

# GATSAL TEACHING

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on

## 37 Practices of a Bodhisattva

Part VI

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14. *Even if someone says all sorts of derogatory things about me  
And proclaims them throughout the universe,  
(That means puts it on the Internet)  
In return, out of loving-kindness,  
To extol that person's qualities is the practice of a  
bodhisattva.*

Now it's very common that if someone says something unkind about us then we will want to say something nasty about them. Then they say something even meaner and we respond predictably and then nothing is resolved. Just a lot of bad feelings, anger and aggression come up. So obviously this is not the way to go.

If someone is saying something critical about us then the first thing to consider is whether or not it is true. Are they pointing out some hidden fault which we hadn't noticed? In which case we can be grateful. Or, if it is totally untrue, so what? If it's not true anyway one doesn't need to keep defending oneself because the gossip will eventually disappear like dark clouds in the sky. However, if for example we are running something like a Dharma centre and are accused of falsifying the accounts or suchlike and this is not true, then it is fair enough that we should try to prove our integrity because otherwise these false rumours could harm the Dharma centre, and bring suspicions against others also. But we should do this without defensiveness or aggression and certainly without pointing an accusing finger at the other person. In fact far from retaliating we are recommended, out of kindness, to extol that person's qualities.

So when someone says something unkind about us, instead of returning that favor we speak everything we can think of that is good about that person, whatever

*truthfully* are their good qualities. Not just pretending and over-inflating so that everyone knows really we are just gritting our teeth. But genuinely, out of loving kindness, from our good heart, we can appreciate that person's good qualities. So instead of ending up as a battle, we can end the conflict by neutralizing it. If we have drunk poison we don't administer another poison, instead we use an antidote.

So the antidote to criticism would be to praise. That response might also undermine their negativity because they are not expecting us to turn around and say nice things about them. So it might well be that when they get to hear about that they will start to change their opinion also.

Then we can consider that although they might be difficult, still from my side I did not retaliate, I really tried to take that challenge on the path. I honestly aimed to think good things about that person since we all have good qualities as well as difficult ones and I tried to think and act as a genuine Dharma person should. So prior to speaking nicely about that person we are cultivating our good thoughts about them, speaking from a mind of loving-kindness.

Everything comes from cultivating the right attitude in the first place. It's not just that we are *pretending* to be bodhisattvas. The *essence* of our practice is to learn how to overcome our self-cherishing attitude. So in all these unpleasant situations, what is hurt? It's that sense of 'I am harmed'. Why don't we like people saying bad things about us? It humiliates *me*. I want to have a good reputation. I want people to say nice things about me, so then I am happy. But when somebody says not nice things about me, or doesn't do what I want them to do, this creates problems for *me*, it's all about *me*.

Genuine bodhisattvas act spontaneously without this sense of self and other. All genuine spiritual

traditions are trying to deal with the little self so that it can dissolve and open up into something so much more. In Buddhism there are many ways offered for doing this – meditations on emptiness, meditations on the nature of mind, vipassana, mahamudra, dzogchen, tantra, all of it is for helping us to see through the delusion of this seemingly solid, eternal and unchanging *me* at the centre: to dissolve that into pure awareness so much more vast and spacious.

So the Lojong is doing this from the point of view of everyday thoughts and emotions because we can talk about emptiness, Buddha-nature, the nature of mind and then someone says something nasty to us and we growl... ‘*Well it’s all empty...yeah, but you said...*’ So Buddhism teaches us to practise on all levels and this is the level that’s dealing with everyday life, relationships, things which come up. How are we responding? Are we responding genuinely as someone sincerely wishing to integrate the Dharma into our lives or just like an ordinary person? That’s when we can know, not when we go to Dharma centres and chant beautifully.

In everyday life, when someone does something that we don’t want, which hurts us, how do we react? Then again, if we do become angry, upset and humiliated, not to be angry with ourselves because we are angry since that creates a spiral. Instead to think that this shows us how much work we still have to do. So good, now we know and can try again. Perhaps later we can re-run that scene and try to imagine a different and more positive response, until gradually new patterns of behaviour will grow.

When someone says something bad to little children they get very upset. If everything goes the way they want, they are happy, but when it doesn’t they get distraught and sometimes quite out of control with their emotions. That’s because they are small so they don’t know how to deal with their turbulent feelings. But we are grown up now and the sign of being truly adult is that we are able to cope with our emotions and able to look and see what is not helpful and needs to change. This doesn’t happen overnight, but gradually we can change until to our own surprise we find that even when someone does something really mean, we actually don’t care. “*So what? May you be well and happy!*” Then we get the feeling that maybe something is shifting inside.

15. *Even if in the midst of a large gathering  
Someone exposes my hidden faults with insulting  
language,  
To bow to him respectfully,  
Regarding him as a spiritual friend is the practice of  
bodhisattva.*

So again, this is all about humiliation. Not only do they say something nasty to me in private, not only do they put it on the internet but even in a crowd of people they come and say something critical that exposes my faults! Again it’s a sense of incredible humiliation which then gives rise to a tremendous anger and a desire to hit back, like at political rallies and so on. Consider the abusive language that people use at these gatherings and consider that these are the people who are going to rule the country! They are making great decisions which affect the whole world, yet they can’t even deal with their own minds. Often they are so out of control it’s frightening. Where are the bodhisattvas?

*So even in the midst of a large gathering someone exposes my hidden faults with insulting language.* Later we are going to have some question and answers and then someone stands up and insults all my views with very critical language and probably accurately exposes my hidden faults to all of you. Meanwhile I am sitting up here nicely on my little throne, but as it were, cast down on the floor and beaten up, allegorically speaking – what do I do? Well I can defend myself, “*Who are you to tell me anyway? How dare you challenge my authority?*” or as Thogmé Sangpo very sagely recommends (I should remember this, should any of you challenge me) to bow respectfully and regard the critic as a spiritual friend. Why? Because anyone who reveals to us our hidden faults is a great friend. If they do that with insulting language in a large gathering they are even more our friend because of the opportunity for the ego to get up on its high horse and want to go in there with raised sword for daring to reveal to everybody my true nature – well my untrue nature – my hidden faults. Because that is the ultimate humiliation and exposes the ego in all its radiant glory. Then it is so clear and naked.

One time a friend had asked me to her house to translate a Tibetan text that she needed. Later some jewellery of hers was stolen which was kept in the room where I had stayed. Some days later she came to visit me with another friend who thought herself to be psychic and she claimed to have had a vision which showed that I was the one who stole the jewel box! It was so interesting, I was in such a state of shock - *me?!!* The sense of ego was so naked. If somebody does accuse us, whether it is true or not true, there is the sense of nakedness. The Lamas say that sometimes through shock we can get a clear view of the nature of the mind because conceptual thinking drops away in that moment. Unfortunately I didn’t see the nature of the mind, but I saw the nature of the ego.

So should anybody get up and insult us and expose our hidden faults – whether we have or don’t have – then from our heart we should be grateful. It’s very

important to know where our faults are. We see some but there are others we just don't see and until something happens to bring them up, we don't even know they are there. So instead of being defensive and all upset, we should be grateful and as it says, take our accusers as a spiritual friend.

*16. Even if one I've lovingly cared for like my own child*

*Regards me as an enemy,  
To love him even more,  
As a mother loves a sick child,  
Is the practice of a bodhisattva.*

One of the most painful things to accept is when we have helped and done favors for other people and they turn round and treat us like an enemy. For instance parents who have done so much for their children – lovingly raised them and given them an education – and then the children reach teenage years and turn against the parents, blaming all their problems on them and being totally ungrateful. At such times there is a double pain because first of all the parents are worried about what the child will do and secondly they are very hurt.

This situation often happens with siblings. There are so many brothers and sisters who are taking each other to court, usually over money and property disputes. The parent dies and then there is a fight over who gets what and so often these siblings end up as enemies even though when they were children perhaps they loved and took care of each other. Or friends who go into business together and they trust each other, then one of them embezzles the funds or something.

My mother owned a fish shop left to her by my late father and she used to work there, but my uncle – my father's brother – was actually doing the buying and selling of the fish. From time to time my mother would remark that business was so good yet we seemed to be making little profit. Then one time my uncle was sick and my mother had to go herself to the fish market to buy the fish. At the market they refused to sell her any fish because they said our shop was already over £2,000 in debt! That was a huge amount of money in those days. It turned out that my uncle was an inveterate gambler on the horses and had gambled away all our money. So, far from making a nice profit which we had actually done, instead we were deeply in debt. Because he was her brother-in-law my mother had trusted him implicitly while all those years he had been cheating us and keeping us short of money. However my mother just felt sorry for him and for his wife. Of course he retired from the shop and had to work elsewhere to repay the debt.

Beyond that she didn't do anything. She didn't take him to court and didn't speak badly of him. I used to go and see his wife every week to perm her hair. My mother just accepted that it was sad he had this affliction and he should try and get himself healed from his addiction to gambling. She never talked about it much, she didn't hold a grudge in her heart, she just went on with her life. Of course she didn't know anything about placing my uncle on the top of her head – which it mentions in the next verse - but certainly she didn't carry him as a great big lump of resentment and anger in the centre of her heart. She just felt sorry for him and that compassion transformed the situation.

So this is something very practical. If a child is throwing up and bad tempered because they are sick, the parent doesn't hate the child. In fact she loves her child all the more because they are suffering. So likewise if people treat us badly even though we have been kind to them, in a way it's because they are sick. A person who is inwardly balanced and healthy would not act like that, so obviously they have a lot of problems inside themselves and that's how they are reacting. So instead of getting upset and angry, we can treat them like a mother with a sick child, giving them even more sympathy and understanding. She realizes the child is grumpy and creating problems not because they are inherently bad but just because they don't feel well.

So all of these verses are about not getting upset, not making a double wound. To harbour resentment in our hearts and regurgitate it over and over again, what does it do? It doesn't make us happy, it doesn't help or harm the other person and it creates negative karma for us. We do to ourselves what only our worst enemies would wish for us.

*17. Even if my peers or my inferiors  
Out of pride do all they can to debase me,  
To respectfully consider them like my teachers  
On the crown of my head is the practice of a  
bodhisattva.*

Again, this is dealing with the ego and feeling humiliated. If ordinary people, like our friends or those whom we might regard as lower – servants, taxi-drivers – create problems for us and say bad things about us, then instead of trying to put them down in return, we raise them up. Why do we raise them up? We do so because they are showing us our own pride, arrogance and narrow mindedness and how much we resent other people treating us in a way that we don't want to be treated. It's dealing with the same attitude that makes us want people to admire us and treat us nicely so then we are all smiles and friendly. However

when people criticize us or don't give us the respect that we think we should be having, then we get all upset and think it's their fault. So rather than being upset and miserable, we can feel gratitude and consider how lucky we are – without adversaries how could we travel on the bodhisattva path? *“Thank you, obviously my good karma brought you along so I can get better and better. This is wonderful! I am so grateful to you for being so difficult – but at the same time I have compassion because you are so horrible and I really hope that from now on you will be well and happy!”* and **mean it**. A sense of humour is one of the great diffusers of anger and humiliation. If we can see the funny side of things then we can laugh. Humor is very important, not to take ourselves so seriously. The ego hates to be laughed at, it takes itself very seriously.

So all these verses, over and over again, are dealing with situations which come up in our relationships with others, causing us pain and hurt. So the question is how to transform that pain and bring it into our practice and at the same time cultivate those very qualities which we are trying to cultivate. It's all right to sit on our cushions and think *May all beings be well and happy! May all beings be free from suffering!* But when those beings come right in front of us and say or do nasty unkind things or say *you've got just 48 hours to get out of the country!* then these are the sentient beings that we want to be well and happy and free from suffering. So this is the point.

This is a very practical teaching on how to make use of the difficulties in life without getting all upset, without getting uptight, and also without getting uptight towards ourselves, because if we are really giving out loving kindness and compassion, these are very warming emotions which also heal our own heart. While we are giving loving-kindness and compassion to others we are also giving loving-kindness to ourselves. We are also sentient beings and we are the sentient being that we are most responsible for, so *definitely* lots of loving-kindness and compassion also towards ourselves too. In fact if we *genuinely* had loving-kindness and compassion towards ourselves, we would naturally have it towards others, it would just *naturally* overflow. The reason why we get upset and angry very quickly, is because inside we do not feel at peace with ourselves and since are always criticizing ourselves, ironically we get defensive when others also criticize us.

Also, we have to work on cultivating our heart to become more open and spacious and loving and peaceful, starting from where we are right now, so that gradually goodwill can naturally begin to radiate out. Otherwise if we are very tight like a drum, everything that touches us makes a loud noise. But if we are relaxed

and soft inside like cotton wool, even if it hits it doesn't make any noise. So inside ourselves we should feel relaxed and peaceful, more at home with ourselves, with a sense of humor so that whatever happens on the outside will not be so difficult, we can deal with it.

It has to be understood that this text of Thogmé presents the summit of how a great bodhisattva naturally acts. So it's not going to happen that each time these events occur we are going to spontaneously react in the way recommended in these verses. But it's a training program. When first we sit down to play the piano we cannot right away play a Beethoven sonata. We start with scales and hit all the wrong notes! It may sound terrible but if we keep practicing and practicing, eventually the music will flow. Likewise with our minds, when these situations come up, perhaps now in our mind we will consider *“Now pause a minute, this is my opportunity to practice”*. So therefore this is called *mind training*. We're training so we don't respond unskillfully – but instead with understanding and compassion.

This is why it's good to memorize some Lojong text such as the *8 Verses of Mind Training* because then we can quickly bring that verse to mind and it will be a reminder how a genuine practitioner should react, rather than as an ordinary person. I am sure that if someone got up in the middle of a big assembly and started insulting His Holiness the Dalai Lama, he would laugh and look at him with great compassion. His Holiness wouldn't feel insulted and upset or start saying nasty things back! Of course the security guards would come but the spontaneous response of His Holiness would be only compassion.

His Holiness often says that as a boy he had a very bad temper, so this Lojong has been one of his main practices. All the awful things that are happening in his own country to his beloved people, he's obviously used that to develop more and more compassion and less and less anger, retaliation and bitterness. He must definitely see this life as a great training program because it's relentless. Yet he never fails and that's why he's universally loved. We can see before us an example of how to respond skillfully in even the most difficult circumstances. It can be done.

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