
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

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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.

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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