
Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

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While maintaining the motivation we generated during the prayers, we can now engage in our meditation practice. *[meditation]*

Now we can re-generate the bodhicitta motivation for receiving the teachings along these lines:

For the purpose of all mother sentient beings, in order to liberate them from all suffering, and lead them to the ultimate state of happiness, I need to achieve enlightenment myself. So for that purpose I will engage in listening to the profound Mahayana teachings, and put them into practice well.

2.1.2.1. IDENTIFYING THE ANTIDOTE

2.1.2.1.2. *Identifying the antidote that abandons attachment (cont.)*

We covered this topic last week. It explained that the two main antidotes for overcoming attachment are calm abiding and special insight. The sequence in which one first needs to obtain calm abiding followed by special insight was also explained, as well as their definitions. So it's good to keep all of that in mind.

2.1.2.2. THE METHOD FOR GENERATING THE ANTIDOTE

Having identified the antidote that abandons attachment, the text goes on to explain the methods for generating that antidote under two main headings:

2.1.2.2.1. Abandoning attachment to the inner object—sentient beings

2.1.2.2.2. Abandoning attachment to the external

2.1.2.2.1. *Abandoning attachment to the inner object—sentient beings*

Again, this has two subdivisions:

2.1.2.2.1.1. The faults of attachment

2.1.2.2.2.2. Abandoning upon having understood the faults

2.1.2.2.1.1. The faults of attachment

The faults of attachment are further subdivided into five:

2.1.2.2.1.1.1. One will not meet with the desired object

2.1.2.2.1.1.2. Being abused by the sense objects

2.1.2.2.1.1.3. Although attaining it there is no contentment

2.1.2.2.1.1.4. Obstructing liberation

2.1.2.2.1.1.5. Squandering the freedoms and endowments

The essential points presented in the following verses are very poignant, and we really need to contemplate them.

2.1.2.2.1.1.1. *One will not meet with the desired object*

It is essential that we understand the faults of attachment. As presented, some of the faults of attachment are that the object of attachment is difficult to obtain and even when one obtains it, one is not content and happy. This is indeed very true, and verified by one's own experience. Of course if we don't pay attention, then these faults may

not be apparent. But when we do an honest internal investigation it is very clear that attachment is the main cause for many of our problems.

As I've said in the past, talking about the faults of attachment may not be a particularly interesting topic for you. But if I were to start talking about the benefits of attachment, you might start paying very good attention and think: 'Now this is what I need to hear'. It is strange how the mind works and reacts when the faults of attachment are mentioned.

This goes to show how the mind is strongly habituated with desire and attachment, to the point that it appears to be an integral part of ourselves. We have such a deeply-rooted association with attachment that it's hard for us to even acknowledge the faults, let alone overcome them. Thus, we don't find listening to the faults of attachment very appealing.

We need to think about these points very carefully, examine them, and investigate them thoroughly as a way to fully acknowledge them, for as long as we befriend attachment it will be extremely difficult to practise true Dharma. Therefore, to help us acknowledge these faults Shantideva takes great care to explain them in detail. The more we begin to acknowledge, contemplate, and make a genuine attempt to overcome attachment, the greater our extent of practising the true Dharma will be.

The presentations of these faults are not all that difficult to understand—they are presented in a straightforward and clear manner. The main thing is to actually adopt this understanding and incorporate it into in one's practice.

The verse relating to this outline reads:

5. *An impermanent person strongly attached
To an impermanent person
Will not see anything beautiful
For thousands of lifetimes.*

The commentary explains the meaning of the verse as follows:

The faults of attachment: Who that is impermanent and dying soon can be strongly attached to family and friends that are also impermanent? They, who are thus attached to the beautiful, will not see anything beautiful in the thousands of lifetimes that are karmic ripening results.

The initial rhetorical question, *Who that is impermanent and dying soon can be strongly attached to family and friends that are also impermanent?*, basically implies that both the person experiencing attachment and the object of that attachment are equally impermanent, as by their very nature, both will naturally decay and die.

If it were the case that one's object of attachment is firm and stable and never changes, then one might feel that perhaps it's acceptable to have attachment, because it's never going to change and will remain stable. However the fact is that the nature of the object that one is attached to is impermanent, and thus naturally disintegrates and decays. The point being made here is the absurdity of being strongly attached to an object that will naturally decay and disintegrate.

Furthermore, due to strong attachment to what is attractive and beautiful, the ripening result is that one will not see attractive objects for a long period of time in

future lifetimes. That is the karmic result of being attached to beautiful objects.

In contrast to that, a buddha's mind is said to remain perpetually in a state of bliss where everything—the surrounding environment and the beings within—all appear to be appealing and pleasant. That is because a buddha's mind is completely free from attachment. That is the result of completely abandoning attachment.

From our limited experience we might have noticed that once we start letting go of things, then they seem to become more abundant. Some have confided to me that when they reduce attachment to certain things, whether it is other people or objects, then the object of that attachment starts to (respectively) come closer, and be more abundant. When you are attached to money, for example, it seems to be difficult to obtain it, but when you start letting go of that attachment and not care too much about it, then money appears to come more easily. Many people seem to have actually experienced this. So even in the short term we can see that letting go of our attachment to things, situations and so forth, can actually make them even more appealing, more abundant and more enjoyable. This is one point we need to understand.

Another significant point we need to recall here is that the fault does not lie in seeing things as being appealing; rather, the fault lies in being attached to them. This is very clearly illustrated by the way sentient beings appear to bodhisattvas: because of their great endearing love, all beings appear to be very appealing and dear to them, yet they are not attached to them. In our situation the reverse seems to operate: other sentient beings appear appealing to us, and we immediately become attached to them.

A bodhisattva's lack of attachment is due to the wisdom realising emptiness that they have developed. This is a very significant point. It is that wisdom realising emptiness which protects their mind from feelings of strong attachment. As explained in the presentations on emptiness, for the person who has a deep understanding of emptiness, there's a discrepancy between the appearance and the actual mode of existence. While things appear to be truly existent, they do not actually exist in the way they appear to exist.

So when an object appears to be very attractive to us, we need to immediately apply the understanding that it does not exist in the way it appears to us, and that will immediately reduce strong interest in the beautiful features of the object. Applying the understanding of emptiness in this way immediately helps to overcome strong attachment. As explained in the teachings, having even a doubt about emptiness begins to shatter the core of cyclic existence.

Understanding emptiness means understanding that things do not exist in the way that they appear, and that there's a discrepancy between appearance and the actual mode of existence. Although things appear to our eye consciousness in a certain way, the actual mode of existence is contrary to the way it appears. Applying this understanding to objects of attachment will have an immediate impact and reduce that attachment to beautiful and appealing objects. Then, whatever

understanding of emptiness one has will have served its purpose.

One might assume that one has meditated on emptiness and understood it. But as soon as one sees an attractive object, one's mind becomes attached and one's heart starts pumping with excitement, or, on the other hand, strong aversion arises when one sees an unappealing object. That indicates that one has not derived even a drop of essence of practice from the meditation. Any understanding of emptiness would have been superficial and not deep-rooted, and hence unable to overcome afflictions. This will be an instance of where one has not even begun to taste the real Dharma. This is an important point that you really need to keep in mind.

The main point from the instructions presented here is that if we don't see the faults of attachment, and apply antidotes to overcome that attachment when it arises, then we will experience negative consequences. Conversely, if we start to recognise and accept the faults of attachment and slowly overcome its influence over our mind, then gradually our wellbeing will improve.

In simple terms, if we ask ourselves whether we want a more relaxed and happy mind, or a more troubled state of mind, then our response will naturally be that we want a genuinely calm and happier state of mind. Thus, the advice being presented here is that for a happy state of mind we should not allow our mind to be completely obsessed with attachment and desire, and this is done by recognising and acknowledging the faults of attachment. This is really the main point.

2.1.2.2.1.1.2. *Being abused by the sense objects*

The first two lines of the next verse are:

*6ab. Not seeing it, one will not have joy,
And the mind will not enter equipoise.*

In a sense, Shantideva is pointing the finger right at our hearts.

The commentary reads:

If asked: 'What will happen when one does not see anything attractive?'

Answer: If one does not see anything beautiful, one will not have joy. Since one's mind will be unhappy, it will be distracted, it will not enter equipoise of concentration and one will not attain happiness.

The hypothetical question posed in the commentary is, *what will happen if one does not see anything attractive?* What would be the consequences if one doesn't see anything attractive?

As the commentary explains very clearly, *if one does not see beautiful or pleasant things, then that will deprive one of a sense of joy.* If we just constantly see unpleasant things then that will weigh our minds down, and we will not be joyful.

If the mind is unhappy then it will be easily distracted. What follows from this is that the mind *will not be able to enter into the equipoise of concentration*, i.e. one will not be able to concentrate on an object because it is unhappy, or depressed. If the mind is depressed or unhappy, then it will be impossible for the mind to maintain complete focus on an object. And if one is not able to enter into the

equipoise of concentration, then there will be no way of gaining a genuine sense of happiness.

The presentation of this fault of attachment follows directly from the previous verse, which indicated that attachment will prevent one from seeing pleasant things in the long-term future. The explanation in these two lines shows the negative effects of not seeing pleasant things. Although the words *attractive* or *beautiful* are used, their meaning in this context is that people or environmental objects are suitable objects for interaction, which can be when they are pleasant, as opposed to unpleasant.

If one has a strong attachment to objects then the consequence will be not seeing pleasant things in the future. Not seeing things as being pleasant and attractive and so forth can cause unhappiness and a lack of joy, and the result of that is that the mind will not be able to develop the equipoise of concentration.

2.1.2.2.1.1.3. *Although attaining it there is no contentment*

However when things do start appearing as nice and beautiful, then there is the danger for attachment to these beautiful objects to arise, which will then cause discontentment.

The next two lines of the verse are:

*6cd. Although seeing it, one is not satisfied
And will be miserable due to craving as before.*

The commentary explains:

Even if one sees the desired objects, one is not satisfied due to craving. Due to craving one will be as miserable as before, when one did not see the desired object.

As explained clearly in the commentary, *if one sees the desired objects, one is not satisfied due to craving*. Due to attachment one desires to possess an object, or if it is a person, then you want to be close to them. However, even when one is in close proximity to the object, or one possesses it, there's a lack of contentment, and because of that lack of contentment one will again be miserable.

When one did not meet with the object there was a certain level of mental suffering, and now, having met with the object, one would assume that one is released from the suffering of not being with the object. However one experiences further suffering from not being satisfied, even though one owns the object, or is in close proximity to the other person.

If we were to take a contemporary example, when two people are initially attracted to each other then there's attachment, and because of that fascination they want to be close to each other. So they agree to live together, and perhaps even get married. But after they have lived together for some time, then a similar suffering to what they experienced before they met will arise. It is as if they are still lacking something; that is because they are still not content.

Therefore, *one will be as miserable as before, when one did not see the desired object*. The suffering that occurs in the mind will be similar to the suffering one experienced when one did not possess the object.

As the teachings explain in detail, attachment is one of the worst of the afflictions, because it is one of the main

causes of being perpetually reborn in samsara again and again.

More precisely, in reference to the twelve links of interdependent origination, at the time of death it is the links of craving and grasping that lead to the link of existence, which is how one is reborn again into cyclic existence. Both craving and grasping are aspects of attachment. So we can see how, as the teachings explain, attachment is the primary cause for one to be reborn in samsara.

2.1.2.2.1.1.4. *Obstructing liberation*

This fault is presented in the following verse:

*7. If one is attached to sentient beings
The mere perfect meaning is obscured.
It will also destroy the mind of disenchantment
And lastly, one will be overwhelmed by misery.*

Here Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

For those reasons, if one is attached to sentient beings, one will be completely obscured with regard to the perfect meaning itself, and thus it will obstruct the direct perception of ultimate truth. In addition, by craving contaminated phenomena, the mind of disenchantment with cyclic existence will be destroyed and one will not attain liberation. As one will finally be separated from everything that is pleasant, one will be overwhelmed by misery.

If one is attached to sentient beings, one will be completely obscured with regard to the perfect meaning itself, and thus it will obstruct the direct perception of ultimate truth, indicates that attachment to the internal object of sentient beings obstructs the perception of ultimate reality, or emptiness.

We have all seen how strong attachment can affect normal judgements, and how it leads to mistakes and poor decisions. For example, strong attachment can obscure the faults of the other person, so that only qualities are seen. There's no question that attachment obscures faults; it impairs the wisdom or intelligence needed to be able to make sound decisions.

This verse specifically relates to attachment to sentient beings. It is explained in the teachings that attachment to animate objects is much more difficult to overcome than attachment to inanimate objects. That's why attachment to sentient beings is specifically explained here.

Furthermore, as explained here, *by craving contaminated phenomena, the mind of disenchantment with cyclic existence will be destroyed and one will not attain liberation*. Renunciation cannot be developed when one's mind is obsessed with desire and attachment. For as long as one is attached to the pleasures of samsara it is impossible to develop renunciation, and it is only when one develops a mind of disenchantment with the pleasures of samsara that one can actually start to develop renunciation.

Disenchantment with the objects of desire comes from the development of a full understanding of the sufferings of samsara. Without acknowledging and recognising the three sufferings of samsara, it is impossible to develop disenchantment with samsara and renunciation of it.

a. The first of these sufferings, **the suffering of suffering** is not too difficult to recognise. It is something we have all experienced—even animals can recognise the suffering of suffering.

b. The second suffering is **the suffering of change**. Attachment to the sensual pleasures leads to disenchantment with change. Even non-Buddhists can develop that level of disenchantment.

c. The true suffering that one needs to recognise, and seek to overcome, is **all-pervasive compounded suffering**, which is said to be much more subtle and thus much harder to recognise and overcome. It is only by fully acknowledging and recognising all-pervasive compounded suffering that one is able to develop disenchantment with samsara.

As one will finally be separated from everything that is pleasant, one will be overwhelmed by misery indicates the extent to which suffering is an obstruction to liberation.

When the commentary refers to *craving contaminated phenomena*, we need to understand that this refers specifically to craving for the appropriated contaminated aggregates. By *craving for contaminated phenomena the mind of disenchantment with cyclic existence will be destroyed*, means that being strongly attached to the appropriated contaminated aggregates destroys disenchantment with samsara, and one will not be able to develop renunciation.

Thus liberation is obstructed by craving contaminated phenomena.

2.1.2.2.1.1.5. *Squandering the freedoms and endowments*

This fault is presented in these two lines:

*8ab. Because of being obsessed with it
This life will pass meaninglessly.*

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je explains:

By thinking exclusively about the objects of desire, this life will pass meaninglessly and the power of the freedoms and endowments will be squandered.

This explanation is, of course, quite clear, and we need to really take it to heart, and apply it to our own practice. As explained here, *by thinking exclusively about the objects of desire, this life will pass meaninglessly and the power of the freedoms and endowments will be squandered*. We currently possess a precious human life with its freedoms and endowments. However, if we become completely obsessed with the objects of desire, then that will prevent us from obtaining any significant personal spiritual goal.

To see this as a personal instruction we need to recall how a mind that is obsessed with an object of desire experiences perpetual problems and difficulties. When we look back, we can see how, in one form or another, all the problems that we have been experiencing are mainly due to not having fulfilled our desires. We keep going from one point to the next trying to pursue an object of desire that keeps eluding us. If one continues in this way then one's life will be empty, and one will not have extracted the essence from one's life. If we behave like that, then we have definitely *squandered* our *freedoms and endowments*.

At a personal level, one should think: 'What prevents me from fully utilising my precious human rebirth to achieve goals such as a good status (which is a good rebirth in the next lifetime), and liberation and enlightenment, is none other than my own mind, which is obsessed with desires. If I continue to be obsessed like this, my mind of desire

will prevent me from using my potential to obtain these great goals. All my problems, from external ones to psychological problems, come down to the feeling of not obtaining the objects of my desire'. That is how we destroy our own temporary and ultimate happiness. So this is what we need to keep in mind.

2.1.2.2.2. *Abandoning upon having understood the faults*

That is subdivided into two:

2.1.2.2.2.1. Contemplating the faults

2.1.2.2.2.2. The way of abandoning

2.1.2.2.2.1. Contemplating the faults

Here there are two subdivisions.

2.1.2.2.2.1.1. Extensive explanation

2.1.2.2.2.1.2. Summary

2.1.2.2.2.1.1. Extensive explanation

The extensive explanation is subdivided into three:

2.1.2.2.2.1.1.1. The great purpose will be destroyed and one will be led to the lower realms

2.1.2.2.2.1.1.2. Childish friends are unreliable and they are difficult to count upon

2.1.2.2.2.1.1.3. One will not receive benefit from them and they will harm one

2.1.2.2.2.1.1.1. **The great purpose will be destroyed and one will be led to the lower realms**

Again, some very significant points are being presented under these headings. They relate to what we need to be wary of in our life. First of all *the great purpose will be destroyed and one will be led to the lower realms*. The next point is that *childish friends are unreliable and they are difficult to count upon*. Thirdly, childish friends are friends who have a bad influence over oneself. Thus, if one were to completely rely on such 'friends', one's own purpose will be destroyed and one will not even be able to help them.

We can go over the explanations in our next session.

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

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