed and clothe our body it is as if we are giving it its wage. For example, when you pay workers a wage you expect the work to be completed. Similarly, feeding one's body with food and clothing it, the body should then work for one's intended purpose—to create virtuous karma. Creating virtuous karma is in direct contrast to creating non-virtuous karma. Non-virtues of the physical body include killing, stealing and sexual misconduct, and if one used one's body to create non-virtue, then that would definitely have defeated the purpose of having such a body.

However, if one can refrain from these negative deeds and employ the body to create virtuous karma as a means to obtain a good rebirth next life, or better still, to become a cause to obtain liberation and ultimately enlightenment for the purpose of all living beings, then the benefit ranges from a temporary benefit to the ultimate benefit that one can use one's body to achieve. *Without the slightest benefit one should not offer the body all this food and clothing without getting any benefit in return* means if we were not to get anything in return, then it is meaningless to serve this body. There is another connotation here too. If, instead of benefit, one generates harm with one's body then there is no point supporting it. In this case it would be better not to feed it and give it care. A contemporary example of this may be individuals who have fed their body to the point where it becomes so obese that they can't even stand up or walk around. What benefit is the body in this situation? This is an implication that one needs to also understand.

#### **1.3.2.1.5.4. It is appropriate to work for sentient beings by adapting the recognition of a boat**

This heading presents the example of a boat as a means of ferrying passengers from one side of a river to the other. Similarly, we need to use our perfect conditions to bring ourselves from the shore of samsara across to the other shore, which is the state of liberation and ultimately enlightenment—just like the boat.

The verse reads:

*70. Regard the body as a boat  
Merely for coming and going.  
Transform it into a wish fulfilling body  
To accomplish the welfare of sentient beings.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains the concept further.

This body is here, in this life, merely as a basis for striving in virtue as it is the basis for coming and going. In such a way, view it with the recognition of it being a like boat for crossing the ocean of cyclic existence, and transform it into the precious wish-fulfilling jewel of a Buddha's body, so as to achieve the welfare of all sentient beings.

The point explained here is to regard our body as the basis for striving in virtue. We use our body to come and go, but it should be the basis for actually striving in virtue. The analogy presented here: *In such a way, view it with the recognition of it being like a boat for crossing the ocean of cyclic existence*, which uses the boat as an example. Just as a boat is used to ferry passengers from one side of a river to the other, so we should use our body to cross the ocean of samsara, from cyclic existence to the shore of enlightenment.

As the commentary highlights, by using our body like a boat to cross the ocean of cyclic existence, having crossed to the other shore of enlightenment, we need to transform our body into the precious wish-fulfilling body of a buddha's body. By engaging in the practice and having generated the altruistic mind of bodhicitta, then the practice one engages in is the six perfections. So, through the combination of the altruistic mind of bodhicitta and the actions of the six perfections, we engage in the practices on the path to reach enlightenment. Thus we need to use our body now as a means to achieve a complete transformed state, where one achieves the two bodies of a buddha: the wisdom truth body and the form body of a buddha. This becomes the means to fulfil one's aspiration to benefit all sentient beings.

### 1.3.2.2. TO BE SKILFUL IN PRACTISING VIRTUE

The presentations under this heading are very practical and applicable advice for our everyday life, which we really need to take on board. There are three subheadings:

#### 1.3.2.2.1. Making ordinary actions beautiful

1.3.2.2.2. Skilfully interacting with others in a virtuous way. The literal explanation is being skilled about engaging with others as a way to be free from misdeeds.

#### 1.3.2.2.3. Being skilful in the actions of the three doors

##### *1.3.2.2.1. Making ordinary actions beautiful*

This is subdivided into three:

##### 1.3.2.2.1.1. How to act when meeting others

##### 1.3.2.2.1.2. How to handle one's possessions

##### 1.3.2.2.1.3. Always perform actions in a courteous manner

##### 1.3.2.2.1.1. How to act when meeting others

This addresses how to act when you encounter others. It reflects on what kind of gestures to express and so forth.

The verse reads:

71. *Thus those possessing control  
Should always wear a smile,  
Clear away wrathful grimaces and frowns,  
Be migrators' friend and be honest.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary expands upon this:

Thus one should take control of one's body and mind and always smile at others. Clear away wrathful grimaces and frowns and be a good friend to migrators. When talking be gentle and truthful.

The line from the verse which says: *Thus those possessing control*, means having control over one's body and mind, particularly one's own mind. When one encounters others one should always have a smiling face and a pleasant gesture, and refrain from wrathful grimaces, like a dark face or frowns. By taking the initiative to be a good friend to migrators, one will always be close to others and have affection towards others. Further, the advice when talking is to be gentle and truthful. The Tibetan word translated here as *gentle* has the connotation of using words which are likeable and suitable for the others to hear. How to act when meeting others is something we need to take on board and try to put into practice.

##### 1.3.2.2.1.2. How to handle one's possessions

This relates to handling things in our area, in our room, in our surroundings. It is very practical advice about how to

take things out from somewhere and how to put them back in an appropriate way. This affects immediate neighbours or people that live next to you. The main point is that we need to be considerate and not to disturb them in any way.

The verse reads:

- 72ab. *Do not throw beds and so forth  
Around noisily without consideration.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary adds:

Do not throw possessions like beds and so forth noisily around because this harms others.

While the explanation here is quite clear, the verse relates to being considerate to others who are living with you, next to you, or close by, such as neighbours,. When the commentary says *do not throw* it means do not handle possessions roughly. For example, when you are opening doors, or when you are taking things out, be considerate. One might unintentionally have no consideration, but apparently there are those who actually do things noisily, like banging the doors or taking things noisily, as a way to annoy their neighbours or roommates. If you see them also showing a dark or sullen face, these are inappropriate gestures in relation to the handling of things.

##### 1.3.2.2.1.3. Always perform actions in a courteous manner

The third subdivision refers to always being mindful not to disturb others when engaging in any activity. This means to be considerate of others' needs and acting appropriately in any given situation.

The verse reads:

- 72cd. *Also, do not open the door roughly  
And always delight in being quiet.*  
73. *Water fowl, cats and thieves  
Go quietly and are inconspicuous  
Thus achieving their goals.  
The able ones always act in such a way.*

While this is quite clear we can go into a little bit more detail in our next session. Here we need to reflect on how Shantideva is presenting really practical ways of being considerate, and how to behave appropriately in accordance with others' needs and space and time. This is very appropriate practical advice that we need to apply in our daily life.

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

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Edited Version*

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# 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

26 August 2014

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Based on the motivation that has been generated during the recitation of the *Refuge and Bodhicitta Prayer*, let us now engage in the practice of meditation.

[meditation]

We can now generate the motivation for receiving the teachings along these lines:

In order to benefit all sentient beings I need to achieve enlightenment myself. So for that purpose I will listen to the teachings, and put them into practice well.

### 1.3.2.2. BEING SKILFUL IN PRACTISING VIRTUE

#### 1.3.2.2.1. Making ordinary actions beautiful

#### 1.3.2.2.1.3. Always perform actions in a courteous manner (cont.)<sup>1</sup>

73cd. *Also, do not open the door roughly  
And always delight in being quiet.*

74. *Water fowl, cats and thieves  
Go quietly and are inconspicuous  
Thus achieving their goals.*

*The able ones always act in such a way.*

These lines give us examples showing how, when we engage in any kind of activities we need to be courteous and mindful of the needs and space of others. Basically, the advice comes down to how to be polite with others.

In this and the following verses, Shantideva exhorts us to practise in a manner that is courteous and pleasing to others, and which will bring them joy. I regularly emphasise the importance of being considerate to others and the need to relate to others in a proper way. We can see here that Shantideva is presenting the very points that I regularly emphasise, so I have very good support from him.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains the last two lines of verse 72 in this way:

Because it harms those that are also at home, do not open doors roughly. Always delight in being quiet and in actions that make others happy.

As presented here, when you come in or leave a room be mindful about not shutting the door loudly, as it will disturb the person inside. This is particularly important when there are lamas, such as our own teachers and so forth, meditating and doing their practices. And, of course, shutting the door noisily will definitely upset ordinary people who are easily irritated. Therefore we need to be mindful about not disturbing others in this way.

When Gyaltsab Je states *Always delight in being quiet and in actions that make others happy*, he is exhorting us to have a

quiet demeanour, and to engage in actions that always make others happy.

Thus far the presentation has been on how to engage in actions out of consideration for others. Next comes a presentation of how acting in a gentle manner becomes a means to achieve one's own purpose. Gyaltsab Je gives us these examples:

Examples for achieving one's purpose with gentle actions: water fowl, cats and thieves go quietly and inconspicuously and in such a way achieve what they desire. The Able One, or otherwise the disciplined bodhisattvas always conduct themselves in this manner.

The literal translation uses the term 'water birds', referring to birds that rely on rivers and lakes to catch fish, such as storks. When they are hunting for fish they stand in the water very quietly and still so that they don't disturb the surroundings and frighten the fish. In this way they are able to catch any fish that come close to them.

Likewise when cats go about catching mice they are quietly inconspicuous and move in a very, very gentle and quiet manner. And, of course, in order to be successful, thieves have to move about quietly if they are to achieve their purpose.

Furthermore, the commentary explains, the Able One or bodhisattvas following the discipline always act in this way. When bodhisattvas engage in actions to benefit others they always do it in a very quiet, dignified manner. They are always gentle with their speech and actions, engaging with others in a very gentle and pleasing way.

This is how bodhisattvas, with their intention to benefit sentient beings, act in ways that are completely in accordance with the wishes of others, in order to please them and give them joy. By reflecting upon this, we need to be inspired to always act in the same manner. Even as an aspiration we need to generate thoughts such as, 'May I also be able to practise just like the bodhisattvas'. Thus, by appreciating the gentle ways and manners of bodhisattvas, we should aspire to be like them.

On a personal level we need to reflect upon the great significance of engaging in our everyday actions so that they don't affect others in a negative way. Of course there are times when we have a bad day, where we might act or speak in a less than courteous manner. While we might not have immediate control over our behaviour, in hindsight we can think, 'Oh, that was not proper'. Then, in order to prevent them from escalating further, we can remind ourselves, 'I have listened to Shantideva's advice from this precious text, so acting in this way is not at all appropriate for me now. As there is no benefit for me and it definitely harms others, I shall definitely overcome such behaviour'. When you remind yourself in this way, it will help to prevent negative behaviour from escalating

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<sup>1</sup> Last week 'Achieve all in a quiet way' was used as the heading.  
Chapter 5

### 1.3.2.2.2. *Be skilled in interacting with others, free of misdeeds*<sup>2</sup>

This refers to ensuring that, when we interact with others, we are not engaging in negative deeds. There are five sub-divisions:

1.3.2.2.2.1. How to act in relation to well-meant advice

1.3.2.2.2.2. How to act in relation to speaking the truth

1.3.2.2.2.3. How to act in relation to creating merit

1.3.2.2.2.4. How to act when the qualities of others are praised

1.3.2.2.2.5. The benefit of making others happy

Here we can see how Shantideva is presenting very practical advice relating to our normal, everyday actions. We often encounter others who offer well-meant advice with the best intentions, and we need to know how to respond to that. Likewise, when others speak the truth, we also need to know how to act in that situation. Another situation is how to react when one sees others creating merit. Then there is the situation of knowing how to act when the qualities of others are praised. This section of the text concludes with a discussion of the actual benefit of making others happy. These are very practical points of advice that we really need to take on-board and implement in our lives.

#### 1.3.2.2.2.1 How to act in relation to well-meant advice

74. *Skilful in inducing others and,  
Through placing unsought beneficial  
Words respectfully on your crown  
Become the student of all.*

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je explains:

Be skilful in inducing others to practising virtue.

Although one didn't ask for it, if someone gives well-meant unsolicited advice, one should place that advice joyfully and respectfully on one's crown. Without pride one should always become the student of all that have provided good advice.

The first point is to *be skilful in inducing others to practise virtue*. This has two elements.

- When one intends to present advice to others about accumulating virtue one should be skilled in knowing what is right and wrong. Then, based on that clear understanding, one should encourage others to practise virtue.
- The second element relates to receiving advice from others about engaging in virtue. One should have the discriminating wisdom to analyse what is correct and right, and then apply the advice according to that understanding. As the commentary clearly presents, when well-meant unsought advice is presented by others, one should take that *advice* joyfully and *respectfully place it on one's crown*. This means that when the advice is presented in accordance to the Dharma then, *without pride one should always become the student of all who have provided good advice*.

There might be situations where some may feel, 'I have much more knowledge than you. Who are you to give me that kind of advice?' Rather than accepting that advice one may be offended, thinking, with a sense of pride, 'I

know better than you'. That would be an inappropriate response to well-meant advice.

Here we are being presented with some very, very practical advice. As a matter of fact, advice may come from any of these three sources: someone who has greater knowledge than oneself, someone who one considers one's equal, or from someone normally considered to have less knowledge than oneself, such as a youngster. In any of these situations, the bodhisattva's practice is to really welcome well-meant advice, receiving it very graciously and without a sense of pride, generating the attitude of seeing all as one's teachers. Although these are specific instructions relating to receiving Dharma advice, we can also apply this to worldly affairs as well.

Normally the instruction is to really check and investigate whether the advice one receives is appropriate and whether one should accept it. This section, however, refers to well-meant advice, where the practice is to take and appreciate such advice. The implication is that one should willingly appreciate advice that is meaningful and useful and place it on top of one's crown with respect, and thus regard oneself as a student of all.

#### 1.3.2.2.2.2. How to act in relation to speaking the truth

The first two lines from the next verse are presented here:

*75ab. Everything that is said well  
Should be commented on as virtue.*

Here the commentary states:

Everything well said as the truth should be commented on as virtuous speech.

Of course the meaning of these lines and the following verses is quite clear. *Everything well said as the truth should be commented on as virtuous speech* refers particularly to all speech on the Dharma, which is of course based on truth and reality. Whenever others speak about the Dharma one should comment on that as being really wonderful and virtuous speech. So one should praise the well-spoken truth of Dharma words, and, in that way show appreciation, rather than scorn or ridicule. This also prevents jealousy from arising.

When others are presenting the Dharma, or sharing advice with others, we should rejoice, and praise them, saying, 'That is really wonderful virtuous speech'. Such comments are the opposite of comments one might make out of jealousy. If one's mind is affected by jealousy then one could not make such nice comments. So we need to take this advice on-board, and when others are presenting the words of truth of the Dharma, comment on that as being virtuous. It is said that when we praise others without any sense of jealousy, it is a really meritorious deed. So conducting ourselves in this manner is a way to accumulate virtue or merit.

We need to relate this point about speaking the truth without jealousy to the earlier heading which is to Being Skilled in Interacting With Others, Free Of Misdeeds.

<sup>2</sup> This subdivision was first mentioned on 22 July 2014, as Skillfully Acting with Others in a Virtuous Way.

### 1.3.2.2.3. How to act in relation to creating merit

This relates to witnessing others creating merit. The next two lines read:

*75cd. When seeing somebody being meritorious  
Inspire joy through praise.*

Here Gyaltsab Je explains:

When seeing somebody being meritorious, making offerings and so forth to the Triple Gem, inspire joy and happiness in their minds by directly praising them.

Of course these points were explained extensively in the third chapter on the virtue that is accumulated from rejoicing in the deeds of others.

These lines of verse make the same point. When one sees others engaging in meritorious deeds, such as making offerings and so forth to the Three Jewels, then, if appropriate, one comments on what great deeds they are doing. And if it is not possible to do that, the main thing is to rejoice, and mentally praise them. That will prevent negative minds such as jealousy, pride and so forth from arising.

As presented earlier, when one rejoices in the good deeds of someone who has greater realisations than oneself, then one gets nearly half of that merit oneself. If the one who is generating that virtue and merit is of lower status than oneself, then one gains even more merit. This is how the teachings present the great benefits of rejoicing.

### 1.3.2.2.4. How to act when the qualities of others are praised

The verse from the text reads:

*76. Comment on qualities secretly,  
When qualities are mentioned, agree.  
If one's qualities are mentioned,  
Check whether there are qualities.*

Here Gyaltsab Je explains:

As it may cause doubts of flattery if one expresses them directly, secretly praise the qualities of others. When others praise the qualities of a third then agree by saying, 'It is like that'.

If your qualities are praised, then without conceit analyse whether the mind really has these qualities or not. If you have, then simply recognise that you have that quality without becoming proud.

The first part of the explanation in the commentary is that if there is a doubt that one's praise might be perceived as flattery, then in order to prevent that possibility, one should practise praising others in secret. If one were to praise others just to flatter them, then that wouldn't be genuine praise, because one is expecting something in return.

If you are not mindful when you praise someone, it may cause them to feel, 'Oh, I wonder why they are praising me. Maybe they want something from me and are just saying that to make me think well of them'. Because of this danger the safest practice is to praise others in secret.

The next point presented in the commentary is also very, very significant and relevant to our normal dealings with others. When others praise the qualities of another person, then we should agree with that praise by saying, 'Yes, it is like that, just as you say'.

The reason why this practice is emphasised here is that if the person being praised is someone who is likeable, then, even if it is not fitting praise, we might say, 'Yes, that is true. They have a lot of qualities'. Whereas if it is someone one doesn't like, then even though they are being rightly praised, we might say, 'Oh, I'm not sure about them'. The main point here is that whether the person to whom the praises are offered is agreeable to oneself or not, the best practice is to acknowledge that praise and say, 'It is like that'. Adopting such conduct not only prevents one from engaging in misdeeds, but we also accumulate great merit by acknowledging the qualities of others.

Furthermore, agreeing in that way also makes the one who is offering the praise joyful too.

The next point in the commentary is also very relevant and significant advice. It relates to when others praise your qualities: *If your qualities are praised, then without conceit analyse whether the mind really has these qualities or not.*

If someone were to talk about qualities they may see in you and so forth, then reacting with a sense of, 'Oh, I might be great. Oh, they have mentioned my qualities so I might be someone special', would be only increasing one's pride. To assess whether what they say is true, one should first check as to whether one does actually have those qualities, and that the praise is fitting. If one does have those qualities, accept that praise but without any conceit or pride.

### 1.3.2.2.5. The benefit of making others happy

What are the benefits of making others happy?

*77. Because all efforts are to bring joy,  
It is so precious that it is priceless.  
Thus, enjoy the blissful happiness  
That comes from the virtue of working for  
others.*

*78. In this life one will be peerless  
And also on the other side will be great  
happiness.  
Faults cause unhappiness and suffering  
And also on the other side will be great  
suffering.*

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je explains:

All the actions of the three doors of bodhisattvas are to make others happy. Because this happiness of others is so precious, it is priceless, like a rare object that cannot be bought even with great wealth.

As presented in the commentary, *all the actions of the bodhisattvas through their three doors—physical, speech and mental intentions—are performed as a means to make others happy and bring them joy.* Bodhisattvas are always engaged in actions that make others happy, because they are aware that the *happiness others experience is priceless, like a rare object that cannot be bought.* No matter how much money or wealth you may have, you cannot use it to purchase the happiness of others.

Thus, bodhisattvas always use the most appropriate ways and means to make others joyful. As mentioned here, that is because the joy and happiness of others is priceless. I regularly emphasise that we need to engage in actions that will make others joyful and happy. We all have that

potential, so it is worthwhile to actually utilise it to bring about joy and happiness to others.

As much as possible, we need to minimise, and try to rid ourselves of any gestures, mannerisms, and behaviours that cause misery to others. If we notice our actions are bringing about misery and agony, then we need to definitely refrain from those actions. Conversely, we need to engage in actions that bring joy to others.

The second paragraph of the commentary reads:

Therefore, with the quality of making others happy, others will not be jealous of one in this life. By practising making others happy, joy in this life will not decline, and one will without doubt also receive possessions and so forth, and in the life beyond one will also attain great happiness.

There are unintentional benefits from making others happy.

- The commentary explains that *with the quality of making others happy, others will not be jealous of one in this life*. When, from one's own side, one sincerely engages in making others joyful and happy, then that will prevent others from being jealous. That is because one is actively engaged in making them happy.
- One also creates the causes for *possessions* and wealth to increase.
- *The happiness and so forth of this life will not decline*, rather it will be restored and established well.
- As a positive consequence of making others happy, one will also attain *great happiness in the life beyond*, meaning the next life. Here, happiness can range from attaining the happiness of the humans or gods, to obtaining the happiness of liberation and the ultimate happiness of full enlightenment.

So these are the great benefits of making others happy.

Next, Gyalsab Je explains a very significant point:

Otherwise, [meaning if we practise contrary to the aforementioned conduct] as the shortcomings of being angry at the qualities of others, one will experience in this life mental unhappiness and physical suffering, and also in the next life one will experience great suffering.

Having mentioned the benefits of making others happy, if one were to practise the opposite, which is being angry at others' qualities, then, rather than rejoicing in them then, *one will immediately experience mental unhappiness and physical suffering in this life*.

Generally, being unhappy is the basis on which one generates anger. Anger and mental unhappiness usually support each other. If you check, you will notice that anger usually arises when the mind is unhappy. So when one is not happy with someone else's qualities, then that is the basis for starting to become upset and angry. The main point here is if we generate anger about qualities of others, then that will cause further mental agony, as well as physical suffering. So, here again we find some very pertinent advice, which is that being angry affects our mental health, as well as causing us physical harm.

Through their investigations, scientists have come to the conclusion that those with a very temperamental nature, who are always irritated and angry, are more likely to

have physical ailments such as strokes. Apparently anger can induce the blood clots that cause strokes. I have also heard that a perpetually angry attitude suppresses the immune system, making the person much more prone to illness and disease.

The main point mentioned in the text is that if we adopt a mind of joy, make others happy, and praise the qualities of others and so forth, we will receive benefits both in this life and the lives to come.

Conversely, if we practise being angry and upset with the qualities of others, then it will cause mental agony as well as physical suffering in this life and future lives.

That is really the main point. We are being encouraged to practise in accordance with the benefits for oneself.

### 1.3.2.2.3. *Being skilful in the actions of the three doors*

The three subdivisions under this heading are:

- 1.3.2.2.3.1. How to act while one speaks
- 1.3.2.2.3.2. How to act while one looks
- 1.3.2.2.3.3. Relating oneself only to virtuous actions

#### 1.3.2.2.3.1. How to act while one speaks

79. *When speaking it should be agreeable and coherent,  
Clear and pleasant.  
Without attachment or anger,  
One should speak gently and appropriately.*

Gyalsab Je's commentary explains:

As it is explained in the *Sutra of the Ten Grounds*, when speaking with others it should be agreeable from the heart, coherent, easily understandable, clear and pleasant, in order to be acceptable to their mind.

Having abandoned the motivations of attachment and anger, one should speak gently and appropriately in regard to time and amount.

As explained in the commentary, *when speaking with others*, one should speak *from the heart*. One should use only truthful words and say them in an *agreeable* way.

In the Tibetan version the word translated in the commentary as *coherent* has the meaning of there being a consistent connection between the first and second parts, making it easily understandable. The point about being clear and consistent in what you are saying is so that others can trust your words.

Next, speech should be *clear and pleasant*, and *acceptable* to the minds of others. Here *clear* has the significance of serving to clear away doubts that others might have. If one is not clear, then even after explanation people will still have doubts about what you said. If you are clear in your speech then that will remove any potential doubts from their mind.

Furthermore, the *motivation* of one's words or speech to others should be one that is removed from attachment and anger, thus ensuring that whatever words one relays to others are not based on attachment or anger.

*One should speak gently* as opposed to speaking harshly. Speaking *appropriately in regard to time and amount* refers to making the length of the presentation in accordance to what is acceptable to others.

As the commentary states, *this is as explained in 'The Sutra of the Ten Grounds'*.

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#### 1.3.2.2.3.2. How to act while one looks

This explains how to look at others and how to act in such a way.

80. *When looking at sentient beings say,  
"In dependence on this very sentient being  
I will become a buddha",  
And look at them honestly and lovingly.*

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

Here, Gyaltsab Je explains:

When we look at sentient beings then, similar to the happiness we receive from drinking a refreshing drink after having been thirsty, we think, 'In dependence on this very sentient being I will attain enlightenment', and look at them with a clear mind in a loving manner.

*Transcript prepared by Judy Mayne  
Edit 1 by Adair Bunnnett  
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Edited Version  
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As explained in the commentary, the analogy is that if one is really thirsty any drink that quenches our thirst will be really refreshing and rejuvenating.

The point of the illustration is that being thirsty is an unpleasant experience and that the suffering of thirst is removed when one quenches one's thirst with water. Similarly, that which relieves the overall suffering in our life is, of course, reaching the state of enlightenment. So when we encounter sentient beings, we can remind ourselves, 'Through this very sentient being I will achieve enlightenment'.

From the accounts in the Buddha's life stories and so forth, the very first stage in the generation of bodhicitta is in relation to developing love and compassion for sentient beings. And of course all the practices in which the bodhisattvas engage in the middle are also in relation to sentient beings. Finally, the ultimate state of enlightenment is attained in relation to sentient beings. Therefore, all the stages, from the beginning to the end result of enlightenment, relate to sentient beings.

The thought to generate in our mind as soon as we encounter any sentient being is, *in dependence on this very sentient being I will attain enlightenment*. With that thought in mind we look at others with a clear mind and a loving attitude, thus generating love and compassion toward the sentient being. If, when we encounter sentient beings we can adopt this advice then we will only have a positive state of mind, free from judgement and prejudice and so forth. Having such a clear state of mind recognises this person in front of us as the very sentient being who will help us to become enlightened.

#### 1.3.2.2.3.3. Relating oneself only to virtuous actions

This is subdivided into three. The three subdivisions under this heading are:

- 1.3.2.2.3.3.1. Practising generosity to the special field of offering
- 1.3.2.2.3.3.2. Creating virtue out of one's own power
- 1.3.2.2.3.3.3. Increasing one's virtue evermore and thinking about the purpose.

We can go through the explanations of these subheadings in the next session.

# 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

2 September 2014

As usual we can spend some time in meditation.

*(pause for meditation)*

We can now generate the motivation for receiving the teachings along these lines—in order to benefit all sentient beings I will strive to achieve enlightenment, so for that purpose I will listen to the teachings and put them into practice well.

## 1.3.2.2.3.3. Relating oneself only to virtuous actions (cont.)

This has three subheadings:

1.3.2.2.3.3.1. Practising generosity to the special field of offering

1.3.2.2.3.3.2. Creating virtue out of one's own power

1.3.2.2.3.3.3. Virtues are progressively superior, therefore think about the purpose before the action

*1.3.2.2.3.3.1. Practising generosity to the special field of offering*

This is similar to the explanation we covered in *Precious Garland* by Nagarjuna.

The verse reads:

81. *Whether arising continually through a clear wish  
Or through the antidote itself, in dependence  
On the fields of qualities, benefit and suffering,  
Great virtue is generated.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains the meaning of the verse as follows:

Engaging in virtue on a continual basis motivated by a clear wish, i.e. a strong aspiration; and an antidote against the opposing side—such as attachment and so forth; in relation to the three supreme fields:

- Field of qualities: The Triple Gem and so forth.
- Field of benefit: One's parents and so forth.
- Field of misery: The destitute, sick, disenfranchised and so forth.

Making offerings to these objects in this manner creates great virtue, thus one should strive in it.

As the commentary explains, accumulating virtue is not to be done sporadically, but rather on a continual basis. There shouldn't be times when one accumulates virtue and other times where one leaves it out. If one wonders when the appropriate time to engage in virtue is, the answer presented here is, at all times, on a continual basis.

Furthermore, engaging in virtue must be accompanied with a clear wish, which is a strong aspiration, and serve as an antidote against the opposing side i.e. the delusions such as attachment and so forth. Thus, the accumulation of virtue has to be accompanied with a strong aspiration,

and ensure that it serves as an antidote to overcome the opposing side. For example, when one engages in practising the virtue of generosity, one needs to ensure that it becomes an antidote for overcoming miserliness, and when practising morality ensure that it serves as an antidote to overcome corrupt ethics and so forth. The emphasis here is that when one accumulates virtue, one needs to ensure that it actually becomes an antidote to overcome an opposing non-virtuous state of mind, specifically the delusions. If you do not apply the practice in this way, you will find that there is not much transformation taking place in your mind. As the great Kadampa master advised: one needs to engage continuously in practising virtue and ensure that it serves as a means to subdue one's mind, by overcoming the delusions in one's mind. So that should be the main purpose of accumulating virtue.

In this explanation three particulars are being pointed out:

- The particular of time or duration for accumulating virtue—which is on a continual basis;
- The particular of an antidote—which is to overcome delusions in one's mind; and
- The particular of relying on the three supreme fields—which are the fields of qualities i.e. the objects of refuge; the fields of benefit i.e. one's parents; and the fields of misery i.e. the destitute, sick, disenfranchised.

One should strive to make offerings to these objects in the manner described, thus accumulating great virtue. You need to also understand that in relation to the three supreme fields the opposite is also true; that if you create negativity in relation to any of these objects then it will be a grave negativity. You need to be mindful when relating to the three supreme fields, so that you protect yourself from creating heavy negativities.

As you have noticed, I regularly emphasise the need to be kind to one's parents, particularly one's aging parents. So, you can see that this presentation is supporting me.

*1.3.2.2.3.3.2. Creating virtue out of one's own power*

This indicates that engaging in virtue should occur from one's own side. In other words, one needs to take the initiative to create virtue oneself and not rely on others to create virtue for you.

The root text and commentary both present the meaning for this heading, which is quite clear and easy to understand. However the emphasis is that we need to take the initiative—to try and put this into practice by being mindful in our daily life.

The verse reads:

82. *Having become proficient and faithful  
I will continuously engage in the actions.  
In all my actions I will not  
Depend on anyone.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

Having become proficient in what has to be adopted and what has to be abandoned, and in what one should engage in and what one should not, as well as having generated faith in virtue, I shall now continuously practise virtue.

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I shall not depend on anybody in my actions of virtue in the sense that I will not order others to do them.

In relation to *having to become proficient in what has to be adopted and what has to be abandoned*, one needs to know the clear distinction between what is to be adopted and what is to be abandoned. Without a clear understanding, one will not be able to adopt certain necessary qualities and abandon certain detrimental faults. This would be a drawback to our spiritual progress. Although on the one hand one may be putting some effort into adopting virtues, on the other hand one could be failing to discard certain faults detrimental to our progress (e.g. negative behaviours and so forth). If one fails to recognise what the faults are from the very beginning, then it will be hard to take the initiative to overcome them. While adopting positive qualities ensures progress in one's Dharma practice, this can only happen when the opposing faults and negativities within oneself begin to decrease. When, by adopting qualities the faults naturally decrease, then that is a true mark of one's Dharma progress, and a sign that a real transformation is taking place.

Again, a clear distinction between what one should engage in (virtues), and the negativities one should avoid should be clearly understood. This, along with generating faith in virtue, becomes a proper way to engage in the practice of accumulating virtue. Generating faith in virtue specifically means having faith in the infallibility of virtue; that by engaging in virtue positive consequences are definitely experienced. In contrast, if one were to engage in non-virtue, then the infallibility of the consequences of an unwanted result, such as various types of sufferings, also occur. Basically the infallibility of karma is applied here. So, when one has faith and a strong conviction in the infallibility of virtue, then one will develop a natural, keen wish to generate virtue. One will actually be motivated to create virtue, because one has a strong conviction in the positive consequences, so one is inspired to continuously engage in virtue.

The essential points here are twofold: to become proficient, that is to gain a good, clear understanding of what is to be adopted and what is to be abandoned; and on top of that, generating strong faith in the very virtue that one wishes to engage in. When sound faith and conviction are developed, one will develop a strong, keen initiative to continuously practise virtue. The commentary states the resolve one needs to develop: *I shall now continuously practise virtue*. Again this is not a casual approach, but rather taking the personal responsibility and resolving to accumulate virtue at all times. These points are really pertinent guides for our practice. I find these verses very helpful for my mind. When you read these verses and pay attention to their meaning, not just to gain an intellectual understanding, but with the intention to implement them in one's practice, then they will be very helpful for your mind.

The commentary emphasises: *I shall not depend on anybody in my actions of virtue*. This implies that one will not order others to accumulate the virtue for oneself; rather, accumulating virtue is dependent on one's own resolve. This is similar to other sutra teachings where Buddha says that liberation is dependent entirely upon oneself.

That means attaining liberation is not dependent on someone else but entirely dependent on oneself.

1.3.2.2.3.3.3. *Virtues are progressively superior, therefore think about the purpose before the action*

In relation to the six perfections, the later practices are progressively superior than the earlier, which means the later practices are of greater virtue than the earlier ones. However when engaging in the practices, one needs to be mindful to adopt practices of greater purpose in accordance to the time and need to benefit other sentient beings. The verse reads:

83. *The perfections of giving and so forth  
Increase them one after the other.  
Do not abandon the big for the small,  
Mainly think towards the purpose of others.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

The perfections of generosity and so forth up to the perfection of wisdom, are progressively developed and increased.

Do not give up the practices of generosity, morality and so forth that are smaller from the point of view of purpose and virtue, to the generosity and so forth that are bigger. Strive in the bigger.

This shows implicitly that if we cannot practice both together and have to choose, then we should abandon the smaller for the bigger.

Query: How does one posit small and big?

Answer: For example, if in this life, out of the purpose of self and the purpose of other, practising one affects the other to decline, then one should make the purpose of other the main practice.

In relation to the six perfections, Gyaltsab Je states that the practice of morality for example, would be of higher virtue than the practice of generosity. With this explanation, one would create far more virtue practising morality for one day, than practising generosity for many days or weeks.

Those who have done the *nyung nye* practice would have noticed the description of the merit for keeping the eight Mahayana precepts even for one day or 24 hours, is incredibly high.

The commentary explains: *Do not give up the practices of generosity, morality and so forth that are smaller from the point of view of purpose and virtue to the generosity and so forth that are bigger. Strive in the bigger.*

Practising morality in the sequence of the six perfections would generally be considered a greater virtue than generosity. However, when there is a greater purpose for practising generosity to benefit others, then one should not pass up this opportunity in favour of the practice of morality. To understand it in its proper context, if one were to practise morality with a strong self-interest, then if an opportunity arose to practice generosity with total dedication to the benefit for others, then the practice of generosity would be greater than the practice of morality which is contrived or stained with mere personal interest.

The commentary explains that *if we cannot practise both together and have to choose, then we should abandon the smaller for the bigger*. The emphasis is that one should abandon the smaller practice and adopt a bigger practice. The hypothetical query is *How does one posit small and big?*

The answer asks you to consider two choices: engaging in the practice merely for one's own purpose and concern for this life, and engaging in the practice for the purpose of others. If by practising one the other declines because they oppose each other, then one should make the purpose of others the main practice. The emphasis here is that if one engages in practices with the intention to benefit just oneself, such as benefit for this life, compared to a practice where the main focus is for the purpose of other beings, then the practice focusing on other beings is the greater practice. One needs to make the distinction between the two, and adopt the practice which is for the purpose of others. As other teachings have emphasised, when one fully dedicates a practice for the purpose of others, then one's own purpose will be fulfilled naturally.

What is being emphasised here is that one needs to ensure that the practice one does is really for the purpose of others. Otherwise, if it is done merely for one's own interest or short-term goal, it will not ultimately fulfil even one's own purpose. One needs to have a clear understanding to derive the main point here. We can see how skilful the advice is here in making the clear distinction between what is a great practice and what is a small practice. And of course, when there is a choice, we would naturally want to choose something which is of greater benefit.

We need to think about our own practice; we might be in the category of those who are choosing small practices instead of bigger ones. Practices that involve mere self-interest for this life's benefit, and practices where the sole intention is to benefit others, are mutually exclusive, and cannot be practised at the same time. If these two practices were presented to you, which one would you choose? As they cannot be practised together, which one would you choose? If one has a bodhisattva motivation one needs to choose the practice which is for the purpose of others. This is also in the motivation for tantric practices.

### **1.3.3. Training in the morality that accomplishes the welfare of sentient beings**

This subdivision has three subcategories:

1.3.3.1. Diligence in the welfare of others

1.3.3.2. The action of gathering others without incurring a fault

1.3.3.3. Protecting sentient beings' minds and training in the action of not incurring fault

#### **1.3.3.1. DILIGENCE IN THE WELFARE OF OTHERS**

The two first lines of the next verse relate to this heading.

The verse reads:

*84ab. Having understood this, they abide always  
Striving for the welfare of others.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary presents the meaning by beginning with a query:

Query: Bodhisattvas strive to always abide in working for others, on the basis of having understood what needs to be practised and what needs to be abandoned. But since they need to engage into a variety of actions to achieve the welfare of others, do they not receive faults?

This reflects a question raised previously in a Wednesday night teaching which asked whether bodhisattvas incur faults or not. This is exactly the same point.

The query is a reasonable doubt which comes when one witnesses a bodhisattva engage in various different kinds of actions. The question raised a few weeks ago by Vanessa was about the example of when a bodhisattva had to kill someone in order to save the other four hundred and ninety-nine people.

An answer is presented in the next two lines of the verse:

*84cd. Those with compassion have the long view  
and allow them the forbidden*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

Answer: The compassionate buddhas also see directly the phenomena hidden very far in the future. Out of this knowledge they permit the seven non-virtuous actions of body and speech, which they prohibited for hearers and self-liberators who work primarily for their own purpose, for bodhisattvas when necessary. As a result, bodhisattvas do not only not incur a fault, but for them it becomes a great accumulation when they engage in these actions.

Within the ten non-virtues, the first seven, i.e. the three of the physical and four of the speech, were completely forbidden for hearers and solitary realisers. Under no circumstances were practitioners of the Lower Vehicle permitted to do these actions. However, bodhisattvas are permitted to do these actions when it is deemed necessary for the benefit of other sentient beings. What will be presented next is a story where, if it were necessary to benefit a greater number of sentient beings, even engaging in an action of killing does not incur negativity, but in fact becomes a means to accumulate large amounts of merit.

As an example the commentary quotes from the *Sutra of Being Proficient in the Great Secret*, which reads:

From the *Sutra of Being Proficient in the Great Secret* it is taught that because the captain killed the evildoer, his time in cyclic existence was reduced by many eons. It is also like it was taught to the Brahmin's son Karma'i Jungwa.

This refers to the bodhisattvas who were permitted the seven of body and speech by those with great compassion, who see far ahead.

This story is from ancient times when merchants had to travel on ships for long distances. The earlier part of the story tells that a ship was carrying 500 traders and merchants with an evil person amongst them, referred to here as an evildoer who had the intention of taking the lives of the rest of the merchants as a way to gain the profits for himself. The captain of the ship, who happened to be a practising bodhisattva, understood the evildoer's intention. So out of great compassion, as a way to protect the evildoer, and out of great compassion for the rest of the merchants whose lives would be taken, the captain of the boat took upon himself the action of taking the life of the evildoer. This protected the evildoer himself from committing a negative act, which would result in him being reborn in the hell realms, as well as saving the lives of the rest of the merchants. It was said that instead of creating negative karma, the Captain's act became a means for him to accumulate a great amount of merit, to

lessen his time in samsara by many aeons. The benefit was to protect the four hundred and ninety-nine merchants from imminent death and protect the evildoer person from incurring negative karma.

One should note that while this is one example of where the seven non-virtues forbidden for practitioners of the Lesser Vehicle whose main practice is for self-liberation are permitted for practitioners of the Great Vehicle, who only have the intention to benefit other sentient beings. So whatever activity they engage in is solely for the benefit of other sentient beings; even acts such as killing—otherwise a great misdeed—are permitted and become a means to accumulate great virtue. However, bodhisattvas with the ability to engage in such negativity only with the intention to benefit other beings with understanding and clairvoyance, would only be high-level bodhisattvas, not lower-level bodhisattvas.

Another example is an account of the Brahmin's son Karma'i Jungwa. In this story the Brahmin's son had adopted the practice of abstaining completely from sexual intercourse. For 12 years he had practised chastity, but there was a young maiden whose life was endangered because of a condition which could be cured only by sexual intercourse. Apparently, with this condition if sexual intercourse was not done the lady would have died. So out of great compassion for this young maiden, he broke his vow of chastity to save her life.

So the example of misdeeds such as killing, forbidden for practitioners of lower vehicles, becomes a means for accumulating great merit when done with the sole intention to benefit other sentient beings. For a lower-vehicle practitioner, sexual activity would be a misdeed, but when engaged in by a bodhisattva with the intention to protect someone from imminent death, it becomes a means to accumulate great merit. These are particular examples from accounts in the past and there are likely other accounts of stealing and lying etc. done solely for the benefit of others, out of compassion.

These accounts are presented in answer to the query as examples of acts actually becoming a means for them to accumulate great amounts of merit, rather than incur negativity.

Gyalsab Je's commentary highlights that:

This refers to the bodhisattvas who were permitted the seven of body and speech by those with great compassion, who see far ahead.

It explains that permission to act on *the seven of body and speech* are only to bodhisattvas who are practising great compassion and who have farsightedness.

One needs to understand committing these acts in the proper context. Non-virtues are permitted to bodhisattvas with the ability to practice extensive benefit for other sentient beings, but beginner bodhisattvas who do not yet have the ability to engage in such extensive benefits for others would not be permitted to do them.

### 1.3.3.2. THE ACTION OF GATHERING OTHERS WITHOUT INCURRING A FAULT

This is divided into two subcategories.

1.3.3.2.1. Gathering with the mundane

1.3.3.2.2. Gathering with the Dharma

#### 1.3.3.2.1. Gathering with the mundane

This in turn is subdivided into three:

1.3.3.2.1.1. The difference between offering food and not offering food

1.3.3.2.1.2. Do not harm the body for small actions

1.3.3.2.1.3. Explaining the time and necessity for offering the body

#### 1.3.3.2.1.1. The difference between offering food and not offering food

The verse reads:

*85. Share with those fallen into the wrong direction,  
With the protectorless and those abiding within austerities.  
Eat only in a measured fashion and  
Offer everything apart from the three robes.*

In response, Gyalsab Je's commentary reads:

Whilst using food, share with those fallen into the wrong direction, i.e. animals and hungry ghosts, with the protectorless sick, and with those that practice pure action and abide in austerities, if they are there as well.

As it is said, *It is appropriate for oneself to measure everything*, oneself should eat just enough according to the correct portion, without incurring faults in relation to food, and with the motivation for eating that is explained in the *Letter to a Friend*.

An ordained bodhisattva should offer everything apart from the three robes or *nam-jar, la-go* and *tang-go*. If one has more of the three robes then one should also offer these, but if one has only one set, then one should not offer one's robes. It becomes an obstacle to the practice of pure action.

The literal translation of *the distinction between when to offer food and not to offer* might relate more to sharing food with those falling into the wrong directions i.e. animals and hungry ghosts etc. In the normal practice of eating, a fully ordained monk separates some of their food, offers it to the objects of refuge, then a portion to the hungry ghost, and a portion to the animals, and dedicates it. In this way one actually divides the food to be consumed with the intention to offer it to others as well.

Having presented how to divide one's food with others such as animals and those who abide in austerities, in relation to oneself, the text quotes *Precious Garland*:

It is appropriate for oneself to measure everything,

The right measure of what one can consume should be likened to prescription medicine: if one takes too much, then rather than curing one's disease it could actually aggravate it and create harm. But if one does not take enough of the medicine, it will not help to cure the disease. Likewise, when consuming food, if one eats too much one can make one's body feel heavy and bring about a feeling of slothfulness and the onset of sleep, thus not being productive for one's practice. Whereas if one eats too little, and the body is not well nourished, it can become weak and one will not be able to engage in it properly.

Gyalsab Je's commentary further explains that:

...oneself should eat just enough according to the correct portion without incurring faults in relation to food,

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*Without incurring faults* means ensuring that one does not incur misdeeds in relation to food, e.g. eating food just for the sake of vanity, of beautifying oneself (e.g. I might look beautiful if I eat this kind of food), or just for the sake of filling oneself up for the pleasure of feeling full with food etc. In accordance with the explanation from the *Letter to a Friend*, one should avoid such motivations when eating and consuming food, and eat the correct portion: not too much, not too little and for the purpose of sustaining one's body to practise the Dharma.

Gyaltshab Je's commentary provides more explanation in relation to knowing the distinction between what is to be given and what is not to be given:

An ordained bodhisattva should offer everything apart from the three robes or *nam-jar*, *da-go* and *tang-go*. [which are particular robes for the fully ordained] If one has more of the three robes then one should also offer these, but if one has only one set, [that means if one has like two or three sets then one could offer the extra set to others] however if one has only one set then one should not offer one's robes. It becomes an obstacle to the practice of pure action.

*It becomes an obstacle to practice pure action* or pure conduct would be in relation to e.g. an ordained monk who has these robes intact. If one gave away everything there would be a fault from a fully ordained monk's perspective, as they should not be separated from one particular robe, even for a day, as being separated from it incurs a fault. But in terms of maintaining oneself e.g. if one is too cold etc. then it would harm one's practice as one would not be able to continue to practise. So it is important to know the distinction between what to give and what portion, how much to give and when not to give. Of course, how to offer the food was also explained clearly in the *Letter to the King* or *Precious Garland* as well by Nagarjuna. So it would be good for you to familiarise yourselves with this explanation, and read other commentaries as well. It is not too obscure and hard to understand, but to get a better understanding it is good to refer to other commentaries as well.

As presented earlier, there were particular ways of offering the food, and the intention held when offering it. These you can also revise. You also need to be mindful of ensuring that you are free from misdeeds in relation to consuming food, because if one is not mindful, the very process of consuming and acquiring food to sustain oneself, one may incur misdeeds. One needs to be mindful of that as well.

We can see how the advice presented here is very practical. In terms of consuming food, how to consume it when sharing with others. When consuming by oneself: how to consume it; knowing the right portion; not having too much or too little as it can harm oneself. This advice is given like a parent would give their child; very detailed advice on how to conduct oneself properly. Here, this advice is given to us by Shantideva.

In summary, the presentation is about how to engage in normal daily activities such as eating and drinking, and use them to serve as a means to accumulate virtue, and not become a cause for non-virtue, and incurring misdeeds. This is the value of the advice that we need to take in.

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

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*Edited Version*

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# Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

བྱང་ལྷན་མེས་པོ་འཇམ་དཔལ་ལྷོ་ལྷན་པ་ལ་འཇམ་པ་བཞུགས་སོ་

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

9 September 2014

As usual, we can spend some time in meditation.

(pause for meditation)

We can now generate the motivation for receiving the teachings along these lines:

In order to benefit all sentient beings I will strive to achieve enlightenment, and so for that purpose I will listen to the teachings, and put them into practice well.

### 1.3.3.2.1. Gathering with the mundane (cont.)

#### 1.3.3.2.1.2. Do not harm the body for small actions

The verse relating to this heading is:

86. *Do not harm for insignificant actions  
This body that practises the supreme Dharma.  
If one acts in this way, the wishes of sentient beings  
Will be accomplished swiftly.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary on this verse reads:

One's body, which is the basis for practice of the holy Dharma that accomplishes extensive benefit for self and others, if it is guarded well, should not be harmed for a small benefit of others. Rather it should be guarded like a wound.

If one does this, then by way of completing the three higher trainings on the basis of the precious human rebirth, one will be able to quickly accomplish the wish of sentient beings.

From the *Four Hundred Stanzas*,

Although one of course views the body as enemy  
One still protects it.  
If one lives for a long time with discipline  
Great merit will arise from it.

In this context, the precious human *body, which is the basis for the practice of the holy Dharma that accomplishes extensive benefit for self and others*, refers to a bodhisattva's body with all those conditions intact. However we can also relate this to the good conditions that we have now, such as having access to the Dharma teachings and so forth.

Here we are being advised that guarding the body means that we should not harm this precious human body, which accomplishes the ultimate wish of sentient beings, for the sake of small gains or benefits for others. The commentary uses the analogy of guarding a wound to illustrate how the body should be protected; just as one would *guard a wound* from further damage and harm, likewise we need to protect and guard our body at all times. This analogy was presented in earlier teachings and I also explained the meaning at that time.

As the commentary explains, if one protects one's body well, then because of having all the right conditions for one's practice *by way of completing the three higher trainings*

on the basis of this precious human rebirth, one will be able to quickly accomplish the wishes of sentient beings. When one fulfils one's ultimate goal of the practice of the three higher trainings, which is to achieve enlightenment, then one will naturally be able to fulfil the wish of other sentient beings as well.

In the first two lines of the *Four Hundred Stanzas* verse, *Although one of course views the body as enemy, One still protects it*, one refers to the one who sees reality, such as the noble bodhisattvas who understand ultimate truth. They see this contaminated body, which is the basis for external and internal harms and so much suffering, as an enemy. Even so, one still needs to protect this body.

The next two lines of the quote from the *Four Hundred Stanzas*, *If one lives for a long time with discipline Great merit will arise from it*, indicate that if one lives for a long time by protecting one's body with the discipline of observing morality, then one will accumulate great merit. Here, *great merit* refers to both the accumulation of wisdom as well as the accumulation of merit.

If I recall correctly, this verse is presented as a response to this doubt: if the body is to be seen as an enemy, then why would one want to protect it? You can also check the commentary on the explanation of this verse.

While the earlier explanations are quite clear it is good for us to reflect on their meaning and try to implement it in our practice.

#### 1.3.3.2.1.3. Explaining the time and necessity for offering the body

When practising generosity with one's body one needs to know the appropriate time and necessity or purpose. This explanation follows the earlier indication that one shouldn't harm one's body, such as giving one's arms or legs to others, for a very minor purpose. Now the text explains the right time and purpose for offering one's body.

87. *Do not offer this body with  
Impure thoughts of compassion.  
Offer it in any way to accomplish  
Great purpose here and yonder.*

Here Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

Although from the very beginning bodhisattvas have offered everything including their body, to sentient beings from the depth of their mind.

However, if one feels despondent with the prospect of being asked for the flesh of one's body and the like, and generates feelings of regret afterwards and so forth, then until the pure mind of compassion that cherishes others more than oneself has been developed, one should not give this body.

*Although from the very beginning* refers to the time when a trainee first becomes a bodhisattva by entering the path of accumulation. Although bodhisattvas on the preliminary stages of the path of accumulation and preparation have developed the courageous mind of offering everything for the sake of sentient beings, which would include their body and so forth, they are nevertheless still on the preliminary stages of the practices. Because there is a probability that bodhisattvas at the initial levels of practice could feel *despondent* at the *prospect* of having others ask for their flesh or body parts

and so forth, the practice of offering one's body parts is not advised. Furthermore, it is possible that one will later feel regret, rather than rejoice in giving one's body.

*Until the pure mind of compassion which cherishes others more than oneself has been fully developed* refers to the development of ultimate bodhicitta, which is within the mental continuum of those who have reached the first of the ten grounds and above. Thus, what is being explained here is that until bodhicitta has been fully developed *one should not give this body*.

The text backs this up with reference to the *Compendium of Trainings*.

This is extensively explained in the *Compendium of Trainings*, where the untimely offering of one's body is described as an action of *mara*.

As explained here, giving one's body before one has fully developed bodhicitta is considered an action influenced by *mara* or demons, which indicates that it is not a completely pure practice.

Next the commentary explains the appropriate time, which is:

One should offer it when one is really free from the obstacles to generosity, such as miserliness and so forth, and the offering becomes a faultless completion of great accumulation, and most certainly when it becomes a cause to achieve a great purpose in this life and beyond.

Thus, the appropriate time to offer this body is when the bodhisattva develops ultimate bodhicitta from the first ground onwards, when they are completely *free from the obstacles to generosity* and so forth. The necessity or purpose of offering one's body is *when it becomes a cause to achieve a great purpose in this and future lives*.

This encompasses the two main points of the appropriate time, and the necessity or purpose.

#### 1.3.3.2.2. *Gathering with the Dharma*

The previous section referred to gathering others as disciples and so forth, through being generous with material aid and so forth. Now comes the explanation on gathering others through offering the Dharma.

This section is subdivided into three:

1.3.3.2.2.1. The physical behaviour of an audience that one should not teach

1.3.3.2.2.2. Analysing the distinction of the motivation of a vessel

1.3.3.2.2.3. Do not lead those with the wish for the great to the small

##### 1.3.3.2.2.1. **The physical behaviour of an audience that one should not teach**

The physical behaviour of an audience that one should not teach refers to the inappropriate physical gestures of those who are not suitable to receive the Dharma teachings.

So as the verse reflects here:

88. *Do not teach the Dharma to the disrespectful.  
Not to those who, while healthy, wear  
headbands,  
Umbrellas, sticks, carry weapons,  
Or cover their heads.*

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je explains:

One should not explain the Dharma to those that do not have respect for the Dharma and the teacher, or to those whose behaviour is unsuitable, such as wearing headbands when not sick, carrying umbrellas, sticks, weapons or covering their heads with cloth and so forth.

The first part of the commentary is that *one should not explain the Dharma to those who don't show respect for the Dharma and the teacher*. This refers to not respecting the qualities of the Dharma. Because the Dharma has such highly esteemed qualities, it would be inappropriate to present the profound and sacred Dharma to someone who does not respect it. Those who do not have respect for the Dharma are by default not suitable vessels to receive the Dharma. Furthermore, teaching the Dharma to those who do not respect the teacher or the Dharma would cause them to incur the negativity of disrespecting the Dharma. In this way, rather than bestowing benefit it becomes the cause for them to experience harm from the negative consequences. So, the first part of the explanation, *one should not explain the Dharma to those that do not have respect for the Dharma and the teacher*, refers to those whose minds are not pure enough to receive the Dharma.

The second part of the explanation refers to those whose physical behaviours are unsuitable. They might have a pure intention to receive the Dharma, respecting both the Dharma and the teacher, but it would be inappropriate to present the Dharma to them because of their inappropriate behaviour. The text lists some examples.

Unsuitable behaviours include *wearing headbands when not sick*. This implies that while it is permitted to wear a headband because one is not well, wearing a headband for no particular reason would be a sign of disrespect. Likewise, *carrying umbrellas*, or *sticks*, or *weapons*, or *covering their heads with cloth and so forth* are examples of disrespectful conduct when listening to a Dharma teaching.

For example, as monks we are not allowed to put our *zen* (upper robe) over our heads while listening to the teachings. During His Holiness' teachings, when there is no roof and it is quite hot and sunny, he gives the Sangha permission by saying, 'Put your *zens* on top of your head to protect yourself from the hot sun'. The usual practice however is not to cover the head, out of respect for the teachings.

##### 1.3.3.2.2.2. **Analysing the distinction of the motivation of a vessel**

This refers to further checking the intention or motivation of those who are coming to listen to a teaching. The relevant verse is:

89. *To those holding the lesser to be great and  
profound,  
To women without their spouse,  
Hold equal respect for the lesser and supreme  
Dharma  
And practise it all.*

Here, Gyaltsab Je explains:

One does not teach the profound and extensive Dharma to those who are not a vessel due to a lesser

motivation and also not to women alone, without their spouse.

It is taught that if one discriminates between the superior Mahayana and the lesser Hinayana on the basis of being wholesome or bad, suitable or unsuitable, becoming the method for enlightenment or not and so forth, is abandoning the Dharma.

One should therefore have equal respect for all paths and practice them all.

This explanation mentions that one should not *teach the profound and extensive Dharma to those who are not a suitable vessel, due to a lesser motivation*. Another way of explaining this is that it would not be suitable to teach the profound and extensive Dharma to those who have the motivation of the Lesser Vehicle. Because of their intention or motivation they are not ready to hear the profound and extensive Dharma, so one should not teach it to them.

With respect to *women alone without their spouse* we need to understand the specific context of the advice, which applies to those who are presenting the Dharma. For example, it is said to be very dangerous for their vows for a fully ordained monk to teach a woman while they are alone; others might also form negative views about the propriety of that. Likewise, if the teacher is a nun then it would be inappropriate if they were to teach a man alone, without their spouse being present. We need to understand that while one gender is mentioned here it refers equally to the other gender. It is important to understand these points in their proper context.

Furthermore, as mentioned here, one will incur the fault of abandoning the Dharma if one discriminates between the superior Mahayana and the Lesser Vehicle, on the basis that one is wholesome and the other is not wholesome; that one is suitable and the other is not; that one has the method to become enlightened and the other does not. It is said that the karma of abandoning the Dharma is a heavy negative karma.

Therefore, as Gyaltsab Je emphasises, one should have equal respect for all paths and practise them all. So Gyaltsab Rinpoche is definitely sharing some really profound advice with us.

### 1.3.3.2.3. Do not lead those with the wish for the great to the small

This heading indicates that it would be totally inappropriate to suggest to those who have a genuine, keen interest in practising the Great Mahayana Vehicle, would be better practising the Lesser Vehicle.

The verse that relates this is:

90. *Do not bring those that are a vessel  
For the extensive Dharma to the lesser Dharma.  
Do not cause them to give up the training,  
Do not mislead with sutra and mantra.*

As Gyaltsab Je explains in his commentary:

Do not lead someone with Mahayana lineage that is a suitable vessel for the extensive Dharma to a lesser Dharma, such as the hearer's path. It is taught that this becomes a downfall.

One should *not lead someone with a Mahayana lineage*, meaning someone who has the actual capacity of mind to practise the Mahayana, and who is *a suitable vessel*, from

*the extensive Dharma* to the lesser Dharma, such as the *hearer's path*. As such that would be a *downfall*.

The next part of the commentary reads:

Also do not cause someone that is a suitable vessel for the morality of restraint to give up their practice of morality while they are suitable vessels, through misleading them with sutra and mantra, saying that they will become pure merely by reading sutras and mantras.

In this way do not mislead others with sutra and mantra.

The point being emphasised here is that while someone may be a suitable vessel to study and practice morality, telling them that to become liberated it will be sufficient for them to purify their mind by merely reading sutras and mantras would be very misleading advice.

This reminds me of the comments made by someone I met from Singapore who was one of the co-founders of an institute in the Kagyu tradition. He commented to me that while the advice to recite, for example, 100,000 Vajrasattva mantras, or do 100,000 prostrations without any further explanation and saying that it will lead one to reach enlightenment, may have some significant purpose, he was not really sure about the actual benefit. I felt that his comments on how doing extensive practices without the basis of a proper understanding could be misleading were valid.

The emphasis here is that misleading suitable vessels who are capable of understanding the teachings by saying that they will become pure just by reading sutras and reciting mantras, is inappropriate. If they are not suitable vessels and lack the capacity and intelligence to understand the teachings and fully grasp their meaning, then it would be skilful to present practices for them to do at their level. However, if trainees who have the intelligence and capacity and are thus suitable vessels were to be given tasks of merely reciting mantras or reading sutras, then that would be misleading them.

Those who have that approach may be presenting it in that way because they don't have much knowledge of the teachings themselves, and cannot present them thoroughly. Saying, 'You don't need to study much; you don't need to understand much. That's OK, just do these mantras and recite these practices and everything will be fine' would be the act of misleading others.

### 1.3.3.3. PROTECTING SENTIENT BEING'S MINDS BY TRAINING IN THE ACTION OF NOT INCURRING FAULTS

This is definitely a very important point for bodhisattvas. Because they are such noble beings, engaging in inappropriate actions could cause others to generate a negative mind, and if they were to cause others to be critical of the bodhisattva, then that would be a cause for them to create really heavy negative karma. Therefore bodhisattvas have a great responsibility to engage in appropriate conduct and behaviour to protect the minds of other beings from the faults of criticism and so forth. This is an important point for us also to keep in mind.

This heading has two sections

1.3.3.3.1. Extensive explanation

1.3.3.3.2. Summary

### 1.3.3.3.1. Extensive explanation

The extensive explanation is subdivided into three:

1.3.3.3.1.1. Abandoning faulty behaviour that causes others to lose faith

1.3.3.3.1.2. How to act when showing the path

1.3.3.3.1.3. How to do the action of sleeping

#### 1.3.3.3.1.1. Abandoning faulty behaviour that causes others to lose faith

Gyaltsab Je begins his commentary on this section of the text with these words:

Ordained bodhisattvas must apply restraint, which is explained in the general basket of teachings on morality, unless there is an exemption that permits them otherwise. As it will cause a loss of faith in the minds of others, even lay bodhisattvas must apply this restraint.

As mentioned here, there are certain forms of conduct that are specifically prescribed for the ordained. There are some circumstances where there are exemptions, but otherwise ordained bodhisattvas have to abide by all of those vows, because not doing so can cause others to lose faith. For the same reason, even lay bodhisattvas have to abide by certain forms of conduct. This was also explained in *Precious Garland*, which we have previously studied.

Then comes the verse relating to this:

91. *If one leaves behind tooth woods and spittle  
Then they should be covered.  
To urinate and the like, on water and ground  
Used by all is inferior.*

92ab. *Do not eat with a full mouth noisily,  
Or with an open mouth*

Then the commentary continues:

If one leaves behind the wood used to clean the teeth and leaves one's spittle on the ground, then these should be covered up with earth and the like. One should also not pollute commonly used water or land with faeces, urine, and mucus as this is frowned upon by the gods and others.

Traditionally in India they use wood from a nim tree as a substitute for toothbrushes. They chew on a piece of the wood to make it like a bristle, which they use to clean their teeth. Having cleaned the teeth in such a way, the advice is that one should not just throw the piece of wood down on the ground for it to be seen by others; likewise one should not just spit onto the ground. Both should be covered up. This of course doesn't really apply in Australia where there is a good tradition of putting the garbage into the garbage can, and you don't see people spitting on the street at all. This is an excellent system.

In general however, one needs to be careful not to cause others to feel disgust, or a bit uncomfortable, when they see behaviour such as spitting out food after one has eaten it. That would be considered as very disgusting. At the moment someone sees that, and thinks it is disgusting, then they become critical of the person who has done that. So if a bodhisattva were to engage in such behaviour, it would cause disgust in others, and if, out of that disgust, they are critical of the bodhisattva, then that will be the cause to create the negative karma of being critical of bodhisattvas. Therefore the advice is that the

bodhisattva always needs to engage in conduct and behaviour that protects the minds of others.

Likewise, *one should also not pollute commonly used water or land with faeces, urine and mucus as this is frowned upon by the gods and others.* This is not only a cause of disgust, but is also a cause of harm for others.

Furthermore:

Do not eat with a full mouth, making noises like chag-chag and so forth while eating, or eat with an open mouth.

Again, these explanations are for monks with vows. When eating one should not eat with one's mouth open, or make sounds such as indicated here, or have too much food in one's mouth, or eat noisily, or with an open mouth. This sort of behaviour will disgust others and is inappropriate.

The next six lines of verse are:

92cd. *Do not sit with the legs stretched out,  
Do not rub your hands together.*

93. *When riding or sitting on a mattress or place,  
Do not be together with another woman.  
Abandon anything that causes worldly beings  
to lose faith,  
That observed and that to enquire about.*

The explanation in the commentary is quite clear.

While sitting on a bed or the like, do not sit with both legs stretched out on the ground. One does not rub both hands together at the same time, but there is no fault if one rubs them sequentially.

One does not ride together with someone else's women on a horse and so forth, or sit together with them on the same seat or place. Lay bodhisattvas also should not sit together with another woman who is not a relative.

In short, one should abandon any inappropriate behaviour that causes the worldly to lose faith, either by observing directly what is done or not done, or through informing oneself by enquiring what is appropriate and inappropriate according to that place and time.

In some cultures and traditions it is considered disrespectful to point your feet out towards others. It is also seemingly disrespectful to rub your hands in front of others, although *there is no fault if one rubs them sequentially.*

*One does not ride together with someone else's women on a horse and so forth, or sit together with them on the same seat or place. Lay bodhisattvas also should not sit together with another woman who is not a relative.* These are quite clear instructions.

In summary, as explained by Gyaltsab Je, *one should abandon inappropriate behaviour that causes worldly beings to lose faith.* One does this *either by observing directly what is done or not done, or through informing oneself by enquiring what is appropriate and inappropriate according to that place and time.* This means that if you are in a place where you don't know the traditions, and you don't know what is appropriate and what is inappropriate, you should ask about the proper ways to act.

This reminds me that prior to coming to Australia Pam, one of the teachers who taught English to the young

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monks at Kopan, gave me some instructions on things such as how to use cutlery and so forth. She said that in the West if you are invited to a place, there are different types of cutlery for different parts of the meal. Indeed, whenever we go to a new place, it is appropriate to know the traditions and customs of that place so that we act appropriately.

#### 1.3.3.3.1.2. How to act while showing the path

This refers to acting in the appropriate way when you are showing the path to others. This is very pertinent and practical advice for our daily lives. The relevant verses read:

94. *Do not point with a finger,  
But respectfully, with your  
Full right hand,  
Show the way.*
95. *Do not move your hand excessively  
But only just enough, with some words.  
Snap your fingers and so forth,  
Otherwise it becomes unrestrained.*

The explanation in Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

When indicating the way for somebody, do not do so with individual fingers from the left hand because this is regarded as insulting. One respectfully points in the right direction with the full right hand outstretched.

One does not wave unnecessarily with one's hand, as this would become excitement and be unconscientious. Instead wave with your hand a little bit, say something and snap your fingers. Otherwise, if one is too loud, then it becomes unrestrained.

This explanation is also quite relevant to our tradition here, where raising your fingers inappropriately is a very bad, even dangerous thing!

When pointing out the path to others in India, it is considered rude and disrespectful to the other when you point with one finger, or just a few fingers. The proper way is to stretch out your full palm and show the way with your right hand. That is the gesture to adopt.

The next part of the explanation is that *one does not wave unnecessarily with one's hand, as this would become excitement and be unconscientious*. Instead wave your hand slightly. If one has to call someone, instead of shouting out loud or waving one's hand wildly, one should slightly snap one's finger, which will gain their attention. *Otherwise one is too loud and becomes unrestrained*.

#### 1.3.3.3.1.3. How to do the action of sleeping

This explanation is precisely in accordance with the presentation in the Lam Rim teachings, but we can leave this for the next session. When done in a proper way sleeping is referred to as the yoga of sleeping, so even the act of sleeping can become a practice.

*Transcript prepared by Judy Mayne  
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# Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

བྱང་ཆུབ་སེམས་དཔའི་སྡོད་པ་ལ་འཇུག་པ་བཞུགས་སོ།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

16 September 2014

As usual we can spend some time in the regular meditation practice.

[Meditation]

We can now generate the motivation for receiving the teachings along these lines:

For the sake of all mother sentient beings I need to achieve enlightenment, and so for that purpose I will listen to the teaching, and put it into practice well.

### 1.3.3.3. PROTECTING SENTIENT BEING'S MINDS BY TRAINING IN THE ACTION OF NOT INCURRING FAULTS

#### 1.3.3.3.1. Extensive explanation (cont.)

##### 1.3.3.3.1.3. How to engage in the action of sleeping

The verse relating to this heading is:

96. *Sleep like the Protector, when he passed  
Into parinirvana, in the desired direction.  
Make sure from the start, with introspection  
about  
The thought of getting up quickly.*

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je gives this explanation of the meaning of the verse:

For sleeping, assume the position of the protector when he passed into parinirvana. Lie down on your right side, with your head in the desired direction, putting your left leg on your right leg, and your head into your right hand, and then sleep well covered with the *cho-go*.

At the time of sleep put your mind onto a virtuous object with mindfulness and introspection and adopt the recognition of brightness. Adopt from the start the mind that thinks, 'I shall rise quickly', and sleep with the thought, 'Tomorrow I shall practise the Dharma with the newly regenerated body'."

As the commentary explains, when we sleep our body should be in a position that is similar to that of protector, Lord Buddha Shakyamuni, in the aspect of passing into nirvana.

Depending on the direction that you wish to face (such as holy images on your altar), you lie down on your right side with your head in that direction and placed on top of your right hand. This lying position is also referred to as the sleeping lion position. The Lam Rim teachings give detailed explanations on the significance of adopting this sleeping posture, which emulates the fearlessness of a sleeping lion.

The commentary continues with the description, *putting your left leg on your right leg*, which is quite clear. Then, having positioned oneself in this manner, one sleeps covered with the *cho-go*, which is the upper yellow robe of the Sangha.

The main significance of placing oneself in this position, which is the position the Buddha adopted when he showed the aspect of passing into nirvana, is to remember death and impermanence. Of course, in actuality the Buddha is

immortal, however he showed the aspect of passing into nirvana for the purpose of teaching death and impermanence to his disciples. So sleeping in this position is a reminder for us of death and impermanence. That is what we need to understand here. As *Praise to Buddha Shakyamuni by Way of the Twelve Deeds*, states:

To exhort the lazy to be quicker,  
At the pure site of Kushinagar  
You destroyed your deathless, vajra-like body  
Entering nirvana—Homage to this deed.

This shows that entering this aspect of passing into nirvana was a way to exhort his disciples to enter into the Dharma. That is why the Buddha's sleeping position is described in this text.

When the commentary states *At the time of sleep put your mind onto a virtuous object with mindfulness and introspection*, it is advising us to recall the practice we have done during the day, as a way of not forgetting the virtuous object.

Next the commentary states that before going to sleep one makes that determination, '*I shall rise quickly*'. Due to that determination one will be able to wake up at whatever time one has set. Indeed, when we develop the strong determination to wake up at a certain time in the morning, then we really don't require any alarm and will naturally wake up at that time. Following that determination to wake up early, one sets the motivation for the next day: 'After I wake up I will continue to engage in the practice of Dharma as a way to benefit sentient beings'. So in this way, prior to going to sleep one sets one's motivation for the next day.

If one goes to sleep with a virtuous mind and love and compassion in one's heart, and determines to wake up with an attitude of love and compassion, then it is most likely that one will wake up in that state of mind. Waking in a virtuous frame of mind would really be a wonderful way to start the next day. So sleeping, in itself, can be a virtuous activity. That is why, among the fifty-two mental factors, sleep is specifically included in the category of the changeable mental factors. If one has a virtuous mind prior to going to sleep then the whole period of sleep will be virtuous. Whereas if one has a negative mind prior going to sleep then that period will be a non-virtuous or negative state, and if the mind is neutral then sleep will be in a neutral state. Thus it is possible to turn sleep into a virtuous deed.

This is very practical advice. By remembering love and compassion before going to bed, if one sleeps for six hours for example, then during those six hours one will have gained the benefit of leaving the imprint of love and compassion on one's mind. It is quite unlikely that we will find the time during the day to spend six hours meditating just on love and compassion, so if we go to sleep with love and compassion on our mind, then that will ensure that our sleep becomes a really virtuous deed.

We can see how this advice ensures that even normal activities become a means to accumulate merit and virtue, and further develop our mind of love and compassion. As Shantideva advised earlier in the text, with the proper motivation we can turn normal activities such as eating and drinking into virtuous deeds. We can see that this advice is very pertinent for our practice in daily life. Other teachings give further explanations on the different states of sleep.

As indicated in the commentary, prior to going to sleep one should develop the intention: *Tomorrow I shall practise the Dharma with a newly regenerated body*. This indicates that one engages in the act of sleeping as a way to rejuvenate the

body. When one goes to sleep with that intention it ensures that the sleep itself will be free from attachment. As indicated earlier, one of the offering prayers with the practice of eating is, 'I consume this food not merely for myself, but in order to sustain my body for the practice of Dharma'. Here sleep is being presented in the same way—with the proper motivation it actually becomes an aid to the practice of Dharma.

Thus we can see how, as indicated in the teachings, whatever actions the bodhisattva engages in are only a means to accumulate virtue. From the preliminary motivation, every aspect of normal activity is turned into the practice of Dharma as a means to accumulate virtue. This can inspire us to try to follow this example with our own motivations and intentions in daily life.

#### 1.3.3.3.2. Summary

The verse relating to this is:

97. *Out of the immeasurable actions  
Of bodhisattvas, that are taught,  
Until you can definitely practise them,  
Take up the trainings of the mind.*

Here Shantideva sums up the practices that have been presented under the heading, Protecting Sentient Being's Minds by Training in the Action of Not Incurring Faults.

Gyalsab Je's commentary reads:

If one is not able to practise all the immeasurable divisions of the bodhisattva actions of generosity and so forth that are taught in the sutras and their commentaries, then one should first only engage in the practices of training one's mind that were explained earlier, until one is definitely able to carry out all the infinite bodhisattva actions.

As explained here, the practices of generosity and the rest of the perfections as well as the practices of the four means of gathering disciples have *immeasurable divisions*, meaning that there are incredibly extensive ways of engaging in these practices. Thus they have immeasurable divisions, and these immeasurable divisions are extensively explained in the sutras and the commentaries.

The Tibetan word *jong* can either refer to training in virtue or purification. As I have explained previously, when the word *jong* is used in context of virtue then it means to train one's mind to increase virtue. When it is used in the context of negativity then it means training one's mind to purify negativities by applying the antidotes so as not to experience the negative results of negativity. In this context it refers to training one's mind to generate bodhicitta. The earlier chapters presented very detailed and particular advice on how to train one's mind to generate bodhicitta. Therefore as the commentary explains, *one should first only engage in the practices of training one's mind, until one is definitely able to carry out all the infinite bodhisattva's actions*. Once one has trained one's mind well and generated bodhicitta, and that has been developed thoroughly and firmly, then one will be able to carry out all the extensive bodhisattva practices prescribed in the teachings.

Again, this is very pertinent advice about how to first train one's mind to generate bodhicitta, and then gradually engage in the practices. If one were to attempt to engage in all the extensive practices explained in the teachings, before having established a thorough basis, then one would not be able to follow any particular practice through. This is very relevant to our state of mind now as well.

So this summarising verse is very significant. If the teachings explain the many different aspects of the practices and so forth, they may not seem personally relevant if they are not subsumed into succinct practical advice that one can apply now. The most practical approach is to distil it down to something that is manageable for beginners so that they can use it as a basis to further develop their mind, and then later be able to engage in further practices.

#### 1.4. The method for perfecting the trainings

The actual training of how to actually perfect the practices that were described earlier has two subdivisions:

1.4.1. The extended explanation

1.4.2. Concluding summary

##### 1.4.1. The extended explanation

This is subdivided into four

1.4.1.1. The methods for purifying the training

1.4.1.2. The basis for training

1.4.1.3. The purpose of the trainings

1.4.1.4. The basis for engaging into listening and contemplating

##### 1.4.1.1. THE METHODS FOR PURIFYING THE TRAINING

If one were to transgress some of the commitments, then this section provides advice on the method for purifying these downfalls.

In explaining the meaning of the verse Gyalsab Je raises this doubt:

Query: What should one do if one incurs faults despite practising the trainings?

To explain the meaning of the verse, he first says:

If one has received a root downfall, then, as it is explained in the *Compendium of Trainings*,

Recall the bodhisattva Akasgarbha in front and engage in purification.

If one receives the small or medium contaminations, the forty-six faults and other faults explained in the *Compendium of Trainings* then,

98. *Recite the Sutra of the Three Heaps,  
Three times in the morning and in the evening.  
Pacify the remainders of downfalls  
In dependence on conquerors and bodhisattvas.*

So this verse is explaining how to purify the faults of the small and medium contaminations in one's training.

Those of you who recite the *Six Session Yoga* will recall after listing the eighteen root downfalls of the bodhisattva vows, there is a list of the four conditions that are necessary to incur a breach of those vows. What are they?

*Student: Not regarding these as detrimental; not forsaking the wish to repeat such behaviour; delighting and taking pleasure in them; having no shame or consideration.*

What are the two that do not need any of these conditions in order to breach that commitment?

*Student: Giving up bodhicitta and holding distorted views*

So, if all four conditions are intact then any breach of the vows will be a **great contamination**. Here, the small or medium contaminations refers to breaches of the vows that do not have all four conditions intact. Thus *if one receives the small or medium contamination* refers to breaching any of the bodhisattva vows, but without all four conditions intact. If one has the mind of not regarding the transgression as detrimental, then, regardless of whether some of the other

conditions are intact or not, it becomes a **medium contamination**, which is, in fact, quite a severe contamination. A **small contamination** is when either of the other three conditions are present, except for not regarding them as detrimental.

As I have mentioned previously the *forty-six faults* refers to breaches or downfalls of the bodhisattva vows. If there are either small or medium contaminations of those forty-six faults, or other faults as explained in the *Compendium of Trainings*, then one needs to engage in the purification as presented in the verse.

Gyaltsab Je presents the meaning of the verse:

...then one should confess three times in the day and three times at night, accumulate merits and recite the method to increase virtue and prevent it from being exhausted, i.e. the *Sutra of the Three Heaps*.

By taking refuge and in dependence on bodhicitta one pacifies the remaining downfalls with the four powers.

As the commentary explains, the way to purify these faults is by confessing them *three times in the day and three times at night*, and also engage in the means *to accumulate merit*. So this practice encompasses both confession and the means of accumulating merit. The way *to increase virtue and prevent it from being exhausted* is by engaging in the practice such as *The Sutra of the Three Heaps*, which is basically the *Thirty-Five Buddhas' Confession Prayer*.

As explained previously, the three heaps encompasses the heap of negativities, the heap of dedication and heap of rejoicing. By engaging in these practices one purifies both small and medium contaminations. This means that if one has not breached a commitment to the degree that it is a root downfall, then one can purify it through this practice. So this is a practice to purify minor breaches of the vows.

If one has actually broken the vows and incurred a root downfall, then one will have to apply the method of actually taking the vows again. Here, the text explains that *by taking refuge and in dependence on bodhicitta, one pacifies the remaining downfalls with the four powers*.

The first power, the power of reliance, is explicitly indicated here with taking refuge and generating bodhicitta. Then one applies the remaining three powers of the practice. This is the supreme method for purifying negativities. The four opponent powers were mentioned in detail in chapter two, so you can refer back to that. The main point presented here is that one needs to rely on these methods to purify the faults one has incurred through the breaches of one's commitments

#### 1.4.1.2. BASIS FOR TRAINING

Here there are two verses, the first of which is:

99. *Whether from the point of view of self or other.  
Whatever you do, on whatever occasion,  
As taught, make it with effort  
An occasion for the trainings.*

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je explains:

Regardless of whether it is for the purpose of self or others, whatever action of body, speech and mind one engages in, and during whatever occasion, the Conqueror taught all of these as opportunities for practice.

One should always make an effort not to receive a fault of the trainings while using these different occasions for one's practice.

As the commentary explains, the Buddha taught that whatever the occasion may be, regardless of whether it is to accomplish one's own purpose or the purpose of others, and whatever actions one engages in through one's three doors of body, speech and mind, they are to be treated as an opportunity for practice. Using these different occasions for practice is really the basis of all the trainings one engages in.

In stating *one should always make effort to not to incur a fault of the trainings*, the commentary is saying that in order to make the training pure, one should ensure that one does not incur any faults when engaging in that training. Thus one should always make an effort not to incur any fault while engaging in the trainings. More specifically, the time when one engages in practice is the time when one needs to ensure that one does not incur a fault.

The second verse in relation to this heading reads:

100. *There is nothing the children of  
The conquerors do not practise.  
For those proficient who abide in this manner  
There is nothing that does not become  
meritorious.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary states:

There is no object of knowledge the bodhisattva children of the conquerors do not use for practice. For those that are proficient in training in all objects, there is no action that does not become meritorious. Therefore, one should never allow the generation of faithlessness.

As explained here, *there is no object of knowledge the bodhisattva children of the conquerors do not use for practice*, which is a point that was emphasised earlier. For the purpose of benefiting others, bodhisattvas may engage in various forms of practice, or acquire skills such as the five major sciences of arts and crafts, medicine, grammar, logic, and philosophy as a means to benefit other sentient beings. To some, these may appear as mundane practices, making it very easy to be critical of a bodhisattva who is engaged in these. As you will recall, Nagarjuna presented all of these five sciences, emphasising that they are needed for the purpose of helping others. The point being raised here is that for those *that are proficient in training in all objects, there is no action that does not become meritorious. Therefore, one should never allow the generation of faithlessness*, which causes one to lose faith in a bodhisattva.

Gyaltsab Je is emphasising the need to protect one's mind from losing faith in a bodhisattva's deeds, in the belief that they are engaging in some sort of mundane activity. We need to take this as a personal instruction. As it is hard for us to know who is actually a bodhisattva it is possible that we might generate a critical mind if we see someone engaging in some mundane activity, and thus incur the heavy negativity of criticising a bodhisattva. The author of the commentary, Gyaltsab Je, emphasises this point in many of his other teachings. We need to be very careful about being critical of others, particularly of those who are engaging in various activities to benefit other beings.

#### 1.4.1.3. THE PURPOSE OF THE TRAININGS

Here there are two sub-headings

1.4.1.3.1. Dedicating the virtue for the welfare of all sentient beings

1.4.1.3.2. Never give up the Mahayana spiritual friend and the training

#### 1.4.1.3.1. *Dedicating the virtue for the welfare of all sentient beings*

The verse relating to this reads:

101. *Regardless of whether it is directly or indirectly  
Do nothing but work for the purpose of sentient  
beings.  
Solely for the purpose of sentient beings  
I dedicate all to enlightenment.*

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je explains:

Whether it is directly or indirectly for the welfare of sentient beings, always act for their welfare, and in no other way. Dedicate all virtues towards enlightenment, solely for the purpose of sentient beings.

As explained in the commentary, whether engaged directly or indirectly, bodhisattvas are always engaged in acts of benefiting other sentient beings. Whatever activities they engage in are for the benefit of other sentient beings, and they do not engage in any activity other than that. That summarises the activities of bodhisattvas—they are always for the benefit of other sentient beings. They then dedicate the virtues of those deeds towards enlightenment, solely for the purpose of sentient beings.

The very beginning of generating the altruistic mind of bodhicitta itself is for the benefit of sentient beings; the middle of engaging in the practices such as the six perfections is for the benefit of sentient beings; and then the ultimate goal of achieving enlightenment is also for the benefit of sentient beings. Therefore whatever activities bodhisattvas engage in are dedicated towards achieving ultimate enlightenment for the purpose of benefiting sentient beings.

Reflecting upon the bodhisattvas' deeds as being solely for the benefit of sentient beings—at the beginning, in the middle and at the end, the very achievement of enlightenment—inspires us to practise similarly. Setting the right motivation at the very beginning of the practice, engaging in the practice itself, and dedicating it at the end, making sure that it is intact, is a fruitful and purposeful practice. It is good to recall the example of the bodhisattvas' deeds to ensure that our actions are meaningful and purposeful.

#### 1.4.1.3.2. *Never give up the Mahayana spiritual friend and the training*

The first section encompasses the qualities of a virtuous spiritual friend. The verse relating to this is:

102. *The constant virtuous friend is one who  
Is proficient in the meaning of the Mahayana,  
And never gives up even at the cost of their life,  
The supreme bodhisattva disciplines.*

Here the *Bodhisattvacharyavatara* is presenting the qualities of the Mahayana guru or spiritual friend.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

The constant Mahayana virtuous friend is one who is an expert in all of the great Mahayana teachings as well as those who abide in the Mahayana vows, and the supreme Mahayana austerities and do not give them up even at the cost of their life.

The main point is that the qualities of the Mahayana virtuous friend are that they are skilled in all of the Mahayana treatises, as well as abiding in the Mahayana vows, the supreme Mahayana austerities, and do not give

them up at the cost of their life. Such are the qualities of the Mahayana spiritual friend, presented here in brief.

#### 1.4.1.4. THE BASIS FOR ENGAGING IN LISTENING AND CONTEMPLATING

There are two subdivisions:

1.4.1.4.1. Training in dependence on sutras

1.4.1.4.2. Training in dependence on the commentaries

##### 1.4.1.4.1. *Training in dependence on sutras*

Here there are two lines of verse

103ab. *Emulate the biography of Shrisambava  
In the training of relying on the guru.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

From the life story of Shrisambava in the *Array of Stalks Sutra*,

The way of relying on the teacher: Child of good family, the bodhisattvas who are perfectly guided by virtuous friends will not fall into the lower realms.

One should train according to how it is explained extensively in this sutra.

This explains that the sutras confirm that *bodhisattvas who are perfectly guided by virtuous friends will not fall into the lower realms*.

This indicates that those who rely on a virtuous friend without breaking their commitments will not fall into the lower realms. So the advice here is one should train as explained extensively in the sutras.

Of course, there are more extensive explanations on the ten different ways of relying on a spiritual friend in the Lam Rim teachings.

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

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Edited Version  
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# Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

བྱང་ལྔ་པ་སེམས་དཔའི་སྤྱོད་པ་ལ་འཇུག་པ་བཞུགས་སོ་

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

23 September 2014

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As usual we can spend some time in our meditation practice. [meditation]

You can generate the motivation for receiving the teaching along these lines:

For the sake of all mother sentient beings, I need to achieve enlightenment. So for that purpose I will listen to the teaching, and put it into practise well.

## 1.4.1.4. THE BASIS FOR ENGAGING IN LISTENING AND CONTEMPLATING

Having presented the qualities of a Mahayana spiritual friend, the text then presents the basis on which to engage in perfecting the trainings in two subdivisions:

1.4.1.4.1. Training in dependence on sutras

1.4.1.4.2. Training in dependence on the commentaries

### 1.4.1.4.1. Training in dependence on sutras

This section is covered two verses:

103. *Emulate the biography of Shrisambava  
In the training of relying on the guru  
Understanding this and other advice by the  
buddhas,  
Through reading the sutras.*

104. *The sutras generate understanding of the  
trainings  
Therefore read the sutras.  
First, read the  
Sutra of the Essence of Space.*

We covered the meaning of the first two lines last week. In his commentary Gyaltsab Je explains the meaning of the remaining six lines thus:

Furthermore, the points of advice from this treatise and other advice taught by the Buddha should be understood by reading the Mahayana sutras.

One should read the sutras because in them the trainings are explained extensively. Specifically, those that have generated the engaging vows should read first of all the *Sutra of the Superior Essence of Space*.

When the commentary states *the points of advice from this treatise*, it is referring to the *biography of Shrisambava*, which gives advice on how to rely on a spiritual friend. We covered that last week. Relying on *other advices taught by the Buddha*, refers to the advice given in the sutras on the bodhisattva trainings, which *should be understood by reading the Mahayana sutras*. So one needs to read and familiarise oneself with the Mahayana sutras in order to understand the advice on how to train in the bodhisattva practices.

The commentary then explains, *one should read the sutras because in them the trainings are explained extensively*. This is also very clear so I don't think it needs any further clarification.

As further explained, *specifically, those that have generated the engaging vows should read first of all the Sutra of the Superior Essence of Space*, which has extensive explanations of the bodhisattva vows. This sutra identifies the eighteen root downfalls of the bodhisattva vows, and how transgressions of those vows are incurred. It also explains very extensively how to purify each of those transgressions. As indicated in the commentary, one should refer to these explanations from the very beginning so as to avoid transgressing these vows, and also to learn how to purify any transgressions of those vows if they were to incur.

Those of us who have taken the bodhisattva vows need to take this as personal advice. It is not sufficient to take the vows and then just sit back and relax. Rather, one needs to endeavour to really understand the eighteen root downfalls, and how to purify them if one were to transgress them. It is very important that we really familiarise ourselves with the bodhisattva vows and the advice on how to avoid any transgressions. While you may not have access to a translation of the *Sutra of the Superior Essence of Space*, you do have access to the many texts and commentaries that explain the bodhisattva vows, what the transgressions are and so forth. So it is important to become familiar with them. Also, as presented earlier, if the transgression is a small or medium contamination, then one purifies it by reciting the *Thirty-five Buddhas Confession Prayer* with the four powers intact.

### 1.4.1.4.2. Training in dependence on the commentaries

There are two verses relating to this heading, the first of which reads:

105. *Since that which one practises continuously  
Is shown even more extensively  
In the Compendium of Trainings, one must  
Read it repeatedly as well.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary on this verse reads:

Those that train and practise should also study repeatedly the *Compendium of Trainings*, where it explains extensively in thirty-two aspects how to give, protect, purify and increase one's body, possessions, and roots of virtue.

When the commentary explains *those that train and practice should also study repeatedly the Compendium of Trainings* it is referring to another text by Shantideva, in which he explains very extensively the ways and means of engaging in the bodhisattva trainings. His Holiness the Dalai Lama has presented teachings on the *Compendium of Trainings* on a number of occasions. If you have access to any translations of it in English, it would be good to read them.

The *Compendium of Trainings* has an extensive explanation of the *thirty-two aspects of how to give, protect, purify and increase one's body, possessions and roots of virtue*.

One engages in the practice of *giving* one's **body** at the appropriate time, and as well as engaging in mental training on giving one's body for the benefit of others. One also has to engage in the practice of *protecting* it, as we need our body for achieving higher purposes. Thus we need to understand the proper contexts for both giving and protecting one's body. We need to *purify* our

body to ensure our generosity is not soiled with negativities, or by any physical defects that would hinder our practice. Then we need to *increase* our virtue, by accumulating the appropriate causes to continuously obtain a body that is endowed with the eight ripened qualities in future lifetimes.

Just as there are the four practices of giving, protecting, purifying and increasing with respect to one's body, the same practices are applied to giving one's **possessions**.

The practice of being *generous* with one's **virtue** refers, for example, to dedicating one's virtue to the welfare of others. *Protecting* virtue refers to protecting whatever virtue one has accumulated from being destroyed by anger. *Purifying* means ensuring that the virtue is not soiled or stained with self-interest for the sake of this life, or even a future life. If one were to accumulate virtue just for the mere intention of protecting oneself from the lower realms, then that would be accumulating virtue out of self-interest. Rejoicing in one's virtues is the way to *increase* one's virtue.

With reference to the thirty-two aspects of giving, protecting, purifying, and increasing, there are four aspects of giving the body, four aspects of giving possessions and four aspects of giving virtue, making up twelve aspects of the perfection of generosity. We can also apply these four aspects to the remaining perfections of morality, patience, joyous effort and so forth. That makes twenty aspects, making thirty-two aspects in all.

The four aspects of giving are specifically explained in *Liberation in the Palm of your Hand*, and you can relate that to all the perfections. As you have easy access to the English translation it would be good for you to take the initiative to read it for yourselves. Next time I might quiz you on whether you've checked it out or not.

This also applies to any explanations in texts that have been translated in English; you need to take the initiative to actually refer to those texts and read their presentation. That is how you will benefit from my reference to them. If I mention a text and you think "OK, it must have been mentioned there" and just leave it at that, then you will not derive the benefit of understanding the topic in greater detail.

As a personal instruction, it is good to try to recall these four aspects of giving, protecting, purifying and increasing whenever we engage in any practice. For example, whenever we accumulate virtue or purify negative karma, it is good to relate that practice to these four aspects.

The next verse in this section of the text reads:

*106. Or, read at least the Compendium of Sutras  
Which summarises, and  
Put also effort into reading the second one  
Composed by Nagarjuna.*

As Gyalsab Je explains in his commentary:

If one is not able to do this, then one should read at least the *Compendium of Sutras*, composed by the master himself, and the second one composed by Nagarjuna, which summarise the sutras.

*If one is not able to do this*, refers to not being able to relate to the extensive explanations presented in the *Compendium of Trainings*. That being the case, *one should at*

*least read the Compendium of Sutras, which is also composed by the master himself*, indicating Shantideva. *And the second one composed by Nagarjuna*, refers to another commentary of same name, *Compendium of Sutras*, which was composed by Nagarjuna, in which the meaning of the sutras is summarised.

Basically the advice is to refer to these texts on the bodhisattva vows: the *Compendium of Trainings*, or if that is too extensive, the *Compendium of Sutras*, or the text with the same name that was composed by Nagarjuna.

#### **1.4.2. Concluding summary**

The verse relating to this reads:

*107. That which has not been prohibited  
Should be practised.  
To protect the minds of worldly beings,  
Practise correctly upon seeing the trainings.*

Gyalsab Je's commentary reads:

One should abandon that which has been prohibited in the sutras and commentaries and one should practise that which has not been prohibited. The purpose is to protect the minds of the worldly beings and prevent the generation of faithlessness. To this end one should, upon recognising the trainings of a bodhisattva, practise them and train in them.

This is a very clear presentation of the distinction between what is to be adopted and what is to be discarded. Put succinctly, one should abandon that which is prohibited or forbidden in the sutras and commentaries.

If one is uncertain as to what one should abandon, then refer to the sutras and the commentaries that explain what is forbidden, and which therefore should be abandoned. If the text states 'This act is forbidden', then the practice is to avoid engaging in that forbidden action. The teachings also present the practices that one should engage in, or adopt. This is how, by relying on the sutras and the commentaries, one makes the distinction between what is to be abandoned, and what is to be adopted.

Yet all too often we seem to adopt what has been forbidden in the sutras, and abandon what has not been forbidden! Out of confusion we ordinary beings actually adopt the opposite of what the sutras and commentaries advise. Here we are being advised to change our approach, and to gain a clear understanding of what is to be abandoned and what is to be adopted.

Furthermore, as explained here in the commentary, *the purpose of engaging in this practice is to protect the minds of the worldly beings as a way to prevent the generation of faithlessness* in ordinary or worldly beings, which means to protect their mind from losing faith in the Dharma.

## **2. CONCLUDING SUMMARY SHOWING THAT ONE HAS TO PRACTISE THE MEANING AND NOT JUST THE WORDS**

This is subdivided into two:

- 2.1. Guard always with mindfulness and introspection
- 2.2. The actual meaning

### **2.1. Guard always with mindfulness and introspection**

The relevant verse reads:

*108. Investigate repeatedly during  
Actions of body and mind.*

*Merely this, in brief,  
Is the definition of introspection.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

Investigate repeatedly, while engaging in the actions of body, speech and mind, with the wisdom that can distinguish between having transgressed the training or not and neutral actions, and whether or not one has fallen under the control of the afflictions.

This alone is in brief the definition of not degenerating introspection.

This is very pertinent advice, which, of course, I also emphasise regularly in my teachings. Its relevance for our daily life and practice cannot be underestimated. As presented here very clearly, we need to *investigate our actions of body, speech and mind repeatedly* at the time of those actions. In other words, we need to maintain constant mindfulness throughout all our actions.

Check whether any physical action is virtuous, non-virtuous or neutral, and whether it is in line with the trainings or not. Likewise, check whether your speech is virtuous, non-virtuous or neutral and whether one is transgressing the trainings. Do the same with the mind. We need to conduct a constant dialogue with our mind, always being vigilant of our actions of body, speech and mind.

*This, in brief, is the definition of not degenerating introspection*, which means maintaining our introspection, and not allowing it to degenerate. This act of investigating our body, speech and mind throughout all activities is called introspection, and we should not allow it to degenerate.

In summary, the main point being presented here is that we need to be constantly vigilant about our state of mind in all our actions and activities. As presented earlier, one way to check whether one's physical, verbal or mental actions are virtuous or not is by acquainting oneself with the explanations in the teachings. If we are engaging in something that is forbidden then it is a non-virtuous action; if we are engaging in something that is not forbidden, or something that is encouraged, then that is a virtuous action; if actions are not specified in the teachings as needing to be adopted or to be discarded, then they are considered to be neutral.

## 2.2. The actual meaning

The relevant verse is:

109. *They all have to be practised with the body.  
What is accomplished by only talking about it?  
Is the sick person cured  
Merely by studying medicine?*

The first part of the explanation in the commentary reads:

Having understood these points and the need for them to be practised, one needs to put them into practise accordingly with this body. Without practice, merely by reciting many lists, what purpose will one achieve? None whatsoever! For example, is a person cured merely by studying the instructions on the medicine? No, they are not.

As explained in the commentary, *they all have to be practised with the body*, means that these points actually have to be put into practice. It is not enough to merely

know about them—one should actually engage in practising them.

As further explained in the commentary, if *one merely recites many lists* or quotes from many texts and so forth, but without practising what they advise, then *what purpose will one achieve?* This is a rhetorical question, and the answer '*none whatsoever*' indicates that there is no purpose at all.

In response to the lines from the root verse, *What is accomplished by only talking about it? Is the sick person cured merely by studying medicine?* the commentary explains that when a patient is prescribed a medication, they have to actually take the medication in order to be cured. It is not sufficient for them to merely read the instructions on how to take the medicine—that won't help to cure them.

Gyaltsab Rinpoche goes on to say:

In brief, although there are the three types of morality, it is important to initially train in the morality of restraint, either by actually adopting the rules of individual liberation or those which are in common with them ...

As presented here, *there are the three types of morality*, and *it is important to initially train in the morality of restraint*, which means not committing misdeeds. One practises the morality of restraint *by adopting the rules of individual liberation*, or those which are *in common with those vows*. As I have indicated many times in previous teachings, morality serves as the basis of all other practices. Without sound morality, one will not be able to accomplish any other more advanced practices. So the self-liberation vows are the very foundation on which to take and observe the bodhisattva vows, as well as the tantric vows. Refraining from the ten non-virtuous deeds is common to all three sets of vows. As I have indicated previously, protecting oneself from the seven misdeeds of body and speech is the basis for refraining from many other misdeeds. In other words, when you apply the practice of refraining from the seven non-virtuous deeds of body and speech, you will naturally refrain from many other misdeeds. Thus the morality of restraint serves as the basis for other practices.

Next the commentary presents the reason why it is essential to practise the morality of restraint:

...for if one protects them, then the others will also be protected, if one does not protect them then the others will also not be protected. If the morality of restraint degenerates, then all vows degenerate, as explained in the *Compendium*.

This directly relates to our own practice, and so it is a personal instruction.

As Gyaltsab Je further mentions:

If one thinks that the vows of individual liberation belong to the hearers and practises the trainings of bodhisattvas apart from them, then that is a great fault. One should train in the morality of restraint that abandons the natural non-virtues and is the basis for the morality of accumulating virtue and benefiting sentient beings. One should rely repeatedly on restraint to the opposing conditions of morality, and practise it in conjunction with the six perfections.

This is all quite clear. The morality of restraint should be practised in conjunction with the six perfections.

Moreover, each of the perfections can be practised in conjunction with the rest of the six perfections. Thus there is the generosity of generosity, the generosity of ethics, the generosity which is practised in conjunction with patience, joyous effort and so forth. Of course I have presented this many, many times previously but I'm not sure if you have retained it. I'm not implying that you don't have the understanding, rather I say this as a way to refresh your memory, to remind you that you do have the knowledge of these topics presented in earlier teachings.

### Summarising Verse

Gyalsab Je ends his commentary on this particular chapter with this summarising verse, in which he very succinctly mentions the essence of this whole practice.

The person taking the essence  
Of practising the sequence of the path of the three  
kinds of beings,  
Depends on protecting mindfulness and  
introspection.  
Hence they should always endeavour to be proficient  
in these.

As mentioned very clearly, taking *the essence of practising the sequence of the path of the three kinds of beings*—which are the practices in conjunction with the small scope; practices in conjunction with the medium scope and the great scope—*depends upon protecting mindfulness and introspection* at all times. Therefore one should endeavour to completely understand, be proficient, and have full knowledge of introspection and mindfulness.

## II THE NAME OF THE CHAPTER

The final outline that concludes the chapter is a presentation of the name of the chapter. The root text reads:

*This is the fifth chapter of Introduction to the Action of Bodhisattvas called Protecting Introspection.*

Gyalsab Je's commentary concludes:

This is the commentary on the fifth chapter called Protecting Introspection from the commentary on the *Introduction to the Actions of Bodhisattvas*, called *The Entrance for the Children of the Conquerors*.

That concludes the fifth chapter.

To explain the context of the next chapter we need to return to the subdivisions introduced in chapter 1.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>

##### 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 enlightenment<sup>3</sup>

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 pure<sup>4</sup>

###### 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 patience

2.2.2.2.2.3.2. The way of training in enthusiasm

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

2.2.2.2.2.3.4. Training in the nature of superior insight—wisdom

## CHAPTER 6: THE WAY OF TRAINING IN PATIENCE<sup>5</sup>

There are two parts to the chapter.

I. Explaining the text of the chapter

II. The name of the chapter

### I. EXPLAINING THE TEXT OF THE CHAPTER

There are two main subdivisions of the explanation:

1. Meditating on patience earnestly by eliminating the obstacles to establishment and abiding

2. Applying to the mind the methods to establish patience

#### 1. Meditating on patience earnestly by eliminating the obstacles to establishment and abiding

This has two subdivisions:

1.1. The faults of anger

1.2. The benefits of patience

##### 1.1. The faults of anger

This is subdivided into three:

1.1.1. The unobservable faults

1.1.2. The observable faults

1.1.3. A summary of the faults

###### 1.1.1. The unobservable faults

Here there are two subdivisions:

1.1.1.1. Anger destroys one's roots of virtue

1.1.1.2. Discerning the faults of anger and the benefits of patience and making an effort to meditate on patience.

###### 1.1.1.1. ANGER DESTROYS ONE'S ROOTS OF VIRTUE.

In our next sessions we can go through the first verse under this heading.

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

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<sup>1</sup> See the teaching of 26 March 2013.

<sup>2</sup> Introduced in the teaching of 2 July 2013.

<sup>3</sup> Covered in chapter 4, introduced on 25 February 2014.

<sup>4</sup> Covered in chapter 5, introduced on 20 May 2014.

<sup>5</sup> The numbering recommences with the new chapter.