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# 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 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.

## **2.2.1. Meditating on disillusionment for desire (cont.)**

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

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

We now move onto contemplating the imperfections of the body as a way of overcoming attachment to the body. Here the specific focus is on desire for a woman's body from a male perspective. However, as I've explained previously, it also applies to a woman who is attached to a man's body. These explanations apply to both men and women.

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

No matter how attractive a body may appear, at the end it is taken to the cemetery and cast aside. That is its ultimate destination. So we can see that this is also a presentation of impermanence, in particular death and impermanence. Furthermore, it not only applies to the attractive bodies of others, but it also applies to one's own body. That is what we need to keep in mind.

There are two verses under this heading:

43. *When one first raises it with effort  
And draws it to oneself, she looks down  
bashfully.  
Whether one saw it before or not,  
A veil covers her face.*
44. *Just as the face of the afflictions  
When you see it is obvious to you now,  
then, after it is revealed  
By the vultures, why do you want to leave?*

The commentary explains:

She looks down bashfully when one first raises her face due to desire and draws it to oneself. Whether one saw it before or not, before going to the cemetery, her face is covered by a veil. Just as the face of the afflictions is obvious to you now, at the time of death, when vultures remove the veil and one can see her face very clearly, why, at that time, do you flee and leave? Also at that time, it is suitable to be attached to it.

The explanation in the commentary relates to the way the bride is traditionally brought to the groom in India. I don't know if there's the same tradition here of the bride having a veil over her face. Because the bride's face is covered, the groom will naturally want to see her face, and when the veil is first lifted the bride will shyly look down. That was often how the bride and groom first met, so the groom has a strong longing to see his bride's face.

As the commentary continues to explain, at that first meeting the groom anticipates unveiling the bride's face with strong longing and desire, but on her death she will be taken to the cemetery. Then, regardless of whether her face is veiled at that time or not, it will be unveiled by vultures at the cemetery. The commentary asks, 'At that time, when its bare nature is clearly exposed to you, why don't you long to see it? If you were strongly attached to the woman it would be appropriate to look at her then, but you run away'. This shows us the contradictions that exist in a desirous, longing mind.

What is clearly being presented here is that contemplating its natural imperfections of an attractive body is actually a method of reducing strong attachment and desire. These are really significant points to contemplate. Being completely obsessed with very strong desire for another person definitely causes mental disturbance and agitation. Therefore, a mind filled with strong desire cannot be calm. So when strong desire and attachment arise, this method is presented as a way to overcome that desire. It would be wise to apply it as a way of appeasing one's mind.

As explained in the commentary, when one meditates on the imperfections of the body, one is actually meditating on the natural defects of the body. Having contemplated the obvious defects first, one then goes further contemplating the defects of the body as it decomposes after death when it decomposes. This is yet another method to overcome strong attachment.

As I've mentioned previously, attempting to meditate on the imperfections of the body, while still holding onto the object as being attractive deep inside one's mind, will not work. For this meditation to actually take effect, one has to develop a firm and stable understanding of the imperfections of the body, and contemplate that. Only after repeated meditation will one be able to let go of the strong attachment. Attempting to meditate on the imperfections of the body while still harbouring a view of the other's body as being clean and attractive, will not do much to remove desire.

This is really a presentation of the ways of overcoming faulty states of mind. Here a distinction needs to be made between seeing the object itself as being at fault or repulsive, and the need to work on one's own mind as a way to overcome strong attachment to that object. Indeed, as presented here, attachment arises when the object appears as attractive and appealing. That mind of attachment exaggerates the qualities of the object, making it appear as being extremely attractive and appealing, and that's when strong attachment arises. In contrast, when the defects of the body are exaggerated and it appears to be completely unattractive and unappealing, then aversion arises in the mind. In both cases, it is the

faulty perception that leads to mental unrest, not the object itself.

The main culprit behind these faulty states of mind is, of course, ignorance. It is as if this ignorance compels the mind to judge the qualities of the object, making it perceive the object as being very attractive, thus leading to attachment. Likewise it is again ignorance that exaggerates the faults of the object, seeing it as being unattractive and thus leading to aversion.

There is a way to overcome these faulty states of mind. Meditating on the imperfections of an object helps to reduce attachment to it. That then enables the mind to settle down. When aversion arises on seeing an unattractive object, then meditating on love and developing compassion towards the object will help to overcome the faulty state of mind that sees only faults and imperfections. Then one can begin to see some of the qualities of the object, which will start to appear as being appealing.

These are really important points to consider, and put into practice. We have the knowledge and understanding of how these meditations can be applied, so if we fail to apply these techniques and instead become overwhelmed with strong attachment or strong aversion then that completely defies the whole purpose of these teachings. It would be a great pity if one doesn't use these methods, despite having access to them.

There's not much that someone who doesn't know anything at all about these methods and techniques can do with a strongly afflicted mind that can completely consume them. But as we do have these methods and techniques, we should use them. I am re-emphasising the points being presented here as a way to exhort you to try to put them into practice.

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

The verse under this heading reads:

45. *When others look at it  
You strongly protect it.  
But when it is eaten by them,  
Greedy one, why do you not protect it?*

The commentary explains:

When other men look at your woman, you jealously protect her from their glances. Greedy one, when this body of hers is eaten by vultures and so forth, why do you not protect it then? By being attached, it is suitable to be protected.

Again the commentary is using the example of a man being attracted to a woman, in particular his bride or partner. When others even just look at her, the man immediately notices that, and wants to protect her. If that is the case, then, as the commentary asks, 'why don't you protect her when her body is being eaten by vultures? As you are attached to her, it would be appropriate to protect her at that time as well'.

#### 2.2.1.2.1.4. It is unsuitable to put on ornaments

The relevant verse reads:

46. *If vultures and others, upon  
Having spotted it, eat this heap of flesh,*

*One is making offerings with flower garlands,  
sandal*

*And ornaments to the food of others.*

Then the commentary explains:

Further, if vultures, coyotes and others eat this heap of flesh upon having spotted it in the cemetery, then why is one making offerings with flower garlands, sandal and golden ornaments to their food? It is unsuitable to offer ornaments even when the body is alive.

This explanation is quite clear. The main thing is that when a beautiful body becomes a corpse, and vultures and coyotes and other creatures start to devour the body, then that beautiful body has become nothing more than food for those wild animals. If that is the case, 'why do you make offerings for beautifying the other's body with flower garlands and sandal and golden ornaments and so forth. It is as if you are offering ornaments to the food of wild animals'.

These passages present different ways to reflect upon the natural defects and imperfections of the body. The more one contemplates these logical reasons, the more that will help the mind to really begin to accept them. Rather than just accepting the words at face value, when one comes to a conclusion using logical analysis the mind becomes very strong and steady, and able to combat the faulty state of mind that exaggerates the qualities of the body, and sees it as being pure. When that occurs, then attachment is naturally reduced. This is how these meditation practices actually work.

#### 2.2.1.2.1.5. It is suitable to be very afraid

The relevant verse reads:

47. *If one is afraid merely by seeing a skeleton,  
Even if it does not move,  
Then why is one not afraid  
If some even move, like zombies?*

As the commentary explains:

If one runs away in fear because one merely sees an unmoving skeleton while being in the cemetery, then why is one not afraid when one sees them even moving about, like zombies, induced by the mind of motivation, while they are alive? It is suitable to be as afraid of them as of zombies, and it is unsuitable to be attached.

Again the explanation in the commentary is very clear. When one sees a body completely exposed, with the flesh eaten away and only a skeleton remaining, one might want to run away out of fear. In fact that skeleton is just lying there and not moving at all, and yet one generates strong fear and wants to run away.

So *why is one not afraid when one sees them even moving about, like zombies*. As explained in the commentary, the movements of living people are basically motivated by a state of mind. It is their motivation that directs their limbs into the act of moving. The commentary asks, 'So when you see them moving, why aren't you frightened of them?' A zombie is a dead body that suddenly stands up and starts to move, and of course if we saw one we would be very afraid, and want to run away. In Nepal the doorways are quite low because, it is said, this will prevent zombies from coming inside as they can only walk while standing up straight. Apparently there were a lot of zombies in Nepal at some point in the past.

The main point here is that if one were to see a zombie then there's no way one would feel attachment to that being. Rather one would run away out of fear. So *it is suitable to be as afraid of ordinary people, as of zombies, and it is unsuitable to be attached*. As explained here, when there's strong fear then there's no place for attachment and no place for anger. What are otherwise strong negative minds such as anger, attachment temporarily cease in the face of fear.

#### 2.2.1.2.1.6. Attachment to that wearing clothes is unsuitable.

A faulty mind might be attached to a body because of the beautiful clothes it is wearing. This heading reflects on how there's no reason to be attached to clothes if it is actually the body that one is attached to.

I have seen on television women who have once been quite beautiful and who are now so thin that their body almost looks like a skeleton. Apparently some are successfully treated, and get back to normal, but I don't know what happens to the others. Looking like a skeleton is not attractive—people need to have some flesh on their body to look appealing.

Just a few days ago there was a report about a very tall but extremely thin young man playing basketball. I don't know what the story was about, perhaps because he was the tallest person, but he didn't look very appealing because he was so skinny.

It seems that there is a faulty state of mind which thinks that it is suitable to be attached to someone because they are wearing attractive clothes. There is this strong notion that if you are wearing nice clothes then others may start paying attention to you. If that is the case and if you want a boyfriend or a girlfriend, or you want others to notice you, then you should wear very nice clothes.

Some go to great measures to beautify their body before they go out, with clothes and make-up and so on, and that can take quite a long time. This reminds me of the time when I was staying with quite a wealthy and very nice family in Perth. The mother was quite interested in Buddhism, and the couple had two daughters and a son. Once when we were about to go out, the son commented on how his mother always seemed to take such a long time to get ready. The family might be ready to go but twenty minutes later she was still not ready. Even though she was no longer young she took time to beautify herself. But, I suppose that when you are from a well-known wealthy family, you want to present yourself well when you go out.

In general, I feel it is a good thing to make yourself presentable by being clean and wearing nice clean clothes. In a way it shows respect for others, and to a certain degree it is socially necessary.

Of course what is being systematically presented here are the various reasons that overcome different kinds of faulty states of mind. If, on seeing a body as being attractive one becomes attached to that body, then this text presents reasons showing how to overcome that faulty state of attachment.

Here the text is dealing with being attached to the attractive clothing on a body, and again presenting

reasons that will show why it is not suitable to be attached to that clothing.

As the verse reads:

48. *If one is attached although it is dressed  
Then why not desire it when it is undressed?  
If one has no need for it,  
Then why embrace it when it is dressed?*

The commentary explains:

When the body that one is attached to although being clothed, has been cast aside at the cemetery, why is one not attached now, despite it being undressed? One should be attached also then. If one has no need for it when being cast aside at the cemetery, then why embrace the dressed body? They are the same in being impure.

As the commentary explains, *when the very body that one is attached to when clothed, is cast aside at a cemetery, why is one not attached to it at that time, despite it being undressed*. What is being implied here is that the body that one was attached to when she wore beautiful clothes, is the same body that it is cast aside at the cemetery. 'So why are you are not attached to the body at that time?' This rhetorical question implies, that *one should be attached also then*.

As it is the same body then one should still be attached to that body. *If one has no need for it when being cast aside at the cemetery, then why embrace the dressed body now?* If one were to argue, 'well there's no reason to be attached to that body at the cemetery, because a body in the cemetery is not attractive. If one argues in that way, then 'why embrace that face and body now because it is *the same* in that it is also an *impure* body. There's no change in the impurity of the body, so why do you embrace it now?' As explained here, *they are the same in being impure*.

#### 2.2.1.2.2. Contemplating the situation in relation to animate phenomena

That is subdivided into three:

2.2.1.2.2.1. It is unsuitable to be attached as the impure becomes obvious

2.2.1.2.2.2. Attachment is unsuitable, as one realises it in dependence upon reason

2.2.1.2.2.3. Hence, stop grasping at the pure

#### 2.2.1.2.2.1. It is unsuitable to be attached as the impure is obvious

This is further subdivided into five:

2.2.1.2.2.1.1. It is unsuitable to be attached to objects of touch

2.2.1.2.2.1.2. Stopping the conception of purity

2.2.1.2.2.1.3. Body and mind are individually not the object of attachment

2.2.1.2.2.1.4. Contemplating these faults by relating them to oneself

2.2.1.2.2.1.5. Shape is not the object of attachment

#### 2.2.1.2.2.1.1. It is unsuitable to be attached to objects of touch

The material under this heading explains ways of overcoming the faulty state of mind we have when we are attached to specific objects. The first verse reads:

49. *If from food alone arise  
Saliva and excrement,  
And if out of these one does not like excrement,  
Why does one specifically like saliva?*

The commentary begins with this comment:

If one says, 'I like the saliva of a woman'.

Then, as an answer, the commentary explains:

Answer: As saliva as well as excrement and urine arise from the same very cause of food, why do you prefer the saliva and dislike the excrement? They are the same in arising from an impure cause and in being an impure result.

The commentary logically explains that if one were to be attached to the saliva of the woman then, as saliva excrement and urine all arise from the very same cause i.e. food, *why do you prefer only the saliva and dislike the excrement? They are the same in arising from an impure cause and thus in being an impure result.*

The next two verses directly relate to attachment arising from touching an object. These logical reasons overcome strong attachment to objects that are impure in nature. When one contemplates these points carefully and relates them to the actual nature of the body, then any strong attachment will definitely reduce, and ultimately one will overcome attachment to that body.

The second verse under this heading reads:

50. *Cushions made of cotton that are soft  
To the touch one does not like.  
Saying, 'It does not have any bad smell.'  
The desirous are deluded regarding impure.*

As the commentary explains,

They discriminate between the cotton cushion that is soft to the touch and the feel of a woman. Saying that foul smells do not emit from a woman's body, when in fact it does, the desirous are deluded regarding the impure and thus act with attachment.

This is another presentation showing the absurd arguments posited by the mind of desire. If the desirous mind claims, 'I like the touch of the woman because it is soft', then the response presented here is, 'if that is your reason then why wouldn't you also be attached to cotton, which is also soft to the touch'.

The main point being presented here is that, *saying that foul smells do not emit from a woman's body, when in fact they do, the desirous are deluded regarding the impure, and thus act with attachment.*

The third verse under this heading reads:

51. *The corrupt desirous that are deluded  
Say, "Though the cotton is soft to the touch,  
One cannot have intercourse with it",  
And become angry with it.*

As the commentary explains:

The corrupt desirous people say that although the cotton is soft when touched, one cannot have intercourse with the cotton, and become angry with it. Hence, they intensely grasp only at that which is distorted. It is unsuitable to be attached to objects of touch.

This is a very clear explanation. The main point is that it is unsuitable to be attached to objects of touch.

#### 2.2.1.2.2.1.2. Stopping the conception of purity

The relevant verse reads:

52. *If there is no attachment to the impure  
Then why do you embrace the midst of others,  
Who are a bone cage bound by sinews,  
Given a face with the mud of flesh?*

The commentary explains that:

If you say, 'I have no attachment for the impure', then why do you embrace the midst of women, who are but a bone cage bound by a net of sinews and given a face with the mud of flesh? It is unsuitable.

As clearly presented in the commentary, if one were to say 'I have no reason to be attached to the impure', then the contradictory nature of the mind of attachment is illustrated in this response, *then why do you embrace the midst of women, who are but a bone cage bound by a net of sinews and given a face with the mud of flesh?* As presented here quite vividly, when we really think about it the basic structure that supports the body is the skeleton. Over the skeleton are sinews interleaved among layers of flesh, which is *given a face with the mud of flesh*. If one were constructing a body, then mud would be used to sculpt the face.

The next verse reads,

53. *Yours alone, which possesses many impurities,  
You utilise continuously, and  
Out of a thirst for the impure  
You desire also other bags of filth.*

And the commentary explains that,

Further, your very body, which possesses many impurities, you utilise continuously, and you also crave and are thirsty for the impurity of other impure bags. If you are not satisfied with your own body, then why do you desire the body of a woman? It is unsuitable.

As the commentary explains the meaning of the verse very clearly, we do not need to clarify it any further.

#### 2.2.1.2.2.1.3. Body and mind are individually not the object of attachment

Having shown that the body in general is not a suitable object of attachment, this section shows how the body and the mind individually are unsuitable objects of attachment. The first verse under this heading reads:

54. *You say, "I like this flesh."  
If you desire to touch and look at it,  
Then why do you not desire the  
Inanimate flesh?*

The commentary explains:

You say, 'I do not like contact with cotton, but I do like the feel of the body of another'.

Answer: If you desire contact with, and to look upon the body of another, then why do you not desire the flesh of an inanimate dead body? You should like it but as you do not, it is unsuitable to be attached to the body.

This is showing the absurdity of saying 'I like the feel of a body, and there is no reason to be attached to cotton because it is an inanimate object'.

As your reason is that cotton is inanimate and a body is not, *then why do you not desire the flesh of a dead body as*

*well?* So again the text is showing the absurdity of the reasons one might give for being attached to a body.

The second verse in the section reads:

55. *The mind you desire  
You cannot touch or see,  
That which you can touch or see is not mind.  
What is meaningless copulation good for?*

The commentary starts with the following hypothetical argument:

Argument: 'I am attached to the mind of others'.

The commentary answers that argument:

Answer: You cannot touch or look at the mind you desire, and that which you can touch is not mind. Therefore, what good is it to embrace the meaningless body and be attached to it? As it is not good for anything, it is unsuitable to be attached.

As the commentary clearly explains, 'how can you say you are *attached to the mind* as an object of desire? It is something that cannot be touched. Moreover that which you can touch is not the mind. So why be attached to the mind?

2.2.1.2.2.1.4. *Contemplating these faults by relating them to oneself*

This is another very significant point. Having described the impurity of the bodies of others, one now applies all of these same reasonings to one's own body. *Precious Garland* also gives extensive explanations of the impurities of the body of others, and it too urges one to relate them to oneself.

The verse reads:

56. *That one does not realise the impure nature  
Of the body of others is not very surprising,  
But that one does not realise  
That oneself is impure is very surprising.*

The commentary explains that:

That one does not realise the impure nature of the body of others is not very surprising, but that one does not realise the impure nature of one's own body that continually disintegrates into something impure, this is indeed surprising. This is an ironic statement. Once one understands the impure, it becomes unsuitable to be attached.

This is another very clear presentation. Being unaware of *the impure nature of the bodies of others is not very surprising*, but knowing that one's body *continually disintegrates into something which is impure*, yet not realising its impurity, is quite astonishing.

One is very familiar with the fact that one's body is slowly disintegrating, yet despite this, one does not realise that this disintegrating body is impure. The main point is that once one is able to realise that one's own body is impure in nature, then that understanding can be easily applied to the bodies of others as well.

2.2.1.2.2.1.5. *Shape is not the object of attachment*

The verse relating to this heading is:

57. *Why reject the fresh lotus  
With petals unfolded by sunlight unobstructed  
by clouds,  
And take joy in the impure cage  
With a mind grasping for the impure?*

As the commentary explains:

If the pure fresh lotus with petals unfolded by the clear sunlight unobstructed by clouds has all these qualities, then why reject it and take joy in the impure cage due to the grasping for the impure? Since it is unsuitable to like it, it is also unsuitable to be attached to its shape.

As clearly explained here, when a lotus first *opens, with petals unfolded by the clear sunlight unobstructed by clouds, it has all these marvellous qualities*. Rather than being intrigued by, and even attached to this natural beauty, one pays more attention to a body that is impure by nature. Why do you *grasp at the impure?* It is because of the faulty mind of attachment.

The conclusion is that *since it is unsuitable to like it, it is also unsuitable to be attached to the shape of the body*.

These explanations are not obscure and are easy to understand. So the main point is to contemplate them, and then put it into practice.

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

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