

Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

༄༅། །བྱང་ཆུབ་སེམས་དཔའི་སྤོང་པ་ལ་འཇུག་པ་བཞུགས་སོ།།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

10 November 2015

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

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

For the sake 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 Mahayana teachings, and put them into practice well.

2.1. Abandoning distractions

2.1.2. The way of abandoning it

2.1.2.4. THE BENEFITS OF RELYING ON ISOLATION

2.1.2.4.4. Distinction of individual discernment (cont.)

2.1.2.4.4.2. Individually discerning the antidote against attachment to friends and relatives

This is subdivided into three

2.1.2.4.4.2.1. It is unsuitable to be attached to friends and relatives

2.1.2.4.4.2.2. The reason for that

2.1.2.4.4.2.3. Thinking of oneself as a guest that stays each day in a different abode

2.1.2.4.4.2.1. *It is unsuitable to be attached to friends and relatives*

This section of the text explains the disadvantages of being overly attached to friends, relatives, and close companions. Indeed, strong attachment to those closest to us seems to lead to a lot of mental agony. It is suitable to generate compassion for close ones, relatives and friends, but strong attachment is the cause of a lot of mental agony. Of course we may engage in relationships with the idea that we are going to derive happiness from that relationship, but it often leads to more suffering, more agony and more disturbance to the mind.

The faults of attachment are specifically explained in the following passages of the text. Really, the main point is that having an overly strong attachment to one's close and dear relatives can be a hindrance to one's practice. These faults are quite clearly explained in the text and are not very difficult to understand.

The verse relating to this heading reads:

31. *Although this body came as one,
If the flesh and bones, which were born at the
same time,
Disintegrate and separate from each other,
Then what need is there to mention friends and
relatives?*

The commentary explains the meaning as follows:

One should give up the craving of not wanting to be separated from friends and relatives. Even though this body came as a whole, if the flesh and bones, which were born at the same time, disintegrate and separate

from each other, then what need is there to mention that one will be separated from friends that came unrelated, through the power of their own individual karma? Think that you will quickly be separated.

The commentary states that *one should give up the craving of not wanting to be separated from friends and relatives*. In addition to attachment to relatives, friends, and companions, which is, of course, a fault, the specific attachment being referred to here is attachment to not wanting to be separated from a partner in a close relationship. One needs to give up that craving. As presented here, the disadvantage of having this craving is that one will experience enormous mental suffering when separation inevitably takes place.

The reason for giving up this craving (which also serves as an antidote to it) is that *even though this body came as a whole, the flesh and bones (which were born at the same time) disintegrate and separate from each other*. Of course, the self and the body are inseparable during this lifetime. However, one is born with a body that will naturally disintegrate, and when that happens, the self and the physical body will separate from each other.

So *what need is there to mention that one will be separated from friends that came unrelated, through the power of their own individual karma?* This rhetorical question implies that as one will be separated from this very body that one is born with, there's no question then that one will be separated from close relatives and friends, and so forth. That will definitely happen.

Contemplating these points is the means to overcome that craving of not wanting to be separated from close friends and relatives. Thinking *that you will quickly be separated* will then help to overcome that craving. When one contemplates these points thoroughly and overcomes the strong craving of not wanting to be separated, then when the actual separation takes place, there won't be as much agony and suffering.

2.1.2.4.4.2.2. The reason for that

Having explained that it is unsuitable to be attached to friends and relatives, the text then explains why that is the case. So we can see how the text presents the material very meticulously, backing up explanations with sound reasoning.

The verse relating to this heading is:

32. *When one is born, one is born alone,
And when one dies, one dies alone.
Since others will not take our fortune and luck,
What is there to do with obstructing friends?*

The commentary explains:

Although one stays together for a short time, there is no need to grasp at that, because when one is born, one is born alone and when one dies, one dies alone. Since others will not take the sufferings of one's ripened results of the karmas that one created in relation to them, what good are those friends that obstruct the creation of virtue? As one is not benefited by them in the slightest, it is unsuitable to be attached to them.

As explained here in the commentary, *although one stays together for a short time, there is no need to grasp at that*. The reason for this is that *when one is born, one is born alone and when one dies, one dies alone*. Since others will not take the sufferings of one's ripened results of the karmas that one created in relation to them, what good are those friends that obstruct the creation of virtue?

While these points are quite clearly explained, we need to contemplate them carefully, and put them into practice so as not to create negativity and harm in relation to one's close ones, relatives and so forth. This is particularly important with Dharma friends, where we need to take particular care not to obstruct their creation of virtue. Indeed, rather than obstructing them, we need to be helping them to create more virtue. One needs to really pay attention to this point.

There are some who claim to be helping others but who are acting with a completely wrong motivation. Some say they are helping the other when in fact they are engaging in sexual misconduct. Behaving in this way is completely contrary to the Dharma, and such a person doesn't even come close to being a real practitioner. One is, in fact, just deluding oneself and the other.

As mentioned in Nagarjuna's *Precious Garland*, obstructing virtue is one of the heaviest negativities. Since we consider ourselves as Dharma practitioners, we need to pay great attention so that we do not obstruct the collection of virtue by other Dharma practitioners.

Individually, of course, we may engage in negativities, and when we recognise that we have created negativity, we need to acknowledge that. As I've mentioned previously, we acknowledge that we have engaged in the negativity, develop strong regret about having done so, and then engage in confession practices. If we find ourselves engaging in negativity, then that is the time to engage in purification practices by confessing those negativities. We also need to rejoice when we engage in virtue, and when we encourage others to also engage in virtue. Then we can rejoice in that too.

However the reverse of that is also practised where, as I've mentioned previously, people rejoice in the fact that they've created some negativity, and regret that they have accumulated virtue. That is the complete antithesis of Dharma practice. This is an example of one's wisdom eye being blinded. One needs to not be blinded, but to take the initiative to use one's wisdom and intelligence to engage in proper Dharma practice.

The main point being related here is that one should overcome attachment to close ones, such as relatives, friends, and companions, because that attachment can serve as a condition to create a lot of negativities. It can also obstruct the creation of virtue. However the result of that negativity can only be experienced by oneself—one can't share the negative consequences of one's negativities with another person. One has to experience those consequences by oneself.

Then the commentary concludes, *as one is not benefited by them in the slightest, it is unsuitable to be attached to them*. This is the real point that one needs to keep in mind.

2.1.2.4.4.2.3. *Thinking of oneself as a guest that stays each day in a different abode*

The analogy being presented here is that of discarding an abode in which one has resided temporarily. Another analogy is of how big gatherings of people will eventually disperse. For example crowds of people swarm around Victoria Market during the day, but by evening the market is completely empty. A recent example was His Holiness's visit to Uluru. I stayed at a guest house which, I was told, had over 200 guests at that time. But the next day, after His Holiness left, most of the guests had left and that abode was now empty. This idea also applies to families. For example, I've heard that there were ten children in the family who

originally owned this building, and I heard from one young man who came here that there are very few decedents of that family. These examples show us how gatherings, abodes and so forth naturally disperse.

The verse relating to this reads:

33. *Just as those travelling
Perceive an abode,
Those on the road of existence
Should perceive the abode of birth.*

The commentary explains:

Just as guests travelling on the road perceive the guesthouse as an abode to stay in for one day, likewise it is inappropriate for those who travel on the road of existence due to karma, to have attachment for them that are of the same kind, blood relatives, and the abode of birth where one was born once.

The commentary begins with the analogy of *guests travelling on the road finding a guesthouse as an abode to stay in for one day*. Likewise, it is inappropriate for those who travel on the road of existence due to karma, to be attached to those who are of the same kind, blood relatives. As we have all been born in this abode of human existence it is as if we are all blood relatives, in the sense that we are all of the same species, i.e. humans. However the time will come when we have to depart this abode and go on to different types of existences. Due to their karma some might be reborn in the unfortunate realms such as the hungry ghost spirit realms; others might be reborn in the human realms again; and yet others find rebirth in the god realms. So in this way the different types of existence, which are similar to abodes, keep on changing.

The point here is there's no point being attached to this abode, as one will eventually have to discard it, and go on to dwell in a different abode.

2.1.2.4.5. *Distinction of non-distraction*

This is subdivided into two:

2.1.2.4.5.1. It is suitable for the skilled to rely on isolation

2.1.2.4.5.2. The benefits of relying on isolation

2.1.2.4.5.1. **It is suitable for the skilled to rely on isolation**

Here *the skilled* refers to those who have great wisdom. Having contemplated the disadvantages presented in the earlier points, they will earnestly seek isolation.

34. *Until this body will be carried
By four people,
While the world is mourning,
Remain in the forest.*

The commentary explains:

Since one is not beyond death at the end of one's life, one should remain in the forest and rely on isolation until one's body will be carried from one's home by four people while the world of one's friends is mourning.

The very fact that one is born means that one will have to inevitably experience death; that is the natural result of being born due to the influence of delusions and karma. Since that is the case then, as explained here, one goes into isolation as a way of applying all of one's time in practice and accumulating virtue before one's body is carried by four pallbearers to the cemetery.

If one were to take this explanation literally, then the best condition for practice is isolation, where one is not distracted. However if one were to take this as a personal instruction, then the main point is that one should dedicate

one's time to engaging in the practice of Dharma and accumulating virtue, and not be overly influenced or consumed by distractions from one's close relatives and so forth. In particular, one should bring to mind that when one's life comes to its end, then it will have gone without any essence if one has not engaged in practice. That is the main point to recall here.

2.1.2.4.5.2. The benefits of relying on isolation

Again we can note here the very systematic and logical presentation of the text. Having explained that it is suitable for the skilled to rely on isolation, the logical sequence is to think about the benefits of relying on isolation.

Here there are three subdivisions:

2.1.2.4.5.2.1. There is no misery of mourning

2.1.2.4.5.2.2. Virtue does not decrease but increases

2.1.2.4.5.2.3. Hence, it is appropriate for one to rely on isolation

2.1.2.4.5.2.1. *There is no misery of mourning*

The verse relating to this heading is preceded by this rhetorical question:

If it is asked, "What are the benefits of remaining in the forest?"

Then the verse is presented:

35. *As there is no friend and no-one with
resentment,
This body should remain alone in solitude.
Being regarded as dead even before death,
There will be no mourner when one dies.*

The commentary explains the meaning of the verse, which serves as an answer to the earlier rhetorical question:

Answer: In the forest there are no friends that generate attachment or hatred and there is no-one harbouring resentment against one because of wondering whether they have been harmed by one. Hence, one should remain in physical isolation. Having given up friends and relatives one will be regarded by them as already dead before death, and so there will be no attachment and no mourners when one dies.

As the commentary explains, *in the forest there are no friends who generate attachment or hatred, so there is no-one harbouring resentment against one because of wondering whether they have been harmed by one.* What is being clearly explained here is that when one goes into solitude to engage in practice then there are no immediate concerns about whether one will be offending others, or be harmed by others. One will be free from all the normal harms and conflicts that arise due to one's relations with others and so forth.

Therefore, as explained here, *one should remain in physical isolation. Having given up friends and relatives one will be regarded by them as already dead.* By remaining in solitude and engaging in the practice, even those who knew you before will not know exactly where you are. You often hear remarks like, 'Have you seen so and so?' To which others reply, 'Well, we don't know; they could be dead for all we know'. These kinds of remarks are appropriate when one has gone into solitude to engage fully in practice.

Thus there will be *no mourners* even at the time of death.

2.1.2.4.5.2.2. *Virtue does not decrease but increases*

The verse relating to this reads:

36. *There is nobody close by
That will mourn or harm.
Through this one will not be distracted
From the recollections of Buddha and so forth.*

As the commentary explains:

If one is remaining in solitude in the forest, as there is no friend or enemy close by that will mourn or harm, one does not have any distractions from the recollections of Buddha and so forth, and from meditating on the path to liberation and omniscient transcendental wisdom. Hence, the skilled will give up distractions and retire to the forest.

As explained here, *virtue does not decrease but increases. If one remains in solitude in the forest, as there is no friend or enemy close by that will mourn or harm,* means that there will be no one to mourn if one is dead, and no-one to harm oneself.

One does not have any distractions from the recollections of Buddha and so forth. There are six recollections:

1. Recollection of the Buddha;
2. Recollection of the Dharma;
3. Recollection of the Sangha;
4. Recollection of morality;
5. Recollection of generosity; and
6. Recollection of the deities.

Furthermore, contemplating suchness and acquiring the conditions for liberation and enlightenment are further practices that one engages in without distraction in isolation. Thus the *skilled*, (those with great wisdom) *will give up distractions and retire to the forest,* to remain in solitude in order to engage in practice.

2.1.2.4.5.2.3. *Hence, it is appropriate for one to rely on isolation*

Having explained the benefits of isolation, the conclusion is that *it is appropriate for one to rely on isolation.* The verse relating to this reads:

37. *Hence, in the extremely delightful forest
There is little difficulty but bliss and happiness.
Pacifying all distraction
I shall remain in solitude.*

The commentary explains:

Hence, by remaining in the extremely delightful forest, where physical and mental happiness increases, one has little difficulty as one obtains livelihood easily, and as there are no harms like sicknesses, happiness is generated. Therefore, one should pacify all distractions and abide in solitude. One will have less harm, and virtue will increase.

As explained clearly *here, by remaining in the extremely delightful forest,* i.e. the conducive conditions in the forest, *where physical and mental happiness increases, one has little difficulty,* because *one obtains livelihood easily, and as there are no harms like sicknesses;* as such *happiness is generated.* Thus, *one should pacify all distractions and abide in solitude.* By doing so *one will have less harm, and virtue will increase.*

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

Transcript prepared by Mark Emerson
Edit 1 by Adair Bunnett
Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe
Edited Version

© Tara Institute