

Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

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Based on the motivation that we have just generated in the *Refuge and Bodhicitta Prayer* we can now engage in our meditation practice.

[meditation]

Now you can generate the motivation for receiving the teaching along these lines:

For the sake of all mother sentient beings I need to achieve enlightenment, and so for that purpose I will engage in listening to the teachings and put them into practise well.

The wish to benefit others is crucial, so we need to give careful consideration to generating such a motivation. It is because of this genuine wish to benefit others that we have just engaged in the giving and taking meditation practice.

Finding that one's mind has become clearer, gentler and more positive as a result of one's meditation practice is a positive sign. Furthermore, when one finds that one's faith in the Dharma and one's guru is becoming stronger and firmer, that is a true sign of one's meditation practice taking positive effect. The hallmark of a positive effect of a practice is when the mind is transformed in such a positive way.

If one does not ensure one's practice actually brings about that result, then rather than experiencing a clearer and more positive state of mind, you may find that the mind is becoming duller and duller. There are those who comment that this has, in fact, been their experience, even though they had engaged in meditation practice for a long time. We need to understand that this is not the fault of the meditation practice itself, but rather the result of not having engaged in the meditation practice properly.

As I emphasised in my teaching last Sunday, we already have the basis of the fundamental practice of developing love and compassion within ourselves. It is not a practice that is alien and out of your reach, because you already have the basis within you. Personally, I have found that my attempts to engage in the practice of cultivating love and compassion have definitely benefited me. You have that basis within yourself and if you actually make an attempt to engage in this practice you will definitely reap the benefit. So I am giving you very practical advice, which many others have also found to be very useful. I'm certainly not claiming that I am engaging in some high level practice that is beyond the reach or capacity of others. You really do have the basis for practising in this way yourself.

You also need to give careful consideration to engaging in those practices for which you already have a basis, rather than trying to reach for high level practices that are

beyond your capacity. You need to engage in practices that are within your reach and capacity right now. It would be pretentious to claim that you are doing high level practices when you are not, in fact, capable of doing them. That is contrary to Dharma practice. These are really important points to keep in mind.

Coming back to the text, we have previously explained the faults of attachment and the way to overcome those faults by examining the imperfections of objects of attachment such as the body.

2.2.1.2.3. CONTEMPLATING THAT IT WILL GIVE RISE TO MUCH THAT IS UNWISHED FOR

2.2.1.2.3.2. Explanation

2.2.1.2.3.2.1. One does not attain one's wishes (cont.)

2.2.1.2.3.2.1.2. One cannot rely on desire objects due to exhaustion

The relevant verse from the root text reads:

73. *A lowly desirous person
Is tired out from working all day long.
Upon coming home his exhausted body
Lies down like a corpse.*

Here Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

A lowly desirous person such as a servant is tired out from working all day long and upon coming home in the night his exhausted body lies down like a corpse. He does not remember his attachment and cannot act on it.

This explanation quite clearly relates to the circumstances of most people engaged in worldly activities. Even though it refers to *a lowly desirous person such as a servant* it is, of course, addressing the situation of those who work like slaves at their job.

Even though they may not actually be servants or slaves, they have to rise very early in the morning to get to work. Driven by their desire for wealth and material possessions they spend all day slaving at their work, expending so much time and energy that when they return home in the evening they are exhausted. They are so tired their *exhausted body lies down just like a corpse*.

After a long day's work, they can't even think about engaging in an act of desire, let alone act upon it. Being driven by their desire to gain wealth, they engage in working all day long, and are so exhausted that they are not able to engage in any acts of desire. You might be able to relate this explanation to your own experiences.

2.2.1.2.3.2.1.3. Difficulty meeting the desired object as it is far

This indicates that it is very difficult to meet an object of desire when it is far away from you.

The verse relating to this reads:

74. *The deluded who go abroad,
They who suffer far away,
Although they desire women,
They do not even see a woman to embrace for
many years.*

As the commentary explains:

They who are deluded and suffering, who go abroad into places far away from home, although they desire to meet a woman, they will not even see the woman they want to embrace for many years. What need is there to mention acting upon their desire?

They who are deluded, refers to those who are overcome by greed. They *go abroad into places far away from home* in order to acquire wealth; this can refer to those on business trips, and thieves who travel far away to steal. These people suffer because they are separated from loved ones who are far away. Although they may desire to have contact with a woman, they will not see the woman who they really *want to embrace for many years*. There is no *need to mention acting upon their desire*, indicates that there is no opportunity for them to engage in actions driven by desire.

These situations actually do occur, and they show the futility of being overly obsessed with the opposite sex. These are very useful points to consider as means to overcome excessive desire and lust.

2.2.1.2.3.2.1.4. One receives many undesired hardships as one will be under the control of others

The verse relating to this is:

75. *As those wishing to benefit self are deluded,
Although they sell themselves for a purpose,
They do not achieve it and are driven
By the meaningless wind of others' actions.*

The commentary explains the meaning as follows:

Those wishing to benefit self, as they are deluded with regards to the method, even though they sell their body for the purpose of gain, do not even get a bad wage. Driven without freedom by the wind of others' actions, which are without meaning for self, they experience suffering in this and the next life and do not achieve their desires.

Those wishing to benefit self relates to selfish personal gain. *They are deluded with regards to the method* means that they don't understand the correct way of obtaining what they want for themselves. Even if *they sell their body for the purpose of gain*, describes a situation where people work for such a low wage that it is as if they are selling their body to others. Furthermore, they might not be paid for a while or in a timely way. During that time they are labouring like a slave, experiencing a lot of hardship and difficulties, without actually gaining anything in return. They are entrapped by their situation.

The commentary further explains that they are *driven without freedom by the wind of others' actions*. They *experience suffering in this and the next life* yet they *do not achieve their desires*. If one is working like a slave for others without being paid regularly, one is in a situation of being driven without freedom by the wind of the actions of others. One may spend one's whole life without liberty or any gain.

Without meaning for the self means that one might not even gain what one wants to achieve, despite having put in so much effort.

So not only is there a lot of suffering in this life because people are driven by desire, but the consequences of that desire will also be experienced in the next lifetime. So this life is ruined as well as the next one as well, and we don't even achieve what we desire!

This is a presentation of the disadvantages of the mind of desire. Out of strong desire, either lust for the bodies of others or for material gain, we are hindered from engaging in more meaningful and purposeful activities.

So here we are being encouraged to pay heed to putting time and energy into the practice of the Dharma, which is much more worthwhile. The gains from that are much more purposeful and meaningful, so we are being advised not to completely be consumed by worldly desires.

The point, *they do not achieve their desires*, is that the whole purpose of engaging in work and so forth is to obtain what one desires. But even that is not obtained. We have all seen people who are consumed by their work for material gain and so forth, but who don't have the time to enjoy any of those gains.

As I have explained in the past, some people have related to me that although they have accumulated a sufficient amount of wealth they still feel that they need to go to work. They can't leave their job and when they do go to work there is a daily routine of anxiety and worries and problems. They don't seem to feel content with what they already have, and feel a need to acquire more, but that doesn't seem to bring them any sense of happiness. They are driven to accumulate more and more wealth – a million dollars is not sufficient, they want another million dollars and so forth.

Then there are those who, having reached a significant level of success in their life, start to realise that what they have isn't fulfilling. Despite all the wealth they have accumulated, they feel they are missing something – that their life is empty - and then a sense of despair begins to arise. They have spent so much time and energy accumulating their wealth and so forth yet they are not really contented or happy.

When worldly people comment about how they feel empty and lack contentment and inner happiness, you can't tell them that the reason they are not fulfilled is because of the desire in their mind, and that there will never be real contentment while that desire remains. They won't be inclined to hear about the disadvantages of desire and attachment and the advantages of engaging in the practice of Dharma. You can't do much for them other than just acknowledge their predicament, and sympathise with them.

However the point for us is that as we do have some understanding of the Dharma, and we also have the conditions to engage in the practice of Dharma, we need to make every attempt to put some time and energy into the practice of Dharma. We know that we should not allow ourselves to be completely consumed by the accumulation of wealth and the desire to accumulate more and more. As explained very clearly here, the end result of being consumed by desire is that one will not be fulfilled in this life, let alone experience happiness and joy in our future life. These are really important points to consider.

We need to attempt to put into practice the pith advice of the teachings, which is to have less desire and to practice contentment. If one has many desires and lacks contentment, one will eventually experience great distress and despair. As the great Indian master Asvaghosa mentioned, 'the greatest mental pain is the pain of discontentment', where one aims for more and more, even though one already has quite sufficient.

True wealth is found in contentment. As the great master Nagarjuna mentioned, 'the purpose of wealth is to feel content'. Indeed if one does not experience contentment then one is always going to be impoverished. No matter how much wealth one has accumulated, one feels that one does not have enough. In contrast, when one practices contentment one will feel a sense of satisfaction, and then one would have utilised one's wealth wisely, and it would have served its purpose.

2.2.1.2.3.2.2. One will be inseparable from many things one does not desire

This heading has five subdivisions:

2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1. One is without freedom and will quickly have to give up one's life

2.2.1.2.3.2.2.2. One will fall under the control of others and continually have many different sufferings

2.2.1.2.3.2.2.3. It obstructs liberation and exhausts the freedoms and endowments

2.2.1.2.3.2.2.4. Having contemplated the shortcomings, generating the mind wishing for liberation

2.2.1.2.3.2.2.5. Contemplating that attachment to sense objects is the source of all shortcomings

2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1. One is without freedom and will quickly have to give up one's life

There are two verses under this heading, the first of which reads:

76. *Some sell their bodies
And are ordered about without freedom.
When the companion becomes pregnant
Birth will be at the foot of a tree or a random
isolated place.*

The commentary on this verse reads:

Some sell their bodies as servants and are ordered around without freedom by others. When on top of this their companion becomes pregnant, as there is no home, she has to give birth at the foot of a tree or some other random isolated place where she happens to be.

Some sell their bodies as servants and are ordered around without freedom by others, refers to the earlier point that there are those who engage in contracts where they effectively become a slave to others, often without receiving their due wages. If, in such a situation, their companion or partner becomes pregnant then, since they have no home, she might have to give birth at the foot of a tree or some other isolated place where she happens to be. Similar dire circumstances still occur in many parts of the world.

The following verse relates more specifically to the heading:

77. *The foolish who are deceived by desire
Say, "I desire and shall make a livelihood,"
They enter wars despite danger to their lives
And go into servitude for profit.*

Here, the commentary explains:

The foolish deceived by desire wish to achieve gain, planning to live a long life through gain. Though they are in fear of their lives, they go to war in order to obtain gain, thinking, "I shall live by gain." For profit, they go into servitude and experience many different sufferings.

The foolish deceived by desire indicates that those who under the control of desire are blinded to what is safe or good for them. Although their intention is to have a long life, with a good income and all the conditions intact, they risk their lives for gain. Under the strong influence of the desire for a profitable return, or influenced by family members and friends, they join the army, for example, in spite of knowing that they could be sent to war and risk their life. Their intention is to gain a good income, but they end up in servitude.

2.2.1.2.3.2.2.2. One will fall under the control of others and continually have many different sufferings

The verse relating to this heading reads:

78. *Some desirous even cut their bodies,
Some are impaled from beneath on wooden
stakes,
Some are pierced by daggers,
And some are seen being burned.*
79ab. *Through the suffering of accumulating,
preserving and losing
Understand wealth to be infinite destruction
and faults.*

Here Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

Some, for the purpose of their desire, cut their bodies. Some receive the sentence from a king to be impaled from below on a wooden stake. Some are pierced by daggers and swords and some are seriously burned by fire.

As the accumulation, protecting and lastly losing of wealth are all suffering, one should understand wealth to be the root of infinite destruction and faults.

Some, for the purpose of their desire, cut their bodies implies that some people engage in actions such as theft or robbery or sexual crimes out of desire for wealth or lust, and that when they are caught they will be punished. As the commentary explains, *Some receive the sentence from a king to be impaled from below on a wooden stake. Some are pierced by daggers and swords and some are seriously burned by fire.* So, the end result of engaging in criminal deeds driven by strong desires is suffering.

The commentary then reminds us that, *As the accumulation, protecting and losing of wealth all lead to suffering, one should understand wealth to be the root of infinite destruction and faults.* We have all seen criminals, some of whom are quite influential or wealthy, having to face punishment for their crimes. We see them on TV, engaging in lengthy legal battles over their crimes of sexual misconduct and so forth, and becoming completely consumed by their predicament.

Even those who are wealthy or famous are not spared from suffering when they act out of desire. One example that comes to mind is the well-known Australian comedian who migrated to England. When I saw this on TV I felt sorry for him. I wondered why they were bringing such an old man to trial and putting him into such difficulty. Then I was told that he been found guilty, and that it didn't matter what his age was, he still had to serve his sentence. This is a clear example of someone being deceived by desire, and having to experience the consequences.

2.2.1.2.3.2.2.3. It obstructs liberation and exhausts the freedoms and endowments

If one follows a mind of desire then not only will that obstruct the achievement of liberation, it will waste the freedoms and endowments, meaning the precious human life. The relevant lines of verse read:

*79cd. Those distracted by attachment to wealth
Have no opportunity for liberation from the
sufferings of existence.*

*80. The desirous have these and many
Other disadvantages and insignificant
happiness,
Like the ox pulling the cart,
Eating occasionally a little grass.*

The commentary explains the meaning of these lines of verse:

Those with a mind distracted by many different objects due to attachment to wealth take rebirth again and again through the force of karma. Hence they have no opportunity to attain liberation by freeing themselves from the sufferings of existence.

The desirous who crave only the purposes of this life experience the faults of, among others, the many sufferings explained before and insignificant happiness. For example, like an ox that, while pulling the cart, can grab a bit of grass from time to time, to work to achieve happiness and clear away suffering only in this life is something even animals stronger than humans do; it is something the ox also does.

Having *a mind distracted by many different objects* is also a point that we need to reflect upon. As I have mentioned many times in the past, if one engages in the practice of meditation with a mind that is occupied with the distractions created by desire, then one will not achieve any significant focus on the object itself. You might assume a meditative posture, but if your mind is constantly distracted because of desire, you are not actually engaged in a genuine meditation practice. These are points that you really need to keep in mind. You need to ensure that you are fully engaged in your meditation practice.

On Wednesday night teachings I have emphasised that when engaging in meditation practice one needs to ensure that one completely withdraws from all objects of distraction, and places one's focus fully on the object itself. I have also emphasised that if you allow your mind to be occupied with distractions you will not be able to really focus on the object. This is the same point that Shantideva is making here. So what I have been emphasising on Wednesday evenings is backed up by Shantideva.

Indeed, when the *mind is distracted by different objects due to attachment to wealth then, as a consequence one takes rebirth again and again through the force of karma. Hence they have no opportunity to attain liberation by freeing themselves from sufferings of existence.* If one is driven by temporary pleasures and enjoyment then that will be a hindrance to achieving one's greater goal.

The desirous who crave only the purposes of this life experience the faults of, among others, the many sufferings explained before and insignificant happiness, indicates that there is no real long-lasting happiness, just fleeting pleasures.

Shantideva uses the example of an ox which, *while pulling the cart, grabs a bit of grass from time to time.* This is a very vivid example where we can imagine an ox experiencing the suffering of pulling a cart with a heavy load. Yet as it pulls along the heavy cart it seems to take pleasure in trying to grab a bit of grass at the side of the road. In comparison to the suffering it is experiencing from its heavy task, the pleasure of eating a bit of grass is very insignificant, just like the pleasure that we find in pursuing distractions such as wealth and so forth. The emphasis here is that if one allows one's mind to be distracted with these pursuits then that will be an obstacle to liberation and freedom from suffering.

The really important point here is to not allow ourselves to be deceived by small benefits or pleasures, which lead to great suffering in the future. The literal translation of the Tibetan word is not to follow 'that which brings small benefit but great suffering' in the end. By allowing ourselves to be deceived and consumed by fleeting pleasures we fail to understand the karmic consequences of long-lasting suffering in the future. The old man mentioned earlier, who is now in prison for his crimes, experienced only fleeting pleasures from his sexual misconduct. But the consequence is being imprisoned most probably for the rest of his life. We can learn a lot from this example.

When one engages in misdeeds such as sexual misconduct, theft and so forth then these are negative deeds in relation to the Dharma – not only has one broken the rules relating to moral conduct from the Dharma point of view but one has also broken the law. So one loses out twice – one will have to experience two sets of ill-effects; one from a Dharma point of view and the other from the legal system. There are legal consequences in this life, as well as negative consequences to be experienced in future lifetimes as well.

These are points for us to really consider. We need to be particularly mindful at times when we might be driven by desirous impulses. Contemplating and thinking about the disadvantages that will arise from these actions in this life, and most importantly in future lives, will help one to apply restraint, and not act upon those desirous and negative impulses.

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

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