

Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

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17 November 2015

Based on the motivation generated during the prayers, let us engage in our meditation practice. (*Meditation*)

We can now generate the bodhicitta motivation for receiving the teaching 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 teaching and put it's meaning into practice.

2.2. Abandoning incorrect conceptualisation

This is divided into two:

2.2.1. Meditating on disillusionment of desire

2.2.2. Meditating on joy for solitude

2.2.1. Meditating on disillusionment of desire

This is sub-divided into three:

2.2.1.1. Contemplating that the result of cultivating desire is fraught with dangers

2.2.1.2. Contemplating the impure nature of the body, and so forth

2.2.1.3. Contemplating that it will give rise to much that is unwished for

2.2.1.1. CONTEMPLATING THAT THE RESULT OF CULTIVATING DESIRE IS FRAUGHT WITH DANGERS

This is sub-divided into two:

2.2.1.1.1. Advice to strive in virtue

2.2.1.1.2. Contemplating the faults of desire

Having earlier presented the reason to seek solitude, this advice follows sequentially in that once in solitude one should then strive in virtue. These are very significant points.

2.2.1.1.1. Advice to strive in virtue

The verse reads:

38. *Giving up all other thoughts,
I shall strive single-mindedly
In placing the mind in equipoise
For the purpose of subduing it.*

The commentary then explains the meaning as follows:

Giving up all other thoughts such as attachment and harmful intent, and with only the one thought to meditate on the two bodhicittas, I shall strive to place my mind in single-pointed equipoise on virtue and then, to subdue the mind, strive to abandon the afflictions by meditating on the meaning of reality.

The commentary clearly presents that the condition of going into solitude means giving up all other thoughts, such as the eight worldly concerns, specifically, attachment. This includes attachment to one's own body, attachment to wealth and good resources, as well as attachment to dear ones such as relatives and friends. Giving up harmful intentions also includes ulterior motives, such as meditating for the sake of gaining renown as a great meditator. So having given up all such

thoughts, the commentary encourages one to have *only the one thought*, meditating on the two bodhicittas— aspiring bodhicitta and engaging bodhicitta. *I shall strive to place my mind in single-pointed equipoise* specifically relates to having the single-pointed mind of focusing on virtue. Thus one's sole intention is to completely use one's time for the benefit of other sentient beings.

Only the one thought, refers to the sole thought of benefitting sentient beings, and *single-pointed equipoise*, refers to placing one's mind in virtue. So what one strives to achieve in solitude is *single-pointed equipoise on virtue*, which indicates developing calm abiding. Based on this, to further subdue one's mind one strives, *to abandon the afflictions by meditating on the meaning of reality*. This reveals that having developed calm abiding, one further applies the antidotes for overcoming the afflictions and subduing one's mind, by achieving 'special insight'. With the aid of special insight one *meditates on the meaning of reality*, through which one then strives to abandon the afflictions. Shantideva meticulously summarises here that the purpose of going into solitude is to achieve calm abiding, and based on that, achieve special insight and subdue one's mind by overcoming the afflictions.

The instruction here is given on the basis of having given up attachment and choosing solitude, and then applying the practice in this way. How do those of us, who do not yet have all the conditions for going into solitude, take this advice as personal instruction to apply to our own practice? The approach is to apply our mind, even if only for a few minutes (up to one hour is great but if not, at least five to ten minutes a day). If one could begin one's meditation by applying and maintaining a single-pointed mind on a virtuous object (for a few minutes or as long as is comfortable), then one can contemplate how all things are empty of inherent existence (with whatever understanding one has) and apply that in one's practice. If one maintains such a practice at one's own level, it will establish the conditions for developing calm abiding and cultivating special insight.

To expand on personal practice further, the first part is subduing one's mind by single-pointed focus on virtuous objects, followed by analytical meditation on the nature of reality or emptiness. Then generate the bodhicitta mind by contemplating the seven-step cause and effect sequence. If one is familiar with it then one can combine it with the 'exchanging self with other' technique. Having meditated in these ways to generate the mind of bodhicitta, one can then generate the aspiring mind to achieve enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings. After spending some time contemplating that, next acknowledge that just having the aspiration to achieve enlightenment is not enough—one needs to actually engage in the practices of a bodhisattva. Recall one's own vows (if one has taken bodhisattva vows) as a way to re-establish and enhance them. Meditate further on remembering the promise one made, and develop a keen determination to practice the six perfections. In this way one establishes a very good imprint in one's mind by putting these instructions into practice to the best of one's own ability.

In what has been explained here, one can notice that this practice also summarises the three higher trainings. The

first part - the practice of morality - relates to giving up all other thoughts. Thus as one gives up attachment one generates renunciation. In this way, giving up attachments such as the eight worldly concerns establishes the training of morality. Based on that, developing single-pointed equipoise is the basis for developing calm abiding, which is training in meditation; then cultivating special insight becomes the training of wisdom. In this way the three trainings are encompassed in this practice.

The commentary presents a quote:

From the *Sutra that was requested by the Fierce Householder*:

And further, Householder, if ordained bodhisattvas remain in solitude why should I remain in solitude? Only remaining in solitude is not virtuous practice ... Investigate by thinking, 'for what reason shall I perfectly complete my virtuous practice by remaining in solitude?'

This is one of the many passages that indicate how the direct recipients of Shantideva's teaching are the ordained community. The sutra says, *further, Householder, if ordained bodhisattvas remain in solitude why should I remain in solitude?* highlighting that when an ordained bodhisattva goes into solitude, the reason for doing so needs to be contemplated. The commentary states *only remaining in solitude is not virtuous practice*, meaning that going into solitude is not all that difficult—with the right conditions anyone could do it. But seeking solitude to engage in virtuous practice is the main point. So even if one has given up a nice house, nice food and nice clothing and has borne hardships, if one just remains idly in solitude without placing one's mind in virtue and accomplishing the practice, then being in solitude doesn't serve much purpose. We are being encouraged here to really contemplate the real purpose for going into solitude. Having contemplated this, and as one reassures oneself that it is for the purpose of engaging in practice, then it becomes a supreme condition for actually engaging in practice.

I'll relate a personal experience about the early part of my life. Having left my home town to go to Lhasa, which is quite a significant journey, I remained three years in the monastery. It is a tradition that after three years monks can go back to their home after completing this minimal requirement. I was missing home and thinking of going back because of the hardships in the monastery and being so far away from home. But when I sought permission from my teacher he didn't give it, and suggested it was better to stay in the monastery. At that point I thought, 'Why would my teacher stop me from going back home?' Obviously it was not very comfortable for me in the monastery where food was scarce and the living conditions very poor. So I had to really think, 'Why would I stay on in a monastery? Why would my teacher prevent me from returning home?' Then it occurred to me that the only reason my teacher had for me to continue staying at the monastery would be for me to fully engage in the geshe study program of all the major texts. When that became apparent in my mind, and that this was the only reason my teacher had for preventing me from

returning home, it encouraged me to fully commit myself to the monastery and engage in the geshe studies. Since then I have never turned back, and I didn't return home. For me, when the purpose became clear, it made it easier for my mind to bear the hardships.

We can apply this approach to any practice we engage in which may involve hardships e.g. the *nyung nye* practice. When someone does the *nyung nye* practice there are obvious difficulties such as abstaining from food and abstaining from drink for a day. So the body faces tiredness, heat and cold. With all hardships, if one doesn't constantly remember the purpose of doing the practice (such as the many benefits explained in the *nyung nye* practice) then it would be a case of experiencing a lot of pain, without obtaining much gain. But if one keeps the purpose in mind, and constantly reminds oneself that doing the practice is a way to gain extensive merit and dedicate it to others, then it serves the purpose.

If you are doing the *nyung nye* practice for the first time it may appear quite difficult. However in time one gets used to it and becomes encouraged when one sees the great benefits. The first time I did a *nyung nye*, abstaining from food was the least of my hardships. I did not find it difficult at all. I guess that was because I was never too keen on wanting good food or lavish meals anyway. It is definitely beneficial if one doesn't have strong attachment to food so that when one has to give it up it doesn't become too difficult. If one seeks out delicious meals, the thought of being deprived of them makes it difficult for your mind to consider giving them up. It would seem that having to give up any meal may be difficult for some. The stronger one's determination to renounce a lavish lifestyle and shun worldly desires, the easier it is to engage in a rigorous practice.

I recall Janette in Bendigo who liked to eat fish a lot. Apparently when she couldn't have fish for a while and saw some, she would start to tremble. This is not just a case of desire for fish. When anyone who has strong desire for food doesn't get a meal for a while, they start to tremble in anticipation of having one. The earlier quote is summarised in that explanation.

2.2.1.1.2. *Contemplating the faults of desire*

To give up desires for an object one firstly needs to contemplate the faults of desire itself. What are the faults of desire? This is presented next.

The verse reads:

39. *In this world and also in the one beyond
Desire objects generate great destruction.
Here one will be killed, bound and cut,
In the beyond, hells and so forth are
established.*

The commentary explains:

Because of craving desire objects, they generate great destruction in this world, as well as in the one beyond. Here one will be killed, bound and cut, and in the world beyond hells and so forth will be established.

The commentary highlights that, *Because of craving desire objects, they generate great destruction*, where destruction also implies bringing about faults or suffering. *In this world* means in this life *as well as in the one beyond*. *Here*

indicates in this very life one can clearly see that engaging in killing out of desire, brings about the consequence of being *bound and cut* and beaten and so forth. In this very life one can clearly see the obvious shortcomings of the cravings of desire. *In the beyond*, meaning the world beyond or the next life, the result is to be reborn in the lower realms such as the *hells and so forth*.

The commentary quotes a sutra to back up these explanations:

From the Sutra requested by the girl Supreme Moon:

Due to the cause of desire, sentient beings fall into the lower realms. Due to attachment, they become hungry ghosts and animals.

The meaning of this quotation from the sutra is quite clear.

2.2.1.2. CONTEMPLATING THE IMPURE NATURE OF THE BODY AND SO FORTH

And so forth in the title indicates the body shares an impure nature with other things also of this nature.

This is sub-divided into two:

2.2.1.2.1. Contemplating the faults in relation to the situation of the cemetery

2.2.1.2.2. Contemplating the situation in relation to animate phenomena

2.2.1.2.1. Contemplating the faults in relation to the situation of the cemetery

This is sub-divided into six:

2.2.1.2.1.1. There are no results that corpses experience

2.2.1.2.1.2. One is not beyond being cast aside in the cemetery in the end

2.2.1.2.1.3. It is unsuitable to protect others' or one's own body with greed

2.2.1.2.1.4. It is unsuitable to put on ornaments

2.2.1.2.1.5. It is suitable to be very afraid

2.2.1.2.1.6. Attachment to that wearing clothes is unsuitable

2.2.1.2.1.1. There are no results that corpses experience

This title tells us that corpses cannot experience any results.

In the following passages it is quite clear what is being presented; it is something that is quite obvious in our world system.

The verses read:

*40. The object of the many requests
Made initially by the male and female
matchmakers,
For whose sake one is unafraid
Of negativity or bad reputation,*

*41ab. Puts oneself into danger
And exhausts one's resources,*

The commentary then explains:

One makes requests repeatedly to the male and female matchmakers saying, "Please organise it that she stays together with me to make a home," without being afraid of negativity and bad advice. If this woman's body, for which one fearlessly disregards harm, puts oneself into harm's way and exhausts one's resources, ...

The first part clearly explains, *One makes requests repeatedly to the male and female matchmakers*. In Tibetan

matchmakers are called go-betweens. They are people who bring messages back and forth to make a match between potential couples. The requests are made by sending gifts or messages and making requests like, *Please organise it that she stays together with me to make a home*. From the male's perspective the request is made to the female, sending messages like, 'Make her consider staying with me'. Such requests are made with strong desire and *without being afraid of the negativity and bad advice*, or a bad reputation, regarding the relationship that may be happening. It continues with, *if this woman's body, for which one fearlessly disregards harm, puts oneself into harm's way and exhausts one's resources*, which is the consequence.

Again, this advice is targeted at the ordained community (in particular a fully ordained monk) to caution them against the pitfalls of a relationship with a woman. It very directly advises that by being attached to a *woman's body*, you are fearlessly disregarding the harm that you put yourself in, and *put oneself into harm's way*, with all the complications of a relationship etc. But also in a practical way, it will *exhaust* your own *resources*. The point here is that one has to spend a lot of money to beautify a wife, as she needs makeup, nice clothing, jewellery and perfume, all of which can be very expensive. These are expenses one would have to bear in order to present the woman with gifts and please her. Shantideva cautions those who might give up their practice, telling them to be careful!

It is clear that when one is under the strong control of attachment then it blinds one to the reality of the situation, and one makes a lot of mistakes. The great master Dharmakirti mentioned that when strong attachment occurs it obscures the faults in the other, and actually exaggerates their qualities. These are very significant points that obviously seem to be the case.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama has clearly explained that if one were to ask whether money can get you friends, the answer is 'Yes! With a significant amount of money you might get friends'. But once those friends acquire what they want they will leave you. His Holiness further explains that this is an indication that money cannot buy true and reliable friendship. He then goes on to explain that a reliable friendship is one which will help you regardless of your financial situation. For example when you are in distress or difficult times, those that help you at that time are true friends. This is a reliable and trustworthy friendship. His Holiness says that the kind of friendship we need is not one obtained through our money; rather through our inner qualities. By having inner qualities, one can gain true friendship through kindness etc.

The verses read:

*41cd That, when one embraces it
Makes one very joyful,*

*42. If it is nothing but a skeleton
Without freedom or self,
That one strongly desires and grasps at
intensely,
Why does one not go beyond misery?*

The commentary explains the meaning of these lines:

... the body that generates attachment and that one is so happy to embrace, is but a mere skeleton and

nothing else, from the start without freedom or a self that protects it, and which one purposelessly desires strongly and grasps at intensely, then why does one not go beyond misery? One should abandon attachment and strive in the path to liberation.

The male is attached to the woman's body ... *the body that generates attachment and that one is so happy to embrace.* After a relationship is sought it feels like one possesses the other's body. The very body that one longs for and is happy to embrace is actually nothing *but a mere skeleton and nothing else.* In essence it is only a skeleton from the inside.

The phrase, *from the start without freedom or a self that protects it,* means that from the very beginning the relationship is in that nature, *which one purposelessly desires strongly and grasps at intensely, then why does one not go beyond misery?* When one contemplates the strong grasping at a body, which from its very beginning and in its very nature is nothing but a skeleton, and due to attachment produces so much suffering and agony, *then why does one not go beyond misery?* This rhetorical question implies that one should strive to go beyond misery, rather than being attached to the very object that causes the misery.

The conclusion here is that *one should abandon attachment and strive in the path to liberation.* In summary, if one has attachment and does not give up desire, this prevents one from going beyond misery and achieving liberation. If one wishes to strive for liberation one needs to give up attachment. Here the specific object of attachment is presented as a person of the opposite sex, but it actually means giving up all attachments.

Specific details of the explanation will be presented later on. This part mainly focuses on the technique of meditating on the imperfections of the body to which one is attached. The body here is presented as nothing more than a skeleton. To meditate on the imperfections of the body as an antidote to overcome attachment is more applicable to one's mind when using reasoning and logic rather than just taking it as 'Oh, this is what's been explained in the teachings so I have to meditate on the imperfections of the body'. Rather than taking it at face value and something one has to accept, if one bases one's conclusion on one's own investigation and reasoning, then the practice becomes acceptable and applicable to one's mind.

The reasoning that comes about through investigation is based on analysing the actual body that one is attached to. Initially one may be attached to the exterior such as the skin, but then one goes beyond the skin and what is beyond the beautiful skin is actually flesh, veins and sinews. Then one goes beyond that to fatty tissues etc. and then you go beyond that to the muscles. If you go further into the body in this investigation the reality is that you will come to the bones, and the bones are the skeleton. One does this investigation from the soles of the feet to the very top of the head, going through each and every part of the body. When one analyses the body in this way then the imperfections of the body appear as the nature and reality of the object. It is in this way that one gets the real sense of the imperfections of the body.

Applying the practice of meditation to focus on the imperfections of the body shows that a body which initially appeared attractive, becomes the object of meditation on the imperfection of the body. That is how it is done. As explained earlier, while initially there is an appearance of attractiveness, if one takes a step beyond that to mentally dissect and analyse the body, then one reaches the point where it appears as an actual skeleton.

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

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