
Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

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Based on the motivation we just generated in the refuge and bodhicitta prayer, we can now engage in our regular meditation practice.

[meditation]

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

For the sake of all mother sentient beings I will achieve enlightenment, and for that purpose I will listen to the teachings and put them into practice well.

Just as we did in our meditation practice, we need to periodically remind ourselves of the need to familiarise ourselves with love and compassion; that we need to increase the love and compassion in our hearts; and that we need to see this as an essential practice. Indeed, the giving and taking meditation practice that we have just engaged in is the essential practice of the bodhisattvas.

When engaging in the practice of equalising and exchanging self with others, one begins by contemplating again and again the shortcomings of cherishing oneself, and the great advantages of cherishing others. Through the use of many different reasons and analogies, and thinking of the many shortcomings of cherishing oneself, one contemplates the advantages of cherishing other sentient beings.

Having done that as a preliminary practice, one then engages in actually exchanging oneself and others by giving one's happiness to others and taking upon oneself the suffering of sentient beings. We need to understand that the actual practice of giving and taking is dependent on having contemplated the shortcomings of self-cherishing and the benefits of cherishing other sentient beings.

This, of course, is pith practice of bodhisattvas. As we are inclined to engage in the practices of the bodhisattvas we need to really think about how this practice is related to the bodhisattvas' deeds. We also need to understand how the giving and taking practice essentially encompasses the seven-fold cause and effect technique.

The main point to contemplate is the intent of the deeds of bodhisattvas, which is to benefit sentient beings. When one contemplates what sentient beings wish for, the answer is that they naturally wish for happiness and they don't want to experience any suffering. So benefitting sentient beings needs to be in accord with that wish to bring about happiness and remove their suffering.

When one contemplates in this way one comes to the point where one cannot leave it at a level of a mere wish. Rather, one has to take personal responsibility for ensuring that all sentient beings are placed in happiness,

and that their suffering is removed. This is the point where one develops superior intention.

Then one naturally checks whether one has the ability to do that right now, one acknowledges that one does not, and realises that only an enlightened being has that ability. When one develops the unwavering aspiration to achieve enlightenment for the purpose of liberating all sentient beings from suffering and leading them to the ultimate state of happiness, then one has developed the altruistic mind of bodhicitta, the awakening mind. This is how we need to understand the practice of giving and taking as an optimum means for developing bodhicitta.

The preliminary stage of thinking again and again about the disadvantages and shortcomings of cherishing oneself is, of course, a way to gain personal happiness, although it may still be a temporary level of happiness. That is because unless and until one overcomes the manifest levels of delusions there is no way that one can experience a genuinely settled and happy mind.

Contemplating in this way one should then resolve, 'If I want to experience happiness, I have no choice but to combat the delusions that exist within my mind'. Lama Tsong Khapa gives very clear and precise instructions on antidotes to overcome the manifest level of these delusions. Contemplating and meditating on the imperfections of the object of attachment overcomes attachment; meditating on love overcomes manifest anger; and focusing on one's breath overcomes a discursive mind; meditating on the categories of the constituents is a way to overcome pride; and meditating on emptiness overcomes ignorance.

In presenting these antidotes, Lama Tsong Khapa's specific advice is that one needs to apply the antidote to whatever strong delusion one has at any given time. That is how we overcome intense delusions. So as beginners it is not advisable to choose any random object, but rather to focus on specific objects to overcome specific manifest or intense deluded states of mind.

When one genuinely wishes for others to be happy then one is generating love, and when one genuinely wishes them to be free from suffering then that is how one generates compassion for sentient beings.

So how do we implement this? Of course, when it refers to others in general we need to be skilful in presenting the ways and means for others to be happy and how to alleviate their suffering. When it comes down to individual beings, however, it depends on the individual circumstances. One of the most practical ways to extend one's love and compassion for other sentient beings is to present them with what they most need at that time, which will alleviate their immediate suffering, and provide the conditions that will endow them with happiness.

When, for example, someone is very hungry, the suffering they are experiencing at that moment is hunger. That will be alleviated by providing them with food and nourishment, and then they will be endowed with the happiness of being full again. That is a practical way to extend love and compassion towards that particular being at that particular time. Of course someone who is already full doesn't need food and if you insist on giving

them food you would not benefit them at all. There is no purpose in doing that, as they are not experiencing the suffering of hunger at that time. Indeed, if you were to insist that they eat, then rather than alleviating suffering and bringing them happiness, you might cause them more suffering by giving them a stomach-ache.

There are many practical ways to benefit others, from giving material aid such as food and clothing when it is needed, or uttering soothing speech when they are feeling depressed and unhappy. Then there is the simple act of being with someone when they are in need of company; even pleasant gestures and facial expressions can bring about a certain level of happiness and alleviate a certain amount of suffering.

At our level we need to think about bringing benefit to others in practical ways. We need to really familiarise ourselves with love and compassion as an essential day-to-day practice, and then we can actually engage in benefitting others at our own manageable and practical level. If we are not familiar with love and compassion then the eagerness to benefit others will not arise. For example, some people just walk by, even though they can see that someone is really in need of food. If they don't have that sense of love and compassion they will not take the initiative to benefit such a person, whereas if you have love and compassion for them then you will extend your help by giving them food.

The practice of love and compassion might seem quite simple and it may even sound like a mediocre practice, but I personally feel that there is no greater practice than love and compassion. As I mentioned earlier, it encompasses the pith practice of the bodhisattvas.

When one practises love and compassion it becomes a means to cultivate more patience towards others, extending whatever is needed, in whatever capacity one has, to immediately benefit others. The companionship and camaraderie that one develops with others is based on love and compassion, so we can see that this love and compassion is really the basis for our own wellbeing and happiness. Conversely, the lack of love and compassion is the foundation of unwanted things, like conflict and disharmony with others. All of these unwanted situations in life come from a lack of love and compassion. These are the points that we need to contemplate.

I have previously related an anecdote about love and compassion that I witnessed in Landcox Park. On the weekend people come for picnics to Landcox Park, and they naturally throw the leftovers into the garbage bin. On Mondays the bins are cleared and one of the collectors routinely used to take out the edible scraps and give them to the birds. Whenever he came all the birds would flock around in anticipation of getting food. I immediately admired this man's generosity in taking the initiative to feed the birds. For me that was a clear example of extending love and compassion to animals. However I haven't seen this person coming in recently.

When we really think about it, birds flock around humans, and ants come into kitchens because they are hungry. The ants have no intention of marching into peoples' kitchens and harming them. What is attracting them is food. When one thinks in this way what may

otherwise seem as a nuisance is an opportunity to practise some love and compassion, knowing that they are suffering and in need of assistance and help. With these practical examples we can see how love and compassion benefit other beings.

2. ABANDONING THE OPPOSING FACTORS TO CALM ABIDING

2.2. Abandoning unrealistic thinking

2.2.1. Meditating on disillusionment for desire

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

2.2.1.2.2. Contemplating the situation in relation to animate phenomena (cont.)

2.2.1.2.2.2. Attachment is unsuitable, as one can realise in dependence upon reason

This is subdivided into four:

2.2.1.2.2.2.1. Contemplating that it is impure because of being the source of the impure

2.2.1.2.2.2.2. Contemplating that it is impure because of being the result of the impure

2.2.1.2.2.2.3. Showing the impurity of the body with an example

2.2.1.2.2.2.4. Contemplating that one's own body is impure

It is through a false view of the body as being pure that one develops attachment to the bodies of others. So these contemplations on the impurity of the body are a way to overcome attachment.

2.2.1.2.2.2.1. Contemplating that it is impure because of being the source of the impure

This point is in accordance with the explanations given in the sutras. Because these points are quite clear we don't need to go into detailed explanations. The main condition for developing attachment to the body is by seeing it as attractive or appealing. The first reason to counter this shows how the body is impure because it is the source of impure products. When one contemplates how in fact there is nothing in reality that is really appealing then one will overcome attachment to the body.

The root text under this heading reads:

*58. If one does not desire contact
With a place and smeared by the impure,
Then how can one desire contact
With the body from which the impure came
from?*

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je gives this explanation of the meaning of the verse:

If one does not desire contact with a place that has been smeared with impure things, such as filth or vomit, then why does one desire contact with the body from which the impurity came? It is unsuitable.

As clearly explained here, if one does not want to come into contact with something such as a cloth or a place that is smeared with filth, then it is reasonable to contemplate why one would want to make contact with a body that is the source of the filth such as vomit and so forth.

If we think about our own clothing being smeared with, for example, excrement, then we would consider it to be so dirty that we would not even touch it. We would rather hold our nose so we can't smell it, and move it away with a stick. This clearly shows that we do not

really like to come into contact with anything that we consider to be filthy.

So the first part of the explanation is that the body is impure because it is the source of that which is impure.

2.2.1.2.2.2.2. Contemplating that it is impure because of being the result of the impure

59. *If you do not have attachment for the impure,
Why do you desire to copulate with others
Coming from the impure field,
Generated by its impure seed?*

As just mentioned, we have no desire to be in contact with anything that is filthy, regardless of whether it is the source, or the product of what is impure. It is actually a matter of looking at the body in a different way. If we take a superficial view and don't think about it, the body may seem to be quite pure.

As the commentary explains:

If one does not have attachment for the impure, then why do you desire to copulate with the body of others that came from the impure field of the mother's womb, generated by the impure seed of the father's semen and mother's blood? It is unsuitable to be attached.

Normally we want to be clean, and we don't want to come into contact with anything that is filthy. Some may even be a bit snobbish, and say, 'I don't like anything that is unclean, and I certainly don't want to come into contact with anything that is unclean'. If we have the notion that we don't want to come into contact with anything that is filthy, we would naturally not want to be attached to anything that is filthy. Rather than attachment, we would actually want to keep our distance from it.

What is being presented here is *if one does not have attachment for the impure then why do you desire to copulate with the other's body which is impure?* If one truly does not want to come into contact with anything that is impure, then it would be absurd to be attached to it. We need to understand the logic being presented here. When we perceive something as being impure or unclean, we naturally don't want to come into contact with it. Attachment to something arises because we are not perceiving it as being unclean and impure. This is the logic that is being presented here.

The commentary poses the question *why would one desire to copulate with the body of others that came from the impure field of the mother's womb.* Here the mother's womb is presented as being analogous to a field where the crops are grown. The body that we (and others) possess is really none other than what has been cultivated from the seed, that comes from the father's semen and the mother's blood, (egg in western terms), which are also impure. Both the source, the field, and the seed, which matures into the body are from sources that are naturally impure.

So if you do not want to come into contact with anything that is filthy, then why would you desire to copulate with a body whose very source, along with itself, is impure? The response being presented here is that it is unsuitable to be attached.

Here we see the use of meticulous reasoning to overcome strong attachment to the body.

2.2.1.2.2.2.3. Showing the impurity of the body with an example

60. *You do not desire even a small
Insect born from filth, yet
The body in the nature of multiple impurities
You desire, despite being generated from filth.*
61. *Not only do you not disparage
Your own impurity,
You desire others' impure bags
Due to a thirst for the impure.*

The commentary on these two verses reads:

Further, you do not like even a small dirty insect that was born from filth. How can you desire the body that is in the nature of many impurities and was generated from the thirty-six impure substances? Not only do you not disparage your own impure object, you desire the impure bags that are the aggregates of others out of a thirst for the impure. This is unsuitable.

As quite clearly explained in the commentary *if you do not like even a small dirty insect that is born from filth, then how can you desire a body that is in the nature of many impurities and was generated from the thirty-six impure substances?*

The thirty-six impure substances referred to here are listed in other texts that you may have access to. Basically they refer to the organs such as the lungs, the stomach, the bones, the marrow, the lymphatic system, the intestines, and external things such as nails and teeth. When one reflects upon what really makes up the body, especially the internal organs, one finds that there is nothing that is very attractive to be found there.

What one considers to be really attractive basically comes down to the skin, which is just the surface of the body. Based solely on that one may develop infatuation and attraction to the body.

2.2.1.2.2.2.4. Contemplating that one's own body is impure

Having contemplated the bodies of others as being impure the text now turns to one's own body. This is divided into two sections.

2.2.1.2.2.2.4.1. Contemplating the impure body

2.2.1.2.2.2.4.2. If one is attached to it, then it is suitable to be also attached to the body in the cemetery

2.2.1.2.2.2.4.1. Contemplating the impure body

Contemplating the impure body is presented with this verse:

62. *Whether it is something pleasant like camphor
Or cooked rice or vegetables,
When it is put in the mouth and taken out
again,
Even the ground becomes impure and dirty.*

Here the commentary explains:

When pleasant medicines like camphor or cooked rice and vegetables are put into one's mouth and taken out again, then even the ground where they are discarded is impure and dirty. Hence, it is unsuitable to have attachment.

This is another example of how, when pure substances such as fragrances and aromas and delicious food are chewed and then spat out, the place where they are discarded is immediately considered as being filthy. One would not wish to come into contact with such filth. Yet what is considered as being filthy now is none other than

the delicious substances with beautiful aromas and so forth. By virtue of just being chewed and then spat out it becomes filthy. This is proof that the body itself is the source of filth.

As with the earlier point, the fact that anything that comes out of the body is impure is, in itself, proof that the body is impure.

2.2.1.2.2.4.2. If one is attached to it, then it is suitable to be also attached to the body in the cemetery

*63. If one has doubt even though
Such impurity is obvious
One should look at other
Impure bodies discarded at the cemetery.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

If one has doubts and thinks this body may be pure even though it is manifestly impure, then one should look at other bodies that have been discarded at the cemetery. Although one knows that once the body's skin is open it is very frightening, one continues to repeatedly take delight in one's own and women's bodies. This is unsuitable. One should abandon attachment by viewing one's body as equal to the corpse in the cemetery.

When one sees, for example, a dead body being dissected then it is very repulsive. There is no sense of attachment to a dead body whose skin has been opened. Even though that is quite obvious, one continues to take delight in the body—for men that is one's own male form as well as the bodies of women, for women that is one's own female body as well as the bodies of men.

It is obvious that there is nothing attractive when the skin of a body in the cemetery is opened up and the body is dissected.

By contemplating in this way one overcomes attachment to one's own body and the body of others. If one contemplates in the way that has been presented here, it will definitely have an effect of overcoming strong desire or attachment to the body.

2.2.1.2.2.3. Hence, stop grasping at the pure

2.2.1.2.2.3.1. The body cannot be cleansed by effortful means

2.2.1.2.2.3.2. The body is not beyond the nature of being frightening

2.2.1.2.2.3.3. Contemplating it as an object of disillusionment

2.2.1.2.2.3.1. The body cannot be cleansed by effortful means

This is subdivided into two:

2.2.1.2.2.3.1.1. The impure body cannot be made pure by scents such as sandal

2.2.1.2.2.3.1.2. There is no reason to be attached to an unrelated smell

We can start this section in the next session.

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

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