
Shantideva's *Bodhisattvacharyavatara*

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Maintaining the motivation we generated during the prayers, we can now engage in our regular meditation practice. *[meditation]*

We can now generate the bodhicitta 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.

Generating such a motivation, even for a few moments, will definitely establish a very strong positive imprint in our mind.

Following from our last session, we were explaining the verses under the following heading:

2.2.1.3.2.2.3. It obstructs liberation and exhausts the freedoms and endowments

Having covered the first verse and a half under this heading, now we come to the second verse which reads:

81. *For the purpose of insignificant happiness,
Which is not rare and even an ox can attain,
Those tormented by karma destroy
The difficult to find freedoms and endowments.*

The commentary explains:

... to work to achieve happiness and clear away suffering only in this life is something even animals stronger than humans can do; it is something the ox also does.

Those tormented by the actions of craving for false objects for the extremely insignificant happiness of this life, which is not rare and even an ox tries to achieve, exhaust and destroy the perfect freedoms and endowments found in this life, which are of great purpose and difficult to attain. Contemplating these faults one should strive to take the essence of this basis with the freedoms and endowments.

In other words, if we are not mindful and engage in meaningless worldly activities, we will allow our incredibly fortunate state of having the eight freedoms and ten endowments to completely go to waste. As explained in the commentary, the work or effort put into achieving some happiness and clearing away some temporary suffering merely in this life is something even animals can do. In fact, some animals can do it better than us, because they are stronger and have greater capacity to protect themselves from danger and maintain their security.

The main point is that if we are not mindful of how we spend our lives, we will merely focus on this life, mindlessly putting our efforts into attaining some temporary happiness and removing some temporary suffering. Even if we claim to know and practise Dharma, if we are not mindful, this is exactly what our situation

will be. This logical explanation is a really significant point for us to contemplate.

As further emphasised, *those tormented by the actions of craving for false objects for the extremely insignificant happiness of this life, which is not rare and even an ox tries to achieve, exhaust and destroy the perfect freedoms and endowments found in this life, which are of great purpose and difficult to attain.*

These are significant points for us because at this time we have obtained such conditions as having the freedoms and endowments. When we think about our life so far, on the surface it may seem that we have led a life in the Dharma, but in fact we have spent most of our time and energy engaging in worldly or non-virtuous activities. We have spent a big part of our life idleness.

This is how our life is being exhausted moment by moment; every moment, our life is getting shorter. If we don't apply ourselves to the actual practice of Dharma and just give into worldly activities, our life will eventually come to an end without having achieved any great purpose. Being completely distracted by frivolous activities and sensual, or desire objects is what obstructs us from engaging in true Dharma practice.

While we have the conditions to engage in Dharma practice, we need to take the essence of this precious life. These freedoms and endowments are difficult to obtain. We are incredibly fortunate to have come in contact with the Mahayana teachings and unmistakable Mahayana teachers. Thus, we have access to the teachings of the Buddha, such as the three baskets of the Buddha's teachings, and the practices such as the three higher trainings of morality, meditation and wisdom. But if we don't utilise this opportunity now, while we have access to the teachings and practices, we are wasting these extremely rare and precious conditions.

Here the text is encouraging us to thoroughly investigate and ask ourselves, "Until now, how have I spent my life? What essence have I taken from it? What meaning or purpose have I achieved from my life thus far?" If one cannot find evidence of achieving much purpose in one's life, then one needs to start putting the teachings into practice.

If we were to develop a sense of disenchantment with this life's affairs and really engage in the practices of morality and so forth, we would definitely secure the results of the practice of the small scope – a good rebirth for our next lifetime – thus deriving significant purpose and meaning from our practice.

Better yet, we could develop a sense of renunciation, becoming disenchanted not only with this life's affairs, but with all of the pleasures and sufferings of cyclic existence. If one develops such disenchantment with cyclic existence and strives to obtain liberation and engages in practices with this intention, one will have secured the practice of the medium scope.

Further, even if we are unable to fully embrace the practice of achieving enlightenment right now, if we can develop a bodhicitta attitude based on love and compassion to the best of our ability, and engage in practices with a bodhicitta motivation, then we will have

definitely secured a practice that is in line with the Mahayana practice of the great scope.

As explained in the teachings, this is how we need to take the essence of our precious human life. This is what is being explained when the commentary says *contemplating these faults one should strive to take the essence of this basis with freedoms and endowments*. When one's practice is free from the stains of merely focusing on this life's gains, it becomes purposeful.

A more specific example of a practice that can become more meaningful, is the meditation practice of giving and taking that we did earlier. When we do the *tong-len* practice of giving and taking on the basis of a pure altruistic motivation – a genuine wish to benefit others, which is free from the stain of self-interest – it then becomes highly purposeful and meaningful. The motivation for the practice needs to be accompanied with the determination “I will fully engage in benefiting sentient beings by leading them to the state of happiness and freeing them from all suffering, and I will do this myself.”

In our sessions here, we are actually studying a Mahayana text. However, whether our study becomes highly meaningful or mediocre depends on our motivation; if it is focused only on this life's interests, our study does not even become a Dharma practice. Therefore, as I regularly emphasise, our motivation is extremely important, both from the teacher's side as well as from the listeners' side. When a bodhicitta motivation is secured from both the teacher's and the listeners' sides, then our study becomes a proper Dharma practice.

Generating a positive motivation is a way of being clear about the goal we intend to achieve. Each time we generate a positive motivation, it helps reinforce the goals we have set ourselves. This is how we also need to understand the significance of cultivating a proper motivation.

Indeed, generating a proper motivation sets our conduct in a proper way. If someone presents a teaching, for example, with the motivation of merely acquiring fame and gain, that individual then would only be willing to teach those who are wealthy and who can pay more, and might not consider giving a teaching to someone who cannot afford to pay, or make grand offerings. When an individual chooses what kind of students they're going to teach based on how many offerings they will get, that clearly shows a flawed motivation. This is really important for us to keep in mind. While you might not be in immediate danger now, there will come a time in the future when you are in a position of presenting the Dharma and regarded as a spiritual teacher. So, it is important to prepare yourself now, as way to protect yourself from misleading others.

Of course, I'm not claiming that I'm doing high level practices or that I'm completely pure and stainless. However as far as my motivation is concerned, because of the danger of a stained motivation, I make every effort to generate the most positive motivation for presenting the teachings. I make a specific effort to present the teachings without seeking reward such as fame and gain, with the intention only that the teachings may be of benefit for

whoever comes to listen to them. Generating such a motivation helps me. I don't personally feel that I have an attitude of seeking gain and fame; I don't really like that sort of approach. However, there are many who seem to make it a priority to become more famous or well known, to get more followers so they can gain more wealth and so forth. This is something I consider as poison, but maybe there are others who don't really see it like this.

Some may think I've gone astray and lack the proper approach. However I don't feel I've gone down the wrong path; when I present the teachings it only makes my mind happier and more joyful rather than feeling anxious and troubled. If one's motivation was tainted by seeking only fame and gain, then after some time they end up having a more troubled mind due to that corrupt mindset.

2.2.1.3.2.2.4. *Having contemplated the shortcomings, generating the mind wishing for liberation*

The verse under that reads:

82. *The desires are certain to disintegrate
And throw one into the hells and so forth,
Just merely a fraction of the effort of
The great effort endured*
83. *For the always meaningless,
Will achieve the very enlightenment.
The desirous have more suffering than those
Practising the path to enlightenment, and no
enlightenment.*

The commentary explains the meaning as follows:

In addition, the desired sensual happiness, such as that of a prince, is certain to disintegrate, and by being attached to it one falls to lower realms such as the hells. One can easily attain enlightenment with just a fraction of the difficulty and effort that one is subject to since beginningless time in attaining the always meaningless. Those attached to the vile, do not act in such a manner. The suffering of the desirous, desiring to attain their wishes, exceeds the suffering of those engaged in the practices to attain enlightenment, and they also do not have the desired result of enlightenment.

The main point here is the reality of impermanence. No matter how much one may have accumulated in terms of wealth or gain, it will naturally start to disintegrate; indeed, one's own life is coming to an end moment by moment. There is nothing we label as valuable that lasts or is permanent.

As related in the teachings, the end of all meeting is separation, the end of all accumulation is dispersion, and the end of all high status is to fall to the low. So meetings, such as relationships, eventually end in separation. And no matter how much wealth one accumulates, the end result is that it will be used up: it will be dispersed. Also, while high status in society may last for a certain period of time, the end result of it is returning again to a lower rank. We do not need to think of this situation necessarily happening only in this life. For example, while we may enjoy the high status of a human existence now, there's no certainty that we will not fall into a lower realm, such as the animal realm, in the next life. So, falling from a high status is a reality when we think of it happening over a period of time.

The main point here is that whatever worldly happiness we experience will eventually have to come to an end. There is no everlasting samsaric happiness.

Further, being attached to such worldly sensual pleasures will cause one to fall into the *lower realms such as the hells*. *One can easily attain enlightenment with just a fraction of the difficulty and effort that one is subject to since beginningless time in attaining the always meaningless*. In other words, although we have spent much time and energy in trying to achieve meaningless, fleeting pleasures over countless lifetimes, the effort it would take to become enlightened is only a fraction of that amount of time and effort. Thus, as the commentary exhorts, *those attached to the vile – meaning those who are attached to the meaningless affairs of this life – do not act in such a manner*. Contemplating the pitfalls of samsara and not being attached to samsaric pleasures will ensure that we do *not act in such a manner*.

As the text further explains, those who pursue their desires and worldly goals don't even achieve the ultimate, desirable goal – enlightenment — because of being completely consumed by worldly affairs.

2.2.1.3.2.2.5. *Contemplating the faults of desire*

The verse relating to this is:

84. *Contemplating the sufferings of hells and such,
Even weapons, poison, fire
High cliffs and enemies
Do not suffice as examples for the desirous.*

The commentary explains:

Having contemplated the sufferings of the lower realms such as the hells that arise from the negativity that one created for the purpose of desire, even examples such as weapons, poison, fire, high cliffs and enemies cannot suffice as examples for the harm of desire the desirous experience. Therefore, one should not be attached to sense objects.

Here, contemplating the *sufferings of the lower realms such as the hells that arise from the negativity that one created for the purpose of desire* is presented as an essential way to develop renunciation. As the teaching points out, without suffering one cannot develop renunciation. These are essential points. While we don't wish to experience suffering, contemplating and meditating on suffering encourage us to be free from cyclic existence.

Some examples of suffering we can relate to in this life include people being maimed by weapons; experiencing great agony after consuming poison; being scorched by fire; jumping from high cliffs and enduring great injuries; or having harm inflicted on them by their enemies. However, such sufferings are nothing compared to the sufferings experienced in the lower realms; all the extreme sufferings we can think of in relation to our human existence amount to nothing compared to the sufferings experienced in the lower realms as a consequence of desire. The conclusion in the commentary is *therefore, one should not be attached to sense objects*.

For example, we would consider it to be extreme suffering and a great calamity if someone perished in a fire. However, that person may have previously created positive karmas and had positive imprints in their mind that might, for example, result in them being reborn in

the god realms in their next life. So while we are focused on the great misfortune and suffering experienced by the individual when consumed in the fire, we may not be able to see that shortly after they perish, they have the karma to be reborn in a higher realm such as the god realms, where they experience great pleasure.

On the other hand, there may be others who may have led quite a luxurious and seemingly comfortable life now but, as a consequence of desire, will experience the much more extreme suffering of the hell realms in their future life.

The suffering of perishing in a great fire may be uncomfortable in the moment, but that in itself – perishing in the fire – does not become a cause to take the individual to the sufferings of the lower realms, such as the hell realms. Whereas being attached to desire objects will be a cause leading one to such extreme suffering.

2.2.2. *Meditating on affinity for isolation*¹

If one were to contemplate the faults of desire, especially the consequences of desire, one would develop the strong wish to go into isolation where one is not consumed by desire and can practise non-attachment.

This heading is subdivided into two:

2.2.2.1. Showing

2.2.2.2. Explaining

2.2.2.1. **SHOWING**

This is presented with the first two lines of the next verse.

*85ab. Thus, one should be weary of desire
And generate a liking for solitude*

The commentary [missing in the draft text] explains:

As explained earlier, one develops disenchantment with desire and generates the joy for isolation and thus establishes mental stabilisation.

As explained, the text is encouraging us to rely on isolation in order to develop mental stabilisation, which is basically calm abiding.

2.2.2.2. **EXPLAINING**

There are three subdivisions:

2.2.2.2.1 The distinction of place and so forth

2.2.2.2.2. The quality of independence

2.2.2.2.3. The quality of satisfaction

The three subdivisions are meticulously presented: the distinction of place, meaning the explanation of what would be a conducive place for going into isolation; the quality of independence, meaning the great virtue of being independent when going into isolation; and the quality of satisfaction or contentment that one develops.

2.2.2.2.1 *The distinction of place and so forth*

The second two lines of the earlier verse, followed by the subsequent verse, are presented. These are preceded by this query or hypothetical question:

Query: In what kind of isolated place should one remain?

The verses which relate to that as an answer:

¹ This heading was introduced on 17 November 2015 as *Meditating on Joy for Solitude*. This was the second part of *Abandoning Incorrect Conceptualisation*.

85cd. *Devoid of strife and afflictions.*

The fortunate contemplate the purpose of others

86. *And wander about in the peaceful forest
On cool wholesome abodes of vast flat stones,
Joyful and refreshed by moonlight and sandal,
Quiet, where peaceful forest breezes move.*

As the commentary explains:

Answer: Just like the wheel-turning king who has no competition and enjoys the happiness of the senses, the yogi abides in the peaceful forest free from the distractions of outer strife, and the afflictions of attachment and anger by others. Like previous fortunate beings, practicing the good actions in a cool place refreshed by moonlight and anointed by sandal, on vast flat stones equalling wholesome abodes, joyful and without unpleasant sound to the mind, in a place beautified by the movement of a soft and peaceful forest breeze.

There the yogi does contemplations for the purpose of others, such as meditating on the mind of enlightenment, and wanders around. Relying in such a way on solitude the yogi's happiness is superior to any kind of worldly happiness.

Just like the wheel-turning king who has no competition means there is no one who experiences the joys or pleasures of the senses as much as the wheel-turning king. The wheel-turning king is the ultimate example of someone who experiences great sensual joys.

Beyond that, *the yogi abides in the peaceful forest free from the distractions of outer strife, and the afflictions of attachment and anger by others* – in other words, going into isolation naturally means the meditator is free from others' harms, and not subject to others' attachment or anger.

The commentary then mentions *previous fortunate beings*, which can refer to bodhisattvas, or those who have had the great fortune to have all the conditions intact to engage in practice in solitude. Like them, the yogi practises *good actions* in cool places *refreshed by moonlight and anointed by sandal, on vast flat stones equalling wholesome abodes*. Here the analogy is that of beautiful, shimmering, celestial palaces where the floors are lit by moonlight and the air is perfumed. These abodes are considered to be very luxurious and comfortable. Similarly, for an individual who has gone into solitude, the dwelling place in their mind would be as comfortable and beautiful as what is described here.

Then, *on vast flat stones equalling wholesome abodes, joyful and without unpleasant sound to the mind, in a place beautified by the movement of a soft and peaceful forest breeze* refers to the further qualities of being in solitude, where there is no sound like the hustle and bustle of towns or other distracting sounds to disturb one's mind. Also such a dwelling is beautified by a peaceful forest breeze. These are the qualities of the abode itself, which is isolation.

In such a place with all of these conducive conditions, *the yogi does contemplations for the purpose of others, such as meditating on the mind of enlightenment*. So the actual object of the meditation would be the mind of enlightenment, with the pure wish to benefit other sentient beings.

With such a motivation, the yogis *wander about* in solitude, and *relying in such a way on solitude the yogi's happiness is superior to any worldly happiness*. Indeed, when

the mind of such an individual is really attuned, with all the external and internal conditions intact, they enjoy great happiness, which far exceeds any kind of worldly happiness that one may be familiar with.

These are points for us to acquaint our minds with and put into practice. While we may not have all the necessary conditions right now to go into solitude and remain in isolation, we can acquaint our mind with the great advantages of this. Even if we have the ability to have some quiet time for just one or two days to acquaint the mind with virtue and contemplate the Dharma, we are actually acquainting ourselves with acquiring the conditions in the future.

As also emphasised here, *the yogi does contemplations for the purpose of others*, meaning that for a Mahayana practitioner, the intention or motivation to be in solitude would be to benefit other sentient beings. With that positive motivation, of course, they will also personally experience great joy from being in solitude. With no desire objects, there's no immediate cause for the mind to follow distractions, so solitude becomes really conducive for the mind itself. This is where we can also understand how our mind gets so easily distracted when we are around desire objects.

2.2.2.2. *The quality of independence*

This refers to the advantage of being independent when one goes into solitude. The verse relating to this is the next verse:

87. *Abiding as one wishes
In empty houses, at the foot of trees and caves,
Abandoning the suffering of keeping,
Enjoying without care and independently.*

The commentary explains:

Abiding in houses abandoned by others, at the foot of trees and caves for as long as one wishes, abandoning the suffering of keeping and protecting many possessions. They abide carefree, independently from fears and worries.

Of course, as mentioned here one needs to be careful not go into houses that are actually occupied by others, and do what you may call squatting! The text emphasises houses that are completely abandoned, where's there's no fear of others coming and disturbing one.

The reference to abiding in abandoned houses or at the foot of trees and caves *for as long as one wishes* refers to setting a fixed time, for example, if one wishes to do retreat. This is significant. Setting a fixed time will ensure one abides in isolation, in retreat mode, for that period. If one comes out of retreat prior to the fixed time, it might be like breaking the retreat commitment. The main point here is to set a time for oneself, with the intention of remaining in that retreat for the duration.

Then *abandoning the suffering of keeping and protecting many possessions* means that when one goes into solitude, one has only the basic, bare essentials. Because one does not have many belongings, one is free of the sufferings associated with having a lot of belongings. If one has many possessions, one has to worry about how to keep, preserve and protect them. Such worries and suffering are naturally reduced when one doesn't have many possessions. Therefore, such individuals *abide carefree*,

independently from fears and worries of such frivolous ways and fears.

The significance of mentioning abandoned houses, caves and the foot of trees as abodes for one's isolation is to protect one from becoming attached to a certain place. If one goes into solitude and remains in one place for a long time, and then starts to become attached to that place, one's intention to make that place even better and more comfortable will become stronger.

So the way to actually practise abiding in solitude is, in summary, to practise having less desire and more contentment. To protect his disciples from attachment, the Buddha forbade fully ordained monks from having possessions, and required that they adopt meagre clothing. But for certain fully ordained monks who were prone to anger, the Buddha permitted them to have nice food and clothing. That is actually very skilful. If you provide someone who is prone to anger, or easily irritated and upset with nice things, food and so forth, this can help to calm their mind.

This is good practical advice for those living in partnership with others. If your partner is inclined to become easily upset and angry, then give them a nice meal to help calm them down. Or maybe buy them some nice clothing; this can also help their mind to settle down. This is practical advice that we need to put into practice. Often when a partner or companion is upset, rather than trying to find means to appease them, you might aggravate them more. This happens all too often. Rather than seeking ways to appease their anger so they don't become more upset and angry, one seems to make them even more upset. This is how conflict arises.

I notice that people often go out and start telling others about such problems, and may even exaggerate them, saying, "Oh my partner or companion is very upset and is always angry". So rather than trying to make the situation better and resolve it between themselves, one goes out and announces to others that one's partner is upset or is a very angry person. This doesn't help the situation.

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

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