
Shantideva's *Bodhisattvacharyavatara*

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Based on the motivation we have just generated, let us engage in the regular meditation practice. (*Meditation*)

We can now generate the motivation for receiving teachings 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 profound Mahayana teachings and then put them into practice well.

If we can put into practice whatever understanding we gain from listening to the teachings, then it serves its purpose and makes it most meaningful. The advice in the next couple of verses is in fact very profound and should be integrated in this way.

2.1.2.2.1.2. Abandoning upon having understood the faults

2.1.2.2.1.2.1. Contemplating the faults

2.1.2.2.1.2.1.1. Extensive explanation (cont.)

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

The last two lines of the earlier verse and the next verse read:

- 8cd. *Friends and relatives lacking permanence
Destroy even the eternal Dharma.*
9. *If one acts on the same level as the childish
One will definitely go to the lower realms.
If they lead one to unequal fortune
What is reliance on the childish supposed to
accomplish?*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

Friends and relatives, who are without permanence in that one will quickly be separated from them, destroy and degenerate even eternal liberation and the method for achieving it, i.e. the holy Dharma. If one acts on the same level as the childish then one will definitely go to the lower realms.

If one is led by the childish to a place unequal to the fortune of superior beings and deprived of the presently obtained human body that we have now, then what is supposed to be accomplished by relying on ordinary individuals? One will not achieve one's wishes, and that which one does not wish for will increase.

While the explanation is quite clear, what we should reflect upon as the essential point - *friends and relations who are without permanence in that one will quickly be separated from them* - is that whatever relationships we have with others are in the nature of impermanence. If we have this understanding from the very outset then, when separation does take place, it will help to release one from great agony. With a lack of this understanding at the beginning, and if one has very strong attachment, then one will grasp and strongly hold onto the object of

attachment. The stronger the attachment one has to the object, the more it taints one's perception and thus one sees it as permanent and long lasting. Thus when the situation changes from either side, it can cause great mental agony. Inevitably change will occur and if one is not able to accept it then it causes great pain in one's mind.

Of course we rely on relationships, especially when we live with others, but the main point is to be mindful of impermanence, which will help to reduce strong attachment and clinging to relationships. In fact, we need to integrate an understanding of impermanence in to everything we engage in. To the extent that we lack the understanding of impermanence, the stronger the attachment and grasping to that object will be.

An understanding of subtle impermanence definitely helps to overcome attachment, but even recognising the grosser levels of impermanence, such as the obvious changes that lead up to death, will definitely reduce strong attachment. The more we reflect on this reality, the less we cling and grasp to the meaningless affairs of this life. Our strong preoccupation with worldly affairs will naturally reduce to the extent that we overcome our grasping to them. Then happiness will naturally occur in one's mind. Even if one says, 'I don't wish for happiness', happiness will naturally occur. The shortcomings being presented here are the faults of attachment, and if one does not overcome attachment, there is no way one can develop renunciation.

It is important to develop **renunciation** as it is the first of the three principles of the path. The reason it is presented as one of the principles of the path is that without developing renunciation one cannot possibly develop disenchantment to samsaric pleasures. **Bodhicitta** is the second principle of the path because without developing it one cannot possibly obtain enlightenment. Whatever virtues we accumulate, without bodhicitta they cannot become causes for enlightenment, so virtuous actions need to be held with bodhicitta. The **wisdom realising emptiness** is the third principle of the path, because without it one cannot possibly overcome the grasping to the self. This is how we need to understand overcoming attachment and developing renunciation in the context of the principles of the path.

The commentary explains that if one holds onto attachment to friends and relatives it will *destroy and degenerate even eternal liberation and the method for achieving it, i.e. the holy Dharma*. Here 'eternal' refers to the unceasing state of happiness experienced when one obtains liberation. This is destroyed if one acts on the same level as the childish, and if one does that, then one will definitely go to lower realms.

I have conveyed the significant points presented here in previous teachings over and over again, specifically how we must be careful not to be misled by negative friends and act like them. What is called 'childish' here refers to those who have no qualms about engaging in negativities, and so if we follow their example we'll destroy our own potential to obtain liberation, and bring ourselves to the lower realms. An example of childish would be if others engage in a negativity such as killing and we think that is fine, and engage in the same

behaviour. That is how the negativity of killing is transferred to us. Likewise if others engage in sexual misconduct and we follow that example it destroys our own virtues and we create negativity. These are significant points that Shantideva points out, and of course we can relate it to the other negativities as well.

While we may *destroy and degenerate even eternal liberation*, ultimately failing to gain the wisdom realising emptiness can also be explained in relation to renunciation. If we do not develop renunciation, and are attached to engaging in the activities of the childish, we become influenced by those negative friends. So we need to be mindful of not associating with negative friends, while maintaining compassion for them. Shantideva clearly explains later on that not associating with negative friends is about protecting oneself so that one is not influenced by negativities. That doesn't mean one does not hold them in compassion, of course one does, but at the same time being mindful not to be influenced by their example.

The commentary states, *If one is led by the childish to a place unequal to the fortune of superior beings and presently obtained a human body*, which means that when one is influenced by one's association with those who engage in childish activities (negative friends), then this destroys one's own virtues, and leads one to a place that does not have the fortune of superior beings. Superior beings can refer to actual arya beings, but it can also refer to holy beings. The Tibetan term *kyiwo-dampa* (which can be translated as 'holy being' or 'noble being') is defined in the *Abhidharma* as beings who are engaged in pure and virtuous conduct and shun negativities.

As explained in the *Abhidharma* there are four types of aryas or holy beings: 1) one who is content with poor clothing 2) one who is content with meagre alms 3) one who is content with a poor dwelling and 4) one who takes joy in ascetic practices. Being led to a place which is unequal to the fortune of superior beings means that following the childish and engaging in non-virtues deprives one of opportunity to engage in virtue; perpetually engaging in non-virtue is exactly the opposite to having the fortune of a superior being.

Likewise, *presently obtained a human body that we have now*, means one will be led to a place where one does not have the opportunity that we have with our presently obtained body. Again, one cannot completely avoid associating with others, and in certain circumstances one may have to be with relatives, friends etc., but if any of these people engage in childish or negative behaviours we need to be mindful not to be influenced by them. We need to use our own intelligence and wisdom to distinguish between what is proper behaviour and what is improper behaviour. So when one is associating with others, even if one has to be with those who are engaging in immoral behaviours, one immediately needs to be able to hold the dignity of virtue in one's mind and be composed, and not allow oneself to follow their example. This is the main point to derive from the instruction.

The commentary further explains *then what is supposed to be accomplished by relying on ordinary individuals*, which implies that one cannot accomplish anything by relying

on ordinary individuals, and so one will not ultimately achieve one's wishes. Conversely, what one does not wish for will increase. These are the negative consequences.

If one were to take these lines literally in a worldly sense, one might think, 'so, it is good to achieve whatever one wishes for'. However the wishes referred to here are not worldly wishes but rather virtuous wishes, those that relate to the Dharma, such as liberation, enlightenment, opportunity to engage in accumulating virtues and merit. Those are the wishes being presented here. One has to understand these meanings to relate to virtues etc. because of the type of advice being presented here. The advice presented here is related to Dharma practice, and in many cases exclusively to a monk's practice. So it is important to understand and relate the advice and instructions given in the text to its proper context. However a lot of the explanations are also very practical and useful to apply by anyone in their daily life. I have presented many of these points previously, so here I am being backed up by Shantideva.

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

This topic is something you can relate to your own experiences in life. There are many who might say 'Oh I cannot relate with that person, it is very difficult to rely on them' but in saying that, one is already in a committed relationship with them. Prior to engaging in the relationship one may not have taken this attribute into consideration, so once one is in a relationship with them, it is almost too late to complain that they are difficult to rely upon.

The verses read:

10. *In one instant they become friends
But in a mere moment they also turn into
enemies.
As they become angry at that which is likeable
Ordinary individuals are difficult to please.*
11. *If one says something beneficial, they become
angry
They will even reverse one from the beneficial,
If one does not listen to their words
They will go to the lower realms due to anger.*

The commentary explains:

As their mental continuum is unstable, they become friends in an instant but in the mere moment it takes to say some bad words they become enemies again.

As they become angry if one brings them into contact with virtue, which is likeable, ordinary individuals are difficult to please. Not only do they become angry if one says something beneficial, in many ways, they will also turn oneself away from the beneficial cause that is virtue. If one does not listen to their words, they become angry and go to the lower realms.

The commentary states that, *their mental continuum is unstable*, highlighting the need to understand the importance of having a stable mind. When one's mind is unstable it is vulnerable to all the faults presented here. There are so many stories I could also share about this. What is being presented here is that people become friends, but in the instant it takes to say some bad words they become enemies. This is really very true. We can see

there are many examples where someone who is supposed to be a very close friend can in an instant turn around and take a person's life. Instances like this have occurred.

These points are actually quite clear, but one should reflect on their significance. For example, the first point reflects upon how just a few words can change the sentiments within oneself or others, even strangers. But sometimes even with strangers, just a few unpleasant words can create a very hostile situation. There are many instances like that which we can reflect upon. The attribute of being childish refers to those who, if you try to connect them with virtue, and things which are actually useful and meaningful for them, become angry and do not appreciate your actions. In this way we see that ordinary beings are very difficult to please. We can also see that by befriending childish, ordinary beings one can easily be misled. There are many instances of someone who is known to be a good Dharma practitioner but because of the influence of their associates they later start to go astray and not practise the Dharma. It is in this way that we can see the disadvantages of befriending the childish.

Furthermore, *not only do they become angry if one says something beneficial, in many ways, they will also turn oneself away from the beneficial cause that is virtue.* This refers to the fact that it is one thing not being able to benefit them, but in fact associating with childish or negative friends can lead you into engaging in non-virtuous deeds and so turn you away from what has been beneficial. We can see in normal relationships that, *if one does not listen to their words, they become angry and go to the lower realms,* which occurs all too often. When you try to explain something using nice words, sometimes they don't listen, and at other times they get angry. If they get angry they are creating the causes to go to the lower realms themselves, but it is in the interaction with oneself that this happens. It is in this way that one should contemplate on the faults.

As one of the great Tibetan Masters Padampa Sangye said:

By relying on a non-virtuous friend, one's own negativities will increase rapidly. Therefore one must definitely shun association with negative friends. By relying on a virtuous friend one's virtues and positive merits will increase rapidly. Thus one must definitely rely on a virtuous friend.

The literal meaning of the term for a Dharma teacher is 'virtuous friend'. So, one must rely on those who help to increase virtues within us, and not rely on those who increase negativities. These few lines have explained the disadvantages of relying on negative friends and the great advantage of relying on a virtuous friend in a clear way. We need to take the essence of this.

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

The verse reads:

12. *Jealous of the higher and competing with the equal,
Pride towards those lower; conceited when
praised.
If one expresses something unpleasant, they
become angry.
When does one derive benefit from the childish?*
13. *If one associates with the childish*

*One will definitely acquire every non-virtue there
is,
Such as praising oneself and criticising others,
And conversation taking pleasure in cyclic
existence.*

As the commentary explains,

Further, the childish are jealous of those higher, compete with those that are equal and if they observe those that are lower, they are proud. When praised they generate conceit, but if one says something unpleasant they become angry.

Hence, when does one receive benefit from involvement with the childish? Not only does one not, but one will definitely acquire every kind of non-virtue by keeping company with the childish. One will definitely take on praising oneself and criticising others, or get in the habit of conversation that takes pleasure in cyclic existence, such as stories that deal with the king, the people in the country and so forth. Therefore, one should not associate with the childish.

This Tibetan verse is written in such an eloquent and poetic way it is good to reflect on the words in the verse itself. You could memorise it and reflect on it, *Jealous of those higher,* and *competing with those that are equal,* is quite clear. *Pride towards those who are lower and being conceited when praised* is also quite clear. Then if one expresses *something unpleasant they become angry* so *when does one receive benefit from the childish?* These are all very significant points as further explained in the commentary.

The attributes of the childish are that they are jealous of those who are higher, and this is something about which many people lament. Many have confided in me that they feel very jealous about work situations or relationships. Jealousy is one of the main factors that cause agony in the mind, especially in a work situation when others are doing better than oneself. Rather than feeling joyful for them it is easy to experience jealousy from which many kinds of faults and spiteful words can occur.

To *compete with those who are equal* refers to being competitive with one's peers. This is something that often occurs. And then with those who are less advantaged, or a bit lower in status, one develops pride and contempt for them. What is being presented here are the shortcomings of engaging in sentiments such as pride, jealousy, and a sense of competitiveness as these are the ones that causes us a lot of problems in everyday life.

One needs to relate these points to oneself, and not think it is referring to others as being childish, and that oneself is excluded from that. If one actually has these sentiments one must reflect, 'If I have these faults then it makes it very difficult for others to relate to me. Just as I find it difficult to relate to others who have these faults, then it is the same for others who have difficulty relating to me'.

By acknowledging these shortcomings we need to apply the antidote. There are antidotes for overcoming each of these negative states of mind, and one needs to resort to them. Jealousy is a dominant sentiment which causes a lot of problems. There are many who say the boyfriend is jealous of their girlfriend, or the girlfriend is jealous of their boyfriend, or in a work situation that they are jealous of their colleagues etc. A lot of jealousy occurs in everyday situations which causes a lot of problems. The antidote for overcoming jealousy is to rejoice. To

contemplate how it is good that others have good things happening for them. If one can train one's mind to feel joy in these situations then basically that will help one to overcome jealousy.

I don't claim that I am a great practitioner, but I have protected my mind from jealousy and while there might be small occasions where jealousy might occur in the mind, I have not gone out of my way to cause disruption by back-biting, and so forth, out of jealousy. This is something I can say I have definitely not engaged in. This is how we need to protect ourselves. If we are jealous, we might go around spreading rumours or backbiting, so one really needs to protect oneself from this kind of behaviour. While the verses here are very clear, applying them in one's own practice is what one really needs to do.

2.1.2.2.1.2.1.2. Summary

*14ab. Thus, the relationship between self and other
Will create ruin.*

As the commentary explains the meaning of these two lines:

Thus, through the mutual relationship between oneself and other childish ones, they become negative friends and one will be ruined.

The commentary explicitly mentions *they become negative friends*. The reason someone would be referred to as a negative friend is that by associating with them one's own negativity increases. That would be a clear sign that one is associating with negative friends. If by associating with someone one's virtues increase, then that is by default a virtuous friend. So while we protect ourselves from associating with negative friends, we need to ensure that we don't become a cause to be a negative friend for others. For example, in our conversations if we start talking about likes and dislikes and gossip, it increases the delusions in one's own mind and creates negativity in the other's mind. Then one is, by default, serving as a negative friend for others. This is why one needs to be mindful of one's speech.

2.1.2.2.1.2.2. The way of abandoning

*14cd. As they have not produced one's purpose
And one also does not become meaningful for them,*

15a. One should get far away from the childish.

The commentary explains:

As childish ordinary individuals have not produced one's purpose and one also does not become meaningful for them, one should retreat far away into isolation.

Having earlier presented the faults of relying on, or associating with the childish, the verse and commentary explain further that *as childish ordinary individuals have not produced one's purpose*, they have not helped to fulfil one's own purpose. *One also does not become meaningful for them* means that one cannot help them. If this is the case, one needs to resolve to go into isolation, which means finding an appropriate place to abide where there are no worldly distractions.

The following lines explain what to do when one goes into isolation.

They read:

*15bcd. If one meets them, make them happy through joy
Without creating great familiarity.
Act well in an ordinary way.*

*16. Like the bee takes the honey from the flower
Take only the meaning of the Dharma and,
Like not having seen them before,
Abide without familiarity.*

The commentary states:

When occasionally meeting them, first make them happy through joy but then do not become greatly familiar. Act well, without attachment or anger, like an ordinary person just pointing the way.

Also when one goes to seek alms in the town, like the bee that takes the honey from the flower without being attached to its colour and so on, whilst being there physically, take only robes and food for the purpose of the Dharma. Abide without involvement in the distractions, and treat all people as if not having seen them before.

Thus when abiding in isolation, on occasions when one meets with ordinary people who may, for example, bring provisions etc., then the advice for that time is not to engage in lengthy conversation. Of course, make the people happy and joyful, but do not become too familiar. In this way one acts without attachment or anger towards them. Just briefly make one's point and keep one's conversation short. This is the way to avoid worldly talk, lest one gets involved in non-virtuous discussions.

When one is in isolation one still needs to eat and be clothed, so if one has no means oneself then one has to depend on alms and go out and beg. The manner of getting alms is explained with an analogy of a bee taking the essence from a flower without being attached to the colour etc. That is, when the bee actually lands on the flower it does not disturb it, it does not get distracted by the flower itself, it just takes the essence, the nectar, and flies off.

Likewise, whilst in the town, one just takes what one needs for one's purpose of Dharma, such as clothes and food, and then return to isolation. There have been times in the past, after I finished my studies, when I have aspired to go and stay in isolation, and do my practice. If that had occurred I would have gone out to seek alms, just as Shantideva is advising here. However I didn't get that opportunity in the past and now, at my age, I don't think it is possible to do it. But living simply in this way, and practising the Dharma, was something I aspired to.

The commentary advises:

Abide without involvement in the distractions, and treat all people as if not having seen them before.

In summary, when one goes out into a town, one should not allow oneself to become immersed and get caught up in frivolous activities and distractions which go on within it. Just go out for one's own purpose, to sustain oneself and for the Dharma practice. Then even if one meets people, act as if one has not known them, not seen them before, and avoid too much familiarity so that one does not get caught up in frivolous activities. This is the advice.

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