

Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

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Based on the motivation that was generated with the *Refuge and Bodhicitta Prayer*, we can now engage in our regular meditation practice.

[meditation]

We can now 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 the virtuous practice of listening to the teaching and then put it into practice well.

It is good to set our motivation so that our practice incorporates both method and wisdom, which is the optimum means for creating the causes for enlightenment. Those who have gained the realisation of emptiness will set their motivation to achieve enlightenment for the benefit all mother sentient beings, prior to going into single-pointed meditative equipoise on emptiness. It is said that because their meditative equipoise is held with the bodhicitta motivation - which includes the aspiration to achieve enlightenment, they will be engaging in the practise of both method and wisdom throughout their meditative equipoise. Their single-pointed meditative equipoise on emptiness is not rendered to nothingness because of their bodhicitta motivation.

We need to relate this to all forms of our practice. Prior to engaging in the practice of prostration, for example, we can take a few moments to generate the bodhicitta motivation. Although we have not yet actually generated bodhicitta, we can develop a contrived bodhicitta motivation, and that similitude of the bodhicitta motivation, will help to secure a more meaningful practice. Combining simple practices with the bodhicitta motivation makes the practice really significant.

2.3.2.1.2. The close placement by mindfulness on feelings [cont.]

2.3.2.1.2.4. Refuting that the feelings of the object possessor exist inherently

Having refuted feelings as being inherently existent, we now turn to refuting that the feelings of an object possessor exist inherently.

The first lines of verse relating to this are:

99cd. *Because it is generated simultaneously with mind
Feeling is not seen by it.*

100ab. *Although generated earlier and later
It is remembered but not experienced.*

As the commentary explains:

Because feeling is generated simultaneously with mind, it is not seen inherently by the mind because those that are of different substance and simultaneous are unrelated. Although feelings are generated earlier

and later, they are remembered but not experienced because, at that time, they have ceased and are not generated.

First of all, even though *feelings* are *generated simultaneously with mind*, they are *not seen as being inherently existent by the mind*. That is because even though they are generated simultaneously they *are of different substance and therefore unrelated*. When the commentary states *although feelings are generated earlier and later*, it is referring to feelings that *are remembered but not experienced now because they have*, in fact, already *ceased*.

The main point to be understood is the lack of inherent existence of a mind that experiences feelings. This is then clarified in the following lines of verse.

100cd *It does not experience its own nature,
And is also not experienced by others.*

101a. *Since there is absolutely no one with feeling,*

As the commentary explains:

Summary: That feelings do not experience themselves is refuted with the refutation of self-knowers. They are also not experienced by an inherently existent another because that which is experienced and the experiencer are unrelated. Not only does that producing the feeling not exist inherently, there is also absolutely no inherently existent experiencer of feeling. This was already refuted at the time of refuting the self of person.

The commentary explains - that *feelings do not experience themselves is refuted with the refutation of self-knowers*. Earlier the text refuted self-knowers. From this it follows that feelings cannot experience themselves. In other words there are no inherently existing feelings that experience themselves.

Lest one has the doubt that there might be another factor that experiences feelings inherently, the text clarifies that *feelings are not experienced by an inherently existent other*. That is *because that which is experienced and the experiencer are unrelated*. Experiencing someone else's feeling is an absurdity because there is no relationship between the experiencer, and that which is experienced i.e. the feeling.

Further, as the commentary explains, not only does that producing the feeling not exist inherently, but *also there is absolutely no inherently existent experiencer of the feeling*. This further refutes any doubts that while the feeling does not exist inherently, the experiencer - the person who experiences that feeling - might exist inherently. *There is also absolutely no inherently existent experiencer of feeling as well*. As explained in the commentary *the self of a person was refuted earlier*.

The next few lines of the verse are presented:

101bcd. *Thus feeling is not suchness.
In this way, how can this collection lacking self
Be harmed by this?*

As the commentary explains:

Thus, just as feeling does not exist as suchness, how should the collection of aggregates, that lack an inherently existing self, be benefited by happiness and harmed by suffering? As there is no inherently existing suffering as well as no inherently existing feeling, it is suitable to apply every effort to meditate on the close placement of mindfulness on feeling.

Since *feelings* are not inherently existent, *how could the collection of aggregates, which lack an inherently existing self, be benefited by happiness and harmed by suffering?* This is similar to what was explained earlier. If feelings were to exist inherently and the person experiencing the feeling also exists inherently, then who is there to benefit from pleasurable, happy feelings? Who is there to be harmed by inherently existent feelings of pain and suffering? While feelings of happiness are beneficial and feelings of suffering are harmful, the point here is that inherently existent feelings of happiness cannot benefit anyone and inherently existent suffering cannot harm anyone. This point was also mentioned previously.

As further explained here, *as there is no inherently existing suffering as well as no inherently existing feeling, it is appropriate to apply every effort to meditate on the close placement of mindfulness on feeling.* This conclusion specifically relates to applying the close placement of mindfulness on the lack of inherent existence of feeling, or the emptiness of feeling.

The main point to be understood here is that if one perceives feelings as being inherently existent one will develop attachment to pleasant feelings, and aversion towards unpleasant feelings. It is through such feelings of attachment and aversion that one creates negative karmas. But when one perceives happy feelings as lacking inherent existence, then attachment will not arise, and when one views any feelings of suffering as lacking inherent existence, then one will not develop an aversion to discomfort. Through the correct understanding of the lack of inherent existence of phenomena in general, and the lack of inherent existence of feelings in particular, the delusions will be overcome. In this way we gain a glimpse of the importance of understanding the lack of inherent existence of phenomena.

When someone, who believes that things exist inherently, hears the teachings on emptiness, they might develop the thought that maybe these teachings on emptiness are valid. As the teachings mention, for those who are receptive, generating even a mere doubt¹ about the validity of emptiness in this way can begin to shatter the very core of cyclic existence. Through understanding the lack of inherent existence, and thus the emptiness of phenomena, the delusions are first weakened, then eventually completely eradicated. This is an essential point to understand.

In order to overcome attachment and craving, one needs to develop an understanding of the lack of inherent existence of feelings. That is the only way to overcome attachment and aversion. A quote in the teachings says that 'because love is not a direct opponent, it cannot overcome the delusion of craving'. The point is that while the unconditional love of bodhicitta in a bodhisattva's mind is an invaluable most precious state of mind, it nevertheless cannot in itself overcome the delusions, the reason is because it doesn't serve as a direct opponent to those delusions. Therefore, as the teachings further explain, in order to overcome the ignorance of grasping at true existence or inherent existence, the direct opposite of that mind needs to be developed as an antidote to

overcome that ignorance. This is really the point one needs to understand. So at our level, having this understanding, and applying it in practice means reflecting on these points again and again, and familiarise our mind with this understanding, as a way to get a better and clearer understanding of the lack of inherent existence, i.e. emptiness.

To apply this as a personal practice, we start by sitting quietly in a focused and a concentrated state of mind, and then look within and examine our feelings. How do feelings actually appear to us? Do they appear as independently existing from their own side? Is that actually the mode of existence of feelings? Or do feelings actually exist in dependence on other factors? When one contemplates in this way, one begins to clearly distinguish between the two different modes of existence. One is the erroneous view that perceives the mode of existence of feelings as existing inherently and independently, in and of themselves? The actual mode of existence, however, is that feelings rely on other factors for their existence, and hence do not exist inherently. When we contemplate these two perceptions, we see that they are the complete opposite of each other. So, which perception is the correct one? The perception of feelings as being inherently and truly existent, or feelings as lacking inherent existence, and which do not exist in and of themselves?

The object is the same, i.e. feeling, and there are two modes of apprehending that object of feeling. One is to apprehend it as being inherently existent, and the other is to see that it lacks inherent existence. Which of these two modes of apprehending feelings is true? When one further investigates in this way, one begins to find that the apprehension of feelings as existing inherently does not have any valid reason to support it. So it is based on a false perception rather than a true perception. The apprehension of feelings as lacking inherent existence is, on the other hand, based on a valid cognition, and is therefore true. It is in this way that one's understanding of the lack of inherent existence is enhanced, and this understanding can then be applied to all other phenomena.

Meditating on, and contemplating these points is essential for enhancing our understanding. Otherwise after receiving some teachings we will end up just parroting: "oh yes, the perception of grasping at true existence and inherent existence is false - it's a mistaken perception. It is mentioned in the teachings so must be true", and leave it at that. If we haven't really spent the time investigating it for ourselves, then it will be just another object of knowledge, and not an actual experience.

As it is our last session for the year, it will good to do an extensive dedication for the time that we have spent together throughout the year. It's important to dedicate the merits that we have accumulated collectively throughout the year, and we will do that by reciting the *King of Prayers*.

It is also good to incorporate an understanding of how, when one dedicates virtues, one is able to dedicate the virtues of the three times, which means the virtues that we have accumulated at any time in the past, the virtues

¹ Doubt in this context carries a positive connotation.

we are accumulating at this time and also the virtues that are yet to be accumulated in the future. I explained this in detail during my explanation of the practice of *tong-len* or the giving and taking practice. When we offer virtues to others we can offer the virtues of all three times. On the other hand we can only offer the body and possessions that we possess now. We can't offer the body and possessions of the past because that time is gone and we don't have them any more, and we can't offer our future body and possessions because we don't possess them yet. Thus, we can only offer the wealth and possessions that we have now.

With But we can give in the three times: Yesterday I gave, today I give, and tomorrow I will also give. The reason why one can offer virtues of the past is because we still have in our possession the positive imprints left upon our mental continuum in the past, and that's what we are actually offering - the positive imprints in our mind. That is how it should be understood.

During the recitation of *The King of Prayers* it is good to reflect upon all the virtues one has ever accumulated in the past since beginningless time: "Whatever positive deeds and virtues that I have created intentionally or otherwise, I dedicate for the benefit of all sentient beings, to relieve them from all suffering and lead them to the ultimate state of happiness". So dedicating our virtues to the ultimate state of enlightenment makes one's dedication much more powerful and meaningful.

I want to thank everyone for your participation in the teachings this year, which have gone very well. Thank-you!

After a short break over Christmas the program will resume on Monday evenings on January 2, and the Wednesday program will begin on January 11. Rather than just staying in your room doing nothing, coming along to meditation together would be good. I place great importance not only on practising together, but also on gathering together afterwards, and have tea together. This is a good way to promote good relationships between students. There have been many who have commented that they have found starting the year, and indeed starting any practice with meditation is very beneficial and meaningful.

In discussion with Ross he said that that he couldn't attend the Kalachakra Initiation this year, and also Tina is not going, so I suggested that you would derive the same benefit from watching a live-stream of the event together. It would be good for those who are around to come along, and perhaps bring something to eat and drink, and watch it together. That would be a really meaningful way to spend time together, again promoting good feelings between each other.

On a practical level, if even one hour spent together with good friends and like-minded people relieves feelings of loneliness, then it will have been worthwhile. If you are at home by yourself, your mind might not be content and go wandering off everywhere. If you are a meditator, of course, then that's different. But you might as well come to a gathering like this because it's more meaningful than sitting at home with a distracted mind. I consider a gathering of like-minded people promotes good feelings

and develops good relationships with each other. I personally take great pride in having a good relationship with others and I feel that it's a really important element of our existence.

Apparently not too long ago, the Kalachakra Initiation done in Ladakh was presented on the ABC's Compass program. Two weeks later when I went for my regular check-up with my doctor, he commented on having seen that program. He was very, very impressed and said "oh, it was really very good". Of course I couldn't understand everything he was saying, but what I gathered was that he said "His Holiness the Dalai Lama is doing really good work". The fact that it was presented by Geraldine Doogue, who is very well respected, was important, as having a well-known presenter seems to make a difference.

You don't need to feel that if you can't come to the live-stream every day that there's no point in coming. That's a narrow-minded way of looking at it. Even coming to one or two sessions will bring some benefit, so that's OK.

Of course my intention is that it will be of some benefit and help. I heard that last year over 100 people joined in the Tara Practice and Lama Tsong Khapa puja. It makes me happy when others take an interest and seem to benefit from these practices.

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

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