

# Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

༄༅། །བྱང་ཆུབ་སེམས་དཔའི་རྒྱུད་པ་ལ་འཇུག་པ་བརྒྱལ་མོ།།

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As usual, let's spend some time in meditation.

[Meditation]

Now based on a bodhicitta motivation, we can generate the motivation for receiving the teachings.

## 2.3.2. Explaining extensively the reasoning that establishes the selflessness of phenomena

Earlier, the selflessness of persons was established with various reasons. Now what is being established is the selflessness of phenomena. To get a good understanding of the explanation of the selflessness of persons and phenomena, consider it from this perspective: if there were to be a self of a person, how would it exist? Think, why is the person empty of an inherently existent self? Likewise with phenomena, if there were to be an inherently existent self or phenomena, how would it exist? Why are phenomena empty of existing inherently? One needs to first clearly understand what is being refuted in order to understand what is being established.

Explaining the selflessness of phenomena has three subdivisions:

2.3.2.1. Explaining the selflessness of phenomena by way of the four close placements by mindfulness

2.3.2.2. Refuting the argument that the two truths would be invalid

2.3.2.3. Stating the reasons that establish selflessness

### 2.3.2.1. EXPLAINING THE SELFLESSNESS OF PHENOMENA BY WAY OF THE FOUR CLOSE PLACEMENTS BY MINDFULNESS

This is subdivided into four, which are the four placements that I have explained previously:

2.3.2.1.1. Meditating on the close placement by mindfulness on the body

2.3.2.1.2. The close placement by mindfulness on feelings

2.3.2.1.3. The close placement of mindfulness on the mind

2.3.2.1.4. The close placement by mindfulness on phenomena

#### 2.3.2.1.1. Meditating on the close placement by mindfulness on the body.

Meditating on the close placement by mindfulness on the body in general would relate to, for example, meditating on the impure nature of the body. However here it specifically relates to meditating on the selflessness of the body.

This is subdivided into four categories:

2.3.2.1.1.1 Comprehending that the body which possesses parts lacks inherent existence

2.3.2.1.1.2 Comprehending that the parts lack inherent existence

2.3.2.1.1.3 Thus, attachment to the dream-like body lacking inherent existence is unsuitable

2.3.2.1.1.4 This also establishes the person as lacking inherent existence

The earlier reasoning of the selflessness of person also applies here as well. The reasoning why the person was established as lacking a self is that if there were to be a self of a person then it would have to be findable on the basis of imputation, i.e. the aggregates. Similarly, if the body were to exist inherently, then it would also have to be findable on the basis of the imputation of the body, which are the parts and collections of what makes up the body. The same logic applies for both the self of person and the body.

The specific explanation here relates to the assertion made by the Mind Only and Svatantrika Madhyamika school, in which they say, when investigated, an inherently person is found upon basis of imputation. Likewise an inherently existent body can be found on the basis of its imputation. That is how the Mind Only and the Svatantrika Middle Way School actually establish an inherently existent self of a person and the aggregates/body. Here, according to the Prasangika, what is refuted is an inherently existent person and body; neither can be found as existing inherently when searched for on the basis their imputation.

The key point to understand here is that what cannot be found is an inherently existent body. This is then established as the emptiness of the body. This is not to be confused with investigating the body and not finding the body itself; the lack of a body is not the emptiness of the body. But investigating the misconception of an inherently existent body, and not finding it is established as the emptiness of the body.

Thus, according to the Prasangika, the reason an inherently existent person and body does not exist is because if it were to exist, the physical aggregates would have to exist without depending on causes and conditions and any of its parts. Therefore the ability for something to exist that does not depend on either its causes and conditions, or its parts, is the proof that it does not exist inherently. While the lower schools would not accept that things exist without depending on causes and conditions at all, they do establish that things exist inherently, from their own side.

The Prasangika assert that the lack of true existence, inherent existence, and the lack of autonomous independent existence all come to the same point. That is, if they were to exist independently or inherently or autonomously, they would have to exist without depending on causes and conditions or any of its parts. Functional things are dependent on causes and conditions, whereas non-compounded phenomena, for example space, depend on its directional parts. This is how the lack of inherent existence is established, because all phenomena depend on either their causes and conditions or their parts.

In simple terms, the Prasangika are saying to the Mind Only and Svatantrika: you say that having investigated you can find an inherently existent person and aggregates, however we say that this cannot be found.

After investigating, if the person or aggregate is found to exist without depending on either its causes, conditions or parts, then we would accept that there is an inherently existent person and body, but that is simply not possible.

### 2.3.2.1.1.1 Comprehending that the body which possesses the parts lacks inherent existence

The commentary explains:

It follows the body does not exist inherently - because if it existed inherently, then an example of the body should be findable in the individual limbs of the body, in the collection of the accumulated parts or as a different entity from these, but it is not found.

Argument: The collection of all the accumulated parts is the body. What doubt is there about this?

Madhyamaka: Because one labels the body in dependence on the collection, the collection of the parts of the body is unsuitable to be the body. If it is not like this, then one needs to accept a final partless particle.

The commentary first presents the reasoning for why there is no inherently existent body. If you can get a good understanding of this reasoning, then you can apply it to all the rest. Just as it states in *The Heart Sutra*: 'correctly and repeatedly beholding those five aggregates also as empty of inherent nature', similarly this is to be applied to all other phenomena. Thus, it is good to have a clear understanding of what it means to lack inherent existence.

The first syllogism the commentary presents is, *It follows the body does not exist inherently - because if it existed inherently, then an example of the body should be findable in the individual limbs of the body, in the collection of the accumulated parts or as a different entity from these. But it is not found* either within the parts or as a different entity from them. An inherently existent body would have to be found, but it cannot be found. That's the reason being presented.

Then the **non-Buddhist** school says, *The collection of all the accumulated parts is the body. What doubt is there about this?* So they are saying that the collection itself can be posited as the body. The **Madhyamika** refute this by saying, *because one labels the body in dependence on the collection* and without the collection one cannot even use the label 'body'. It continues that, *the collection of the parts of the body is unsuitable to be the body. If it is not like this, then one needs to accept a final partless particle*, meaning that if this were to be the case, by default one would have to assert that there is a partless particle, which cannot be the case.

The verses read:

78. *The body is not the feet or calves,  
The thighs and waist are also not the body,  
The stomach and back are also not the body,  
The chest and upper arms are also not the body,  
The rib cage and hands are also not the body,*
79. *The armpits and shoulders are also not the  
body,  
The internal organs are also not it.  
If also head and neck are not the body,  
Then what of this is the body?*

The commentary explains the meaning of the verses as follows:

Thus, when one analyses whether and how the basis of engagement for the label that expresses 'body' exists from the side of the body itself: The feet and calves of the person are not the body of the person, the thighs and waist are also not the body, and also the stomach and back are not the body because the body of the person is labelled in dependence on these. The chest and upper arms are also not the body, the rib cage and hands are also not the body, the armpits and shoulders are also not the body and the internal organs are also not it. If also the head and neck are not the body, then which of these parts is the body? Not any of them. Because also their collection is not the body or any different entity from these, the body does not exist inherently.

The statement *When one analyses whether and how the basis of engagement for the label that expresses 'body' exists from the side of the body itself*, is making the point that if the body were to exist inherently, it would have to exist from its own side. There is nowhere else it could exist inherently apart from the parts or the collection of the body. Then the following investigation applies: if the body were to exist from its own side then going through each part of the body, one would investigate whether that part is the inherently existent body.

The reasoning presented here refutes an inherently existent body after having searched for it. Even conventionally, any normal person would be able to accept that *the feet and calves of the person are not the body of the person*. Clearly, we can all accept that the feet and calves are not by themselves the body. Likewise, *the thighs and the waist are also not the body and also the stomach and back in itself are not the body, because the body of the person is labelled in dependence on these*. So these are not individually the body because what is labelled as 'body' is a combination of all of these. The commentary goes on, *The chest and upper arms are also not the body, the rib cage and hands are also not the body, the armpits and shoulders are also not the body and the internal organs are also not it. If also the head and neck are not the body, then which of these parts is the body?*

For an individual meditating on the emptiness of the body, the process is to first investigate whether the body exists inherently or not. That investigation is based on what appears as a body, meditating on whether each and every part are inherently existing parts of the body or not, and whether the collection of these parts make up an inherently existent body or not? When an individual employs this method to realise the emptiness of the body, they come to the conclusion that an inherently existent body is nowhere to be found. Not finding an inherently existent body is in fact realising the selflessness and emptiness of the body. So the investigative meditation and realisation is not based on negating a body, but rather negating an inherently existent body. This is the main point to be understood.

When one first conducts an actual meditation on the emptiness of the body, doing it in a proper way, one can come to a really good understanding of the emptiness of the body. To begin with, if the body were not empty of inherent existence, then it means that it would have to exist inherently. So first one needs to get a good understanding of how the body would exist if it did exist

inherently. If the body exists inherently, then it can only exist upon either the collection of, or the parts of the body. There is nowhere else an inherently existent body could exist. Thus one investigates the various parts that make up the body, and going through each one comes to the conclusion that there is no inherently existent body, neither the parts nor the collection of the body itself can be found as being inherently existent. At a certain point one experiences a sense of vacuity, just like empty space, and it is at that point one maintains one's focus on this vacuity. Having done the earlier profound investigation, it is at this point that one gets a true sense of the lack of an inherently existent body. It is said that when one reaches this stage one should not engage in further analysis, but rather just maintain that awareness of emptiness and meditate on it. This establishes a really good understanding from which you can get closer to the actual realisation of emptiness.

While these points will be explained further on, I will now present the common understanding we have of a person which actually shows one's own wrong perception. It is good to begin to recognise one's own mistaken view when one perceives an individual person, or their body.

When we see the body of a person how does it appear to us? We have an instinctive notion that the body actually exists from its own side, independently of causes and conditions, and we grasp onto that appearance in the belief that the body actually exists in that way, i.e. as existing from its own side. That is the misconception of apprehending a truly existent body. There is no other misconception of true existence other than how we normally perceive and apprehend the body, instinctively grasping onto a body as existing from its own side.

So the body that appears to us as existing from its own side is actually completely mistaken. An individual person, and their body, cannot exist independently from its own side. What we call 'a person and their aggregates' is merely imputed by mind. Therefore they are known as imputed phenomena.

This is really the key point of the Prasangika view as presented by Chandrakirti and Nagarjuna: that persons and phenomena are merely imputed by the mind, and that all existence is merely imputed and labelled by the mind. When one gets a good understanding of this point, one is getting closer to the real understanding of the correct view – the fact that things are merely imputed by mind.

When one has an inkling that there is no substantial existence, but rather that the body is merely imputed by mind, then all the attractive attributes of the body also start to disintegrate within one's mind, and thus one's attachment to the body also disintegrates. This how we need to understand that the right view of emptiness is the optimum means to overcome one's delusions such as attachment and so forth. As explained in the teachings, when one comes close to the correct understanding of emptiness, it begins to shatter the core of cyclic existence and one's delusions. This is the key point in the explanation here.

To summarise the earlier part, the commentary says, *Because also their collection is not the body or any different entity from these, the body does not exist inherently.*

The next argument is then presented: *The coarse body is of a different entity from the limbs and parts.*

This suggests that some think the 'coarse body' is of a different entity from the limbs and parts. The following verses are a way to refute this view.

The first two verses read:

80. *In case this body abides  
In all parts individually  
Then of course the parts abide in parts.  
How can it abide in itself?*
81. *In case the entire entity of the body  
Abides in the hands and so forth,  
However many limbs such as hands,  
Are found, they become bodies.*

The commentary explains the meaning of these two verses as follows.

Madhyamaka: If there is such a coarse body that possesses parts, and it is of a different entity from the parts, does then each part of that coarse body individually abide in one of the parts, such as one part in the hand, one part in the calves and so forth, or does the whole part-possessor [the body] abide in each of the parts without being divided up?

If one looks at the first, as the part-possessor [or body] pervades hands and so forth, with each part abiding on the respective part, then it would become infinite for each part, e.g. the hand has again parts such as the fingers, which then would also abide in their respective parts.

If the part-possessor [the body] is partless, then there are no individual parts that can abide in the individual parts. Rather, as in the later examination, the whole entity would abide in each of the parts of the complete body, and there would therefore be as many bodies as there are parts. As the parts would not touch the body, it is solely false and not in the slightest truly existent.

Then a summary is presented.

82. *If there is no body inside or out,  
Then how is there a body in the hands and other  
parts?  
If it does not exist apart from them,  
How can it exist?*

The commentary explains:

Summary: If one analyses well with reasoning in this way, then regardless of whether it is the body of the outer person asserted by the Buddhists or the internally fabricated person by the non-Buddhists, it does not exist inherently. Therefore, how could the hands and so forth be pervaded by an inherently existing body? They are not.

The commentary explains that if one analyses well with the reasoning presented earlier, *then regardless of whether it is the body of the outer person asserted by the Buddhists*, (i.e. the Prasangika) that what the body is, is a mere label upon a base of imputation, which is the aggregates. What is meant by the *outer person asserted by Buddhists or the internally fabricated person by the non-Buddhist* does not exist, is that *it does not exist inherently*. The body which does exist, the merely labelled body, as well as the body

asserted by non-Buddhists (which is a fabricated assertion of the body) do not exist inherently, *therefore how could the hands and so forth be pervaded by inherently existing body? They are not.*

The main point here is, *how could the hands and so forth be pervaded by an inherently existing body?*, which, being a rhetorical question, implies that they are not. With the reasons presented earlier this should all be clear.

The next verse reads:

83. *Thus, there is no body. Body awareness is generated  
Through delusion regarding the hands and other parts,  
Similar to awareness of a person generated as  
A heap of stones; through the specific shape it is placed in.*

The commentary explains:

Although the body does not exist inherently, regarding the cause for being mistaken: Although the body does not exist inherently, there is a reason for being mistaken with regards to it because although it does not exist inherently, by fantasising that the hands and so forth exist truly, the awareness thinking that the body exists inherently is generated. For example, like the generation of the awareness of a person as a heap of stones because of the characteristic of the human like shape it is placed in.

Here the commentary affirms that while the body does not exist inherently, as an ordinary being one apprehends a truly existent, or inherently existent body. Why is that so? The cause for this mistaken perception is that, *although the body does not exist inherently, there is a reason for being mistaken with regards to it because although it does not exist inherently, by fantasising that the hands and so forth exist truly, the awareness thinking that the body exists inherently is generated.* In relation to parts of the body such as the hands, when you perceive these as being truly existent then naturally you will perceive the body itself as being inherently existent.

The next example, *like the generation of the awareness of a person as a heap of stones because of the characteristic of the human like shape it is placed in* refers to further conditions impeding perception. For example, at certain times of the day when the visibility is a bit hazy, and one is at a distance from a heap of stones stacked in a similar shape to a person, one sees a shape which looks like a person. One will have a mistaken perception of a person over there, which arises because all the conditions for that mistaken perception are present. This explains the example presented here. This is explained further in the next verse.

The verse reads:

84. *As long as the conditions are there  
The body will appear as the person.  
Likewise, as long as they are there regarding  
The hands and so forth, they will appear as the body.*

The commentary explains the verse in the following way.

For as long as the conditions for the mistake such as the unclear appearance of the heap of stones are complete, for that long the shape will appear as the person. Likewise, for as long as the causes and conditions of the hands and other parts are complete,

for that long the body will appear as that which has limbs, and the awareness grasping at the body as existing inherently will be generated.

This clearly explains that for *as long as the conditions for the mistake such as the unclear appearance of the heap of stones are complete*, meaning that when all the conditions for perceiving a heap of stones as being a person are there, then for that period of time the shape will appear as a person. Likewise for as long as the causes and conditions for the hands and other parts are complete, i.e. *as long as they appear as being truly existent, then for that long the body will appear as that which has limbs, and the awareness grasping at the body as existing inherently will be generated.*

### 2.3.2.1.1.2. Comprehending that the parts lack inherent existence

The verse reads:

85. *Likewise, because of being the collection of fingers,  
What could the hand also become?  
Because they in turn are a collection of joints  
Also the joints are divided by their parts,*

The commentary explains the verse this way:

The body of the person is labelled in dependence on the collection of limbs and parts, and does not exist truly. Likewise, as the hand is also labelled in dependence on the collections of parts and fingers, how could it become something inherently existent? It is impossible. Also because the finger is labelled in dependence on the collection of joints it cannot exist inherently. If the joints are also divided into their parts, they do not possess inherent existence. If the parts of the joints are divided into particles, then they also do not exist inherently.

*The body of the person is labelled in dependence on the collection of limbs and parts, and does not exist truly.* The reason the person does not exist truly is because it is merely labelled by mind upon the parts which make up the body. Similarly when you relate to each part of the body, such as the hand, then *the hand is also labelled in dependence on the collections of parts and fingers.* What we call 'hand' is nothing but the collections of the different parts which make up the hand, such as the fingers and so forth. So, *how could it become something that is inherently existent?* Being a rhetorical question, what is implied is that it cannot exist inherently. That is impossible. Furthermore, even the fingers are made of parts, the joints and so forth, so they cannot exist inherently.

86. *And the parts are divided into particles.  
Should the particles be divided into directions,  
Since the partitioned directions lack parts,  
They are like space. Hence, there are also no particles.*

When the particles are also divided into different directional parts through the division into the directional part of the east and so forth, then they are labelled in dependence on directional parts and do not exist inherently. Also the directional parts do not exist inherently because they lack inherently existing parts, for example, like space.

Then, also the particles do not possess inherent existence because if they did, then one would need to accept partless particles, but this is refuted by the reasoning of 'if six are connected simultaneously'.

The commentary explains that, *When the particles are also divided into different directional parts through the division into the directional part of the east and so forth, then they are labelled in dependence on directional parts and do not exist inherently. Directional parts do not exist inherently because they lack inherently existing parts, for example like space* because space is posited as being a mere negation of obstruction.

The commentary continues:

Then, also the particles do not possess inherent existence because if they did, then one would need to accept partless particles, but this is refuted by the reasoning of 'if six are connected simultaneously'.

What is being presented here is that the particles themselves do not possess inherent existence. Of course, when you divide them into their smallest parts, even then they do not exist inherently, because if they did one would have to accept a partless particle. If a partless particle did exist, the logical refutation here is that it couldn't possibly coexist with other particles, like six other particles, because if it didn't have any parts to it, then in coming together with other particles it would all merge to become one, so they couldn't be separate particles. Then nothing solid could possibly exist as there are no parts to the particles, and all other particles would merge and become just one particle, which is absurd.

### 2.3.2.1.1.3. Then, attachment to the dream-like body lacking inherent existence is unsuitable

This is one of the points I mentioned earlier.

The first two lines of the verse read:

*87ab Thus, who with discernment,  
Is attached to a dream-like form?*

The commentary explains these lines:

The dream-like form appears as something identifiable when not investigated but at the time of immediate investigation, it does not exist inherently. Who that possesses discernment would be attached? It is unsuitable, as there is nobody that comprehends the object of true-grasping.

*The dream-like form* refers to the body. The real point to understand here is the connotation of form or body being *identifiable* or existing from its own side, because it has not been investigated.

It is very true that with anything we perceive, like the hand, that when we don't investigate and just grasp onto it as it appears, it appears to us as really existing from its own side. The verse refers to the way forms are in fact like dreams; they have no real essence because they do not exist at all from their own side; to us however they appear as something real and identifiable. This is how something appears when it is not investigated, *but at the time of immediate investigation it does not exist inherently*.

As a group we can recite the Tara Praises and dedicate them to the success of Ingrid's treatment and also to Susan who is very unwell and has been admitted to hospital recently. Also dedicate them to Julie's mother who is also apparently very ill. I have been informed that while Susan is physically unwell, her mind is quite stable, quite happy and quite good.

I have advised her to put her complete reliance on Tara and recite Tara mantras and just think that whatever

happens, I rely upon you Tara, wholeheartedly. She commented to me that this has been really helpful for her mind, that it is a good practice.

It is good to give advice that is easy to comprehend and manageable as a practice for people to do. Sometimes a practice can become too much, then of course it becomes overwhelming. That's a point to keep in mind – to make advice simple and manageable. Actually this reminds me of what a geshe (who is quite a great scholar himself) once told me – that it is good to give easily understood, succinct advice for a practice, rather than giving too many things to think about. When people ask for advice we find that many give too much elaboration, not something that is manageable and simple. This geshe told me that when people asked a question, it is good to give a simple answer, something they can manage. This particular geshe has now passed away.

In relation to sharing something simple with people, once I said to someone it is good to remember that your real, true friend is within you; not outside, but within you. This person said that he'd never heard that and it was a very significant point. The person was in distress because he had lost quite a lot of money in a business, but when I mentioned that he hadn't really lost anything, he understood the point and came to realise that if the real true friend was inside, then in losing external things one actually hasn't lost anything. He maintained the internal real friend that is within him. That is the point he got from that simple advice.

On another occasion, again I shared some advice with a Dharma student who was very ill. I mentioned that of course it is preferable if we can all have a long life. However between this life and the next life, wouldn't the next life be more important to consider? And then this person said that advice really helped them. Accepting sensible, good advice was a true mark of them having a good understanding of the future life. This is what we need to prepare ourselves for: that our practice is done as a means of preparing for that inevitable time of death. Otherwise what use is Dharma practice? It is not meant to accumulate worldly possessions.

When we do practices, and accumulate numbers of mantras, remember the main point to think about during the recitation is to think about these points and remember that we have something to rejoice about. The teachings state that when we rejoice in others' good deeds, this is a virtue that further enhances our own virtue. Also, rejoicing in one's own good deeds becomes a means to further accumulate or enhance our virtue. In order to be able to rejoice in one's virtues, one has to accumulate virtues, so one has to have a virtuous mind.

The virtuous mind is something we need to familiarise ourselves with periodically: think about Dharma points during the day, when going out and about. That is how our mind becomes more and more familiar with virtue. There are so many non-virtues we can recall even in this life alone, not to mention all our past lives.

While we can't remember the non-virtues we've accumulated in past lives, we can assume that we have definitely accumulated many grave negative karmas, such as being a very evil person who we'd now condemn

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as a murderer etc. We would have been born as animals, who are completely dependent on eating other animals. These are things that we can assume we have done in past lives. In terms of this lifetime, we can definitely recall certain non-virtuous states of mind or actions that we have engaged in and that what we need is to apply a purification practice. The main point of purification is to develop strong regret, because when one develops this it purifies half of the negative karma one has accumulated. In this way we embark on our practice of Dharma.

It is good to think about these points periodically to develop our practice of Dharma on a daily basis and further enhance a virtuous state of mind, and develop regret for the non-virtuous states of mind. That is how we familiarise ourselves with accumulating virtue. Otherwise there will be no end to it if we are completely preoccupied by the affairs of this life, thinking constantly about how things should be going in relation to this life's affairs. There will be no end to trying to fulfil one's wishes in relation to this life's affairs. If that was the case and if this life's wishes could be fulfilled, then there would be many who would already be really satisfied and happy by now. That we can see that this is not sufficient, and that we need to have a bigger scope to prepare us for our future existences, is something that constitutes the practice of Dharma.

There being no end to this life's affairs is illustrated in a story I would have shared in the past. Once there was a teacher and a student. The teacher used to promise that they'd have a picnic someday, and the student would periodically remind him about going on the picnic. The teacher would say, 'We will go. We will go when all our work is finished'. After a while the student would ask the teacher again, 'So when are we going on a picnic?' and again the teacher would say, 'When all the work is completed'. One day the teacher noticed something in the distance. He couldn't see very clearly and asked the student what was happening. It was a funeral procession, so the student said to the teacher, 'Well, that's someone whose work is all completed and who is now going on a picnic'. Whether this is a true story or not, it is a good illustration of our situation.

So when things are well, we constantly think that things are not going well and try to make them better. And during this time one's life will end.

So now we'll do the recitation of the Tara Praises and make the dedications. Since we can assume we here are endowed with morality, then the prayers would definitely be fruitful. The key point about whether aspirational prayers are actualised or not is dependent on the morality of the person who is doing those prayers. That is something which we need to keep in mind because if you are assuming that you are doing a virtuous practice of Dharma, whether that becomes a cause for our good rebirth or not is dependent on observing morality. So therefore we need to understand that morality is essential.

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

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