
Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

23 February 2016

While maintaining the motivation we generated during the prayers, we can engage in our regular meditation practice. [meditation]

We can now generate the motivation for receiving the teachings along these lines:

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

When one generates such a motivation, whatever positive action one engages in will indeed become a cause to benefit other sentient beings.

Having covered the subdivisions of the next outline last week, we come to the first of these categories which is:

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

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

2.2.1.2.2.3. Hence, stop grasping at the pure

2.2.1.2.2.3.1. *The body cannot be cleansed by effortful means*

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

The verse is presented with the hypothetical argument or query: "Although the body is impure it is suitable to be attached to it when scents such as sandal are applied to it."

This hypothetical query or question arises in conjunction with the notion the mind of attachment has, which is that, while one may agree that the body is impure by nature, it is still a suitable object to be attached to when beautiful scents like sandal and so forth are applied to it. This is how the mind of attachment works.

The verse and a half relating to this outline are:

65. *The scents applied to the body
Are among others, sandal, and nothing more.
Why be attached to another
Due to a scent separate from it?*

66ab. *If it naturally has a bad smell,
Is it not befitting not to be attached to it?*

The commentary explains:

The scent applied to the body can be, among others, camphor or sandal, and does not belong to the body. For what reason are you attached to the body of others due to a smell separate from that body?

The meaning of the next two lines are presented as a rhetorical question:

"If the body naturally has a bad smell, then is it not befitting not to be attached to it?"

The answer to this is:

"Indeed if one is attached to the body, it causes many sufferings."

As presented here, the faulty mind of attachment may present faulty reasons for being attached to a body. While acknowledging that a body may be impure in nature, the mind may trick one into believing that if that body were beautified with various scents – sandal, camphor, musk and so forth – it would become a suitable object of attachment.

However, as presented here, that reasoning is absurd. Since the body by its very nature is impure and has foul smells, why see it as a suitable object of attachment when scents that do not naturally occur in the body have to be applied to it? The fact that scents need to be applied to a body shows it doesn't have a naturally good smell; one has to apply these external scents to make it smell good.

As the commentary explains, *the scent applied to the body can be, among others, camphor or sandal, and does not belong to the body*, so when one smells the scent it is not coming from the body itself. Therefore, *for what reason are you attached to the body of others due to a smell separate from that body?* The commentary is basically showing the absurdity of being attached to an object due to an external factor making it smell nice.

The meaning of the next two lines is that due to the natural bad smells of the body, it is proper not to be attached to it. As the commentary explains, it is indeed proper not to be attached to the naturally foul smelling body because being attached to it causes many sufferings.

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

The next verse and a half relates to this heading.

66cd. *Why do those who crave the meaningless
Transitory world, apply nice scents?*

67. *As the scent belongs to sandal
How can it become that of the body?
Why be attached to something
Due to a scent that does not belong to it?*

The commentary that explains the meaning of this verse reads:

Those who crave for the meaninglessly transitory world apply scents such as sandal to their body in order to generate attachment for it. However, if the pleasant scent is a quality of the sandal, then how can it become a quality of the body? As it is not in any way a quality of the body, why be attached to something due to a scent that does not belong to it? It is unsuitable.

The presentation here is quite clear. The main point is to really reflect on and contemplate this meaning. The text is presenting the objects of meditation – the imperfections of the body – as a means to overcome attachment to the body. The explanation asks us to reflect on the act of applying scents to body out of attachment – out of pure vanity, wanting to beautify the body, just to become an object of attachment for others.

When we take the eight Mahayana precepts during the *nyung-nye* practice, for example, one of the precepts entails avoiding applying scents and perfumes. This specifically requires one to refrain, for the specified time, from applying scents and perfumes out of attachment to beautifying the body. This also implies that to apply scents and perfume without strong attachment is fine –

for example, as part of one's daily personal hygiene routine. However, one must avoid doing this out of attachment when one takes precepts.

As stated here, *those who crave for the meaninglessly transitory world apply scents such as sandal to their body in order to generate attachment for it* – thus this implies that when one takes precepts, one must avoid this attitude.

However as explained further, if the pleasant scent is a quality of the sandal, then how can it become a quality of the body? So, if the nice smell coming from the body is, in fact, due to the sandal that was applied on the body, how can it be a quality of the body itself? That is a rhetorical question implying that it is not a quality of the body.

As it is not in any way a quality of the body, why be attached to something due to a scent that does not belong to it? It is unreasonable and thus unsuitable.

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

When the body is left in its natural state, it can indeed appear frightening. So it has to be beautified in order not to appear frightening.

The hypothetical query or argument presented to explain the meaning of the verse is that *the body is an object of desire once hair, nails and so forth are cleaned up and made nice.*

The body is not naturally beautiful – that's why we have to spend so much money on beautifying it. How much money do we spend just on beautifying the hair? Apparently a lot of money also goes into polishing fingernails to make them look nice! Then there are our teeth.

What is being pointed out here is the fact that one has to go to great lengths to beautify the body. If it was left in its natural state it wouldn't appear beautiful, but rather quite frightening.

The verse and a half which relates to this reads:

68. *If the nature of the naked body
With long hair and nails, yellow teeth
And anointed with the scent of foul
smelling mud
Is only frightening,*
- 69ab. *And if it is like a weapon that harms me,
Why do I clean it with effort?*

The commentary explains:

If the hair and nails are long, the teeth are yellow and body has the smell of unpleasant smelling mud, then the naked body is frightening. If it harms me like a weapon that is killing me, then why do I clean it with effort? It is unsuitable.

If the body is left ungroomed, in its natural state – for example, if we were to let our hair grow extremely long and it became matted so that our body was covered just with our matted hair – it wouldn't be a pleasant sight. Furthermore, if our nails were not trimmed, they would grow really long and look frightening. If one didn't clean one's teeth, one's mouth would have a foul smell. It is quite frightening to picture a body with long matted hair, long nails and yellowish teeth. Then there are the unpleasant foul smells that ooze from the body if it's not cleaned. So the unkempt naked body can definitely look

frightening – some might even run away thinking it was a ghost!

What we need to understand is that while we should not beautify the body out of attachment, we must of course clean the body and take care of it, for the sake of hygiene and of our health. Otherwise, the reality is that if the body is left in its natural state, it can be a frightening object.

The presentation here clearly shows that to make the body presentable and to further beautify it, one has to rely on external sources (to clean it, apply scents, and so forth). When one doesn't apply these external measures to beautify the body and it is left in its natural state, it emits natural foul smells and appears frightening. These are referred to as the body's natural imperfections.

When we cover up these natural imperfections, they are not apparent, we don't see them. But here the text presents logical reasons, based on the reality of the body, for the existence of its natural imperfections.

The text goes on to say that, *if it harms me like a weapon that is killing me, then why do I clean it with effort?* The analogy used here is that of polishing and cleaning a weapon that will be used to kill us; it would be absurd to take care of such a weapon. Similarly, if one beautifies the very object that causes one attachment, it is as if one is taking care of something that is destroying oneself. Thus *it is unsuitable.*

The reality is that we need to care for our body for hygiene and health reasons. For example, we need to bathe regularly, and of course nourish our body with food. So for our survival we need to engage in these deeds.

So, if we generate the proper motivation while engaging in actions involved with caring for our body, then those actions become meaningful – they can even become a practice. For example, when bathing and cleaning the body, one can think: "I'm cleaning away the stains and dirt to keep my body healthy so as to benefit other sentient beings". Further, when nourishing one's body with food and drink, as mentioned many times previously, it can become a means to create a great amount of merit by offering the food and drinks first. Then when one consumes it, one can be mindful one is consuming it to nourish one's body so that one can be of service to other sentient beings, that one is using one's body to achieve one's ultimate goals of liberation and enlightenment. So then that becomes a highly purposeful and meaningful practice.

As I have mentioned previously many times, we need to ensure that our everyday activities – such as eating, drinking, sleeping and walking – become a means to engage in virtue and accumulate merit. If we engage in these daily activities with mindfulness and a positive motivation, even seemingly normal activities become a means for one to accumulate virtue.

I personally see this as being much more practical than sitting down rigidly with closed eyes for a set time, and assuming that one is engaging in meditation. It is good to know that sitting down with closed eyes is not the only way to practise; with the proper motivation, one can transform normal activities into a means of accumulating virtue and collecting merit.

In fact, for an ordinary person practising at an ordinary level, I doubt whether sitting down with closed eyes and sitting rigidly would be a means to accumulate much virtue if the mind is distracted. I can say from my own experience that at a beginner's level it is extremely hard to have a concentrated and focused mind. Even if our body is sitting rigidly and our eyes are closed in a seemingly meditative posture, at best the mind may remain focused for a few moments, but then it can become completely distracted with thoughts of worldly concerns. So one is not engaging in the practice of accumulating virtue at that time. I'm not referring here to the great, advanced meditators who have reached a level where their concentration is sound and firm. They can actually keep their mind single-pointedly on a virtuous object for a prolonged period. Rather, at a beginners' level, I know from experience it is extremely difficult to have a really focused mind.

Therefore, a more practical approach would be engaging in practices such as prostrations, making offerings, and other practices involving more physical activity. When one does prostrations to purify one's negativities it becomes a highly meaningful and purposeful practice. With the proper motivation, the very physical activity of prostration in fact purifies a lot of negativity. This will then help the mind to become clearer and sharper. Such activities are a more practical means of engaging in practice, as I've shared in the past.

Also, out of worldly concern, one might sit rigidly in a meditative posture for an hour or two in the presence of others. That is possible. However, one needs to be careful that if one resorts to this as a way to impress others, in fact it only becomes a worldly dharma, not a real Dharma practice. One needs to be mindful of this.

2.2.1.2.2.3.3. *Contemplating it as an object of disillusionment*

The next two lines and the verse relate to this:

*69cd. Through efforts deluded with regard to self,
The crazed completely disrupt this place.*

*70. If one becomes disgusted with the cemetery
Because of seeing only skeletons,
Can one delight in the cemetery of the city
Filled with moving skeletons?*

The commentary explains:

In this way, through efforts deluded with regards to the self, people are crazed because they are mistaken with regards to the continuum due to afflictions. They completely disrupt this place and are everywhere.

If one becomes disgusted with the body in the cemetery due to seeing only skeletons, then how can one be delighted in the town that is a cemetery filled with skeletons moving around through motivational impulses? It is unsuitable to be delighted.

In other words, when people are deluded by ignorance, they perceive an inherently existent self when in fact there is no such self. Likewise, due to the deluded mind, even if an object doesn't have any attributes to make it appealing, people will see it as appealing and thus develop attachment to it. This is all the consequence of having a deluded mind.

Thus, as mentioned here, people are indeed 'crazed' with the delusions, particularly attachment. We can clearly see in the world that it's as if people are crazed with attachment, doing unthinkable things and going to great lengths to pursue their attachments.

They are *crazed because they are mistaken with regards to the continuum due to afflictions*. So, *they completely disrupt this place and are everywhere*. With a crazed mind – that is, one affected by the delusions – it is as if everything around it is polluted by that deluded mind.

Next the text says: *if one becomes disgusted with the body in the cemetery due to seeing only skeletons, then how can one be delighted in the town that is a cemetery filled with skeletons moving around through motivational impulses?* As explained here, if we saw a skeleton in a cemetery, it would be an object of fright and we would be repulsed by it, especially if some bits of flesh were still stuck to it.

Yet other human beings and the beings we are attached to are like live skeletons moving about due to some motivational impulse. Sometimes on TV we see shows with skeletons moving around, just like this. When we think about the structure of our body, it really is as if we are skeletons moving about. The only difference is that we are moved about by some motivational impulse from within the mind, whereas a dead body cannot move because it does not have these motivational impulses.

By using the analogy presented here – of not taking delight in seeing skeletons in a cemetery – one needs to reflect upon the unsuitability of having strong attachment to other living human beings. That is the main point being presented.

2.2.1.2.3. *Contemplating that it will give rise to much that is unwished for*

That is subdivided into two:

- 2.2.1.2.3.1. Showing
- 2.2.1.2.3.2. Explanation

2.2.1.2.3.1. *Showing*

The next verse relates to the *showing* or presenting, which is:

*71. Thus, this impure object
Is not obtained without a price,
As one works for it one is exhausted
And receives the harms of the hells, among
others.*

The commentary which explains the meaning of this verse reads:

Thus, the impure body of a woman is not obtained without paying a price of wealth and so forth. As one builds up one's wealth for one's own body, among other things, in this life one will be exhausted due to hardship, and in the next life, one will receive the harms of the hells, among others.

As explained here explicitly with the example from a male's perspective, the *impure body of a woman is not obtained without paying a price*. If you're a male that is the reality – a woman's body is not something you get freely, it is something that you have to pay a price for. At the very minimum, you can't take a bride without presenting a ring!

Whether it may be from the man's or woman's perspective, the object of attachment does not come without a price. The commentary implies that there are many other prices one has to pay, apart from wealth, to obtain the object of one's attachment. In relation to the accumulation of wealth, *as one builds up one's wealth for one's own body, among other things, in this life one will be exhausted due to hardship* – this is where many seem to succumb to the strong pull of attachment to wealth.

Many people have the grand idea that if they were to acquire wealth, they would use it for a good purpose. While they may initially have such good intentions, as ordinary beings, these intentions soon get forgotten. In fact, when one actually does acquire some wealth, one may blindly pursue even more wealth. Far from using that accumulated wealth in a meaningful way for the purpose of others, one may not even use it for one's own kin, such as one's own children or relatives. Instead such a person may only use that wealth as a way to accumulate more, or to gain a more beautiful partner and so forth. We can see many examples of this – people using their wealth only to fulfil their desires, rather than using it in a meaningful way.

For those with a real, sustained Dharma motivation, when wealth is acquired it can be definitely used for a good purpose, to help and benefit others beginning with close relatives and so forth. But often it is hard for ordinary beings to maintain their initial good intentions and act upon them. The main point here is that if wealth is not utilised properly, it can be a source of one's downfall. While the text clearly explains this, it's good to also reflect on these points.

As explained here, when one exerts one's energy for the mere sake of gaining more wealth to satiate one's desires, one becomes *exhausted due to the hardship*. Apart from the loss of experiencing great hardship in this life, this exertion will not benefit, but will in fact harm one's next life.

2.2.1.2.3.2. Explanation

The explanation is subdivided into two subdivisions:

2.2.1.2.3.2.1. One does not attain one's wishes

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

2.2.1.2.3.2.1. *One does not attain one's wishes*

This is subdivided into four:

2.2.1.2.3.2.1.1. There is no time to rely on desire objects

2.2.1.2.3.2.1.2. One cannot rely on desire objects due to exhaustion

2.2.1.2.3.2.1.3. Difficulty meeting the desired object as it is far

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

2.2.1.2.3.2.1.1. *There is no time to rely on desire objects*

The verse relating to this is:

72. A child cannot increase wealth

And what happiness will it give in the prime of life?

After having spent one's life accumulating wealth,

What is one to do with desire in old age?

The commentary explains:

When one is a young child one cannot achieve wealth for the purpose of finding a woman and when one is in the prime of life one does not find a woman, so what happiness will wealth give then? Once in the prime of life, if one passes one's life with accumulating wealth, what is one then to do with one's desire in the end of one's life, when one is old, as one is not able to rely on desire objects then?

The first part of the explanation is obvious. *When one is a young child one cannot achieve wealth for the purpose of finding a woman*. That is true because a child may be hardly capable of accumulating wealth for their own purpose, such as to feed themselves.

Then *in the prime of life*, such as when one is in one's youth, *one does not find a woman, easily*. Having reached the prime of life in one's youth and middle age, one may exert oneself in accumulating expansive wealth. But then *if one passes one's life with accumulating wealth, what is one then to do with one's desire in the end of one's life* – at the end of one's life, even if one has desirable objects, due to old age *one is not able to rely on or utilise those dire objects*. So, at the end of one's life, again wealth does not serve its purpose of bringing one real happiness.

As mentioned earlier, the presentation and the meaning of the verses are not that obscure or difficult to understand. The main thing is to try and derive real meaning from it, then apply that understanding in one's practice.

This year I intend to go back to the normal schedule we've had in the past of doing exams and discussions in six-week blocks (of four-week teaching periods.) This is because when we reach the ninth chapter, in particular, it will be good to leave time for discussion to help students gain a better understanding of the chapter's material.

With this chapter that we are studying now, the eighth chapter, we can have the discussion after six teaching sessions, excluding the first one, because we didn't really have a teaching on the first session. So today would be the second teaching session in this block. Then after six teachings on the text, we'll have a discussion and exam. Then there might be two more sessions where we can complete the eighth chapter.

These verses and explanations, as I mentioned, are quite clear and don't rely too much on further discussion. However, while I might be going through these verses quite quickly, when we reach the point of discussing the exchanging-self-with-other technique of generating bodhicitta, then I will make a point to emphasise and explain that in further detail.

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

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Edited Version

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23 February 2016 week 2

Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

1 March 2016

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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Edited Version

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Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

8 March 2016

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

*Transcript prepared by Mark Emerson
Edit 1 by Mary-Lou Considine
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Edited Version*

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Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

15 March 2016

Based on the motivation that we generated during the *Refuge and Bodhicitta Prayer*, we will now engage in our meditation practice.

[meditation]

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

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

The very text that we are studying introduces bodhicitta – the mind of enlightenment – showing us how to develop and further nurture it. It is important to periodically remind ourselves of this aspiration to achieve enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings, and to familiarise ourselves with bodhicitta again and again on a regular basis.

Generating the bodhicitta attitude as a motivation should not be confused with actually generating the mind of enlightenment. However, such a motivation definitely plants a seed that will develop at some time in the future – familiarising our mind with bodhicitta now will definitely leave a very strong imprint.

As His Holiness mentions, while chapter eight explains how to develop concentration and thus calm abiding, it is presented in the context of instructions on how to develop the mind of enlightenment. So the presentation is not just about how to develop calm abiding, but more specifically on developing bodhicitta. For those of us who are already familiar with the bodhicitta attitude, the following verses in the text show the optimum way to develop this mind of bodhicitta.

As I have mentioned previously, the first two chapters in the text are specifically related to the benefits of the mind of enlightenment, while the middle three chapters present techniques to prevent the degeneration of the mind of enlightenment, and chapters seven to nine specifically explain how to further develop the strength of the mind of enlightenment. So we can see the really meticulous organisation of the text. His Holiness the Dalai Lama praises this text as being one of the most supreme presentations of how to generate bodhicitta, develop it and further increase it. It is indeed a supreme text.

2.2.2. Meditating on affinity for isolation

2.2.2.2. EXPLAINING

2.2.2.2.2. The quality of independence

This heading relates to the quality of the satisfaction that one gains from being in solitude. The verse relating to this heading reads:

88. *Acting independently and without attachment,
Having no relation to anybody,*

*Enjoying the happiness of contentment,
This is difficult to find even for the powerful.*

Gyaltsab Je gives this explanation of the meaning of the text:

The happiness of independently enjoying place, possessions and so forth as one wishes without attachment to them, of abiding in a place with no relation to anybody, with the happiness of being content with meagre food and clothing, is a happiness that is even difficult to find for gods and influential humans. Hence, those skilled should make an effort to rely on solitude.

What is clearly presented here is the need to develop contentment, and in explaining the benefits of contentment, it is also showing the faults of not practising contentment. All the positive qualities that are presented here are the consequence of practising contentment, which is one of the main prerequisites for developing calm abiding. *The happiness enjoying place, possessions and so forth* means that when one is in solitude one is able to enjoy the place and its conditions. *Independently* refers to not having to rely on or be dependent on others, i.e. one is able to enjoy that place of abode because one does not have to depend or rely upon others.

It is possible to enjoy the place and possessions and so forth because one is not attached to them. When one overcomes attachment to one's own body, the place one dwells in and one's possessions then one is able to fully utilise and enjoy them. In contrast, when we are still attached to our body, possessions and place, then although we may claim otherwise, we are, in fact, not able to really enjoy our possessions and so forth because of that strong attachment. It is attachment that prevents us from fully enjoying the attributes of our body, possessions and place. In addition to enjoying the place and so forth, there is also *the happiness of being content with meagre food and clothing*.

Having *no relation to anybody* refers to not being constricted by others. Having no need to please relatives or friends or people of high or low status, one can completely focus on one's practice. Indeed, it is our strong attachment to relationships that keeps us circling in samsara as we try to please those to whom we are attached, and overpower those who try to oppose us. It is these kinds of relationships that keep us circling in samsara over and over again.

The joy that is being explained here is the joy of contentment. When one practises having few desires and contentment then it brings great satisfaction. We really need to pay attention to the great advice that is being presented here.

It may sound presumptuous, but from my own experience I can say that I have found real satisfaction with my attempts at having less desire and practising contentment. In my early twenties I spent some significant time practising having less desire and contentment. I arrived in India with no possessions and no money – just the clothes I wore. Yet over the next couple of years, despite real hardship, I was not unhappy because I practised contentment with my situation. My mind was happy, and as a result of practising in this way, I had no worries. I am not sure if I was swayed by the

worldly dharmas, but I do recall feeling a great sense of satisfaction with this practice.

Although having less desire and practising contentment is a paramount practice for Dharma practitioners, anyone who practises contentment will definitely reap the benefit, and experience an inner sense of joy and satisfaction. Nagarjuna said that being contented is a true mark of wealth. As Gyaltsab Je explains in his commentary, finding the happiness of contentment is *difficult even for the gods and powerful, influential humans*. Nothing in samsara – wealth, pleasurable objects, sensual pleasures – will make them happy when they lack contentment in their heart.

In simple terms, practising contentment means being happy with what one has, and thinking, ‘I am happy and contented with what I have, and I am happy and contented with the friends that I have, even they are few in number’, regardless of whether we are in solitude or not. We can apply this practice to our everyday life, wherever we may be.

As the text indicates, when all the conditions come together for one to be able to go into solitude, then it should be utilised to further develop the mind of enlightenment. Indeed, there is no greater joy and satisfaction than in doing that.

Then the commentary concludes with this exhortation: *Hence, those skilled should make an effort to rely on solitude.*

One cannot underestimate the great value of contentment as that is what brings a true sense of satisfaction. When one is contented, any wealth one has will bring a sense of joy and happiness. Without contentment however, no matter how much wealth one has, there will be no satisfaction and no real happiness. Those who practice true contentment seem to be really happy wherever they may be. His Holiness the Dalai Lama has noticed that the focus of a certain order of Christian monks and nuns is contentment. They don’t have any possessions or savings; they forsake everything and concentrate on a single-pointed focus on God. Even though they don’t have anything, they seem to be really happy because they are contented. We can see from this example how the practice of contentment definitely brings a sense of joy to those who practise it.

When one is contented, one’s living conditions and so forth will work out quite well. Whereas if one lacks contentment then that leads to dissatisfaction with one’s surroundings and living conditions, and then conflicts and so forth arise. We really need to pay particular attention to this point.

However, the emphasis on practising contentment should not be misinterpreted as meaning that one has to get rid of all one’s wealth and possessions. That is not the point. Rather, one needs to reduce attachment to wealth and possessions. If one does not explain this to others properly, and they misunderstand what you say, then they may get the impression of, “Oh, if you are a Buddhist then you have to completely divest yourself of all your wealth and possessions”. Being contented is not suggesting that we have to live in very poor conditions. Far from that, it is actually saying that we should be contented and happy regardless of the situations we

encounter, and that reducing attachment to one’s possessions and wealth brings satisfaction and contentment.

3. THE WAY OF MEDITATING ON CALM ABIDING¹

This is the third major section of the chapter, and it has two subdivisions:

- 3.1 The way of meditating on equalising self and others
- 3.2. The way of exchanging self and others

Here we can note that the method for developing calm abiding is presented within the context of meditating on equalising and then exchanging self with others. There is no separate explanation of the way to develop calm abiding.

What is calm abiding?

We also need to take note that calm abiding (*shi-ne* in Tibetan) and mental stabilisation (*sam-ten*) refer to the same thing. As I have explained many times, the definition of *calm abiding is the meditative equipoise that is able to single-pointedly focus on its object for as long as it wishes, which is combined with the bliss of physical and mental pliancy*. Calm abiding is a meditative state of mind that is able to focus single-pointedly on an object for as long as one wishes, and this is associated with the bliss that arises due to physical and mental pliancy. The methods for developing calm abiding will be presented in more detail later on, but it is good to have some understanding of the topic at this point.

The reason why the explanation of calm abiding is embedded in the subject of the text, rather than being explicitly introduced and explained, is perhaps because the teaching was presented to listeners of sharp intellect. Because of that intellect we’re able to derive an understanding of this topic from other sources of the Buddha’s teachings.

Coming back to the method for developing calm abiding, having chosen an appropriate object one needs to focus on that chosen object without wavering. Focussing single-pointedly means focussing on that object without distraction, free from the obstacles of laxity and excitement.

One continuously engages in this single-pointed focus, free from the faults of laxity and excitement, again and again, and thus familiarises one’s mind with the object. Then, having engaged in that mental training, the mind becomes free from defects like wandering off, or resistance to focussing on the object. Thus the mind becomes serviceable, and it is at this point that one obtains mental pliancy.

Because one is able to focus on the object without mental effort, it helps the wind energy to flow freely through one’s body. Any physical resistance to sitting for too long, to the distractions caused by aches and pains and so forth subsides, and so the physical body also becomes serviceable. At that point one obtains physical pliancy.

¹ This section of the text was introduced on 29 September 2015. The other two major sections under the heading Explaining the Text of the Chapter, are Advice to Meditate on Mental Stabilisation, and Abandoning the Opposing Factors to Calm Abiding

Due to that physical pliancy there is no resistance whatsoever at a physical level, and one is able to sit for as long as one wishes. That induces a blissful feeling throughout the body, which is called physical bliss. Experiencing that physical bliss then induces a mental bliss.

When a meditator experiences this combination of physical and mental bliss, and further familiarises themselves with the object of focus, then they are able to focus unwaveringly on that object, free from all faults, and for as long as they wish. At that point the meditator has obtained calm abiding. This, in short, is what reaching calm abiding entails, and it is a significant result of the practice of meditation.

Although further explanations are presented later on, it is good to have this summary of what calm abiding means. This understanding will resolve any doubts about the benefits of engaging in the practice of meditation, or its end result that you or others might have – it is that physical and mental bliss of remaining in single-pointed focus on an object.

The three higher trainings

Following the attainment of calm abiding, one then obtains special insight, which is the real force that overcomes our delusions. In order to obtain special insight one has to have first obtained calm abiding. In other words, special insight cannot be developed without having previously developed calm abiding.

The first condition for being able to develop calm abiding is practising **morality**, which serves as the basis for the other two higher trainings of concentration and wisdom. So morality is really the fundamental basis. As you know, one of the qualities of a Mahayana teacher is that they are endowed with morality; this indeed is one of the most important qualities of a Mahayana teacher. The definition of morality and so forth is explained in detail in *Liberation in the Palm of your Hand*, so you can refer to that for more information.

Morality serves as the root of all virtues. Just like a seed is the basis from which all plants grow, morality is the basis for the development of all virtue. Practising morality acts as a restraint to engaging in the gross levels of external distractions.

Inner distractions can be divided into gross and subtle distractions. The gross level of inner distraction is basically laxity and excitement. As a means to overcome these gross inner distractions of laxity and excitement one applies the training of **meditation**.

Subtle inner distraction refers to grasping at true existence or grasping at a self. To overcome this grasping one needs to apply the **wisdom** realising emptiness. The wisdom realising selflessness, or the realisation of emptiness is the means to overcome the most subtle levels of inner distraction, and thus eliminate all distractions.

It is good to have this overview of how gaining an understanding of the three baskets of the teachings of the Buddha can be subsumed into the three higher trainings of morality, meditation and wisdom, and how that serves as a means to overcome gross and subtle distractions and

obscurations. Having this overall view can be very helpful for understanding the structure of the Buddha's teachings.

Having given you an overview of what calm abiding entails, its benefits and so forth, we now return to the text.

3.1.1. Brief explanation

This section is explained in two verses.

89. *Having contemplated the qualities of solitude
In these and other aspects,
One should pacify disturbing thoughts
And meditate on the mind of enlightenment.*

The commentary on this verse explains:

Having contemplated in the aspects outlined before, and in other aspects, the qualities of remote places isolated from outer excitement and other distractions, one should then pacify the disturbing thoughts that are aspiring to sense and other objects, and meditate on the mind of enlightenment.

When the commentary states *Having contemplated in the aspects outlined before, and in other aspects, the qualities of remote places isolated from outer excitement and other distractions*, it is referring to places that are isolated from external distractions such as friends and relatives, and the hustle and bustle of daily life. So the abode needs to be an isolated place like a forest or a cave where you are free from external distractions.

The next type of isolation is isolation from inner distractions, which are *the disturbing thoughts*. As mentioned previously, it is not sufficient to exist in an isolated place free from external distractions if the mind is still distracted. No conducive external conditions can help if one is constantly affected by disturbing thoughts. Therefore, you need to be isolated from inner distractions, i.e. disturbing thoughts.

... *and other aspects* refers to being isolated from self-interest. The very purpose of going into isolation is to develop the mind of enlightenment. If you are affected by self-interest and a self-cherishing mind, there is no way that you can develop the mind of enlightenment, which is primarily the wish to benefit other sentient beings.

So one should *pacify the disturbing thoughts that are aspiring to sense and other objects*, and then use the external conditions to meditate on the mind of enlightenment. That is the real purpose of conducive conditions.

The second verse under this heading reads:

90. *At first, strive in meditating
On equalising self and others.
Since they are the same in happiness and
suffering
Look after others like yourself.*

The commentary is presented in the form of hypothetical questions and answers.

Query: With which method should one meditate?

Answer: At first, strive in meditating on equalising self and others.

Query: How?

Answer: Since others have the same acceptance and rejection of happiness and suffering as oneself, and try to establish their happiness and clear their suffering in the same way as one tries to establish

one's happiness and stop one's suffering, one should look after all sentient beings, cherishing them like oneself.

In response to the hypothetical query, *With what method should one meditate?* the commentary states, *At first strive in meditating on equalising self and others.* This is an essential point, because without first equalising oneself with others there is no possibility of being able to engage in the actual practice of exchanging self with others. So the practice of exchanging self with others has to be preceded by equalising oneself with others.

The hypothetical question following on from this is *How?*, and then the commentary goes on to explain that one needs to see all beings as being equal in wanting happiness, and not wanting any suffering.

All beings equally have this fundamental aspiration or wish to be happy and not to suffer. We might wonder how all beings can be equal, but when we think about it we see that regardless of whether they are rich or poor, whether they have high status or power like a king or minister, or if they are a simple person, all living beings, including animals such as cats or dogs are alike in wanting happiness, and not wanting to experience suffering. So as explained in the commentary, one needs to first strive in meditating on equalising self and others.

When the commentary explains that *others have the same acceptance and rejection of happiness and suffering as oneself* it is saying that as we too have this wish for happiness and want to avoid suffering, we are all alike. This is how we are equal. Since that is the case, we need to *try to establish their happiness and clear their suffering in the same way as one tries to establish one's happiness and stop one's suffering.* Without first generating the mind of equalising oneself with others, there is no possibility of developing love and compassion.

Thus, the commentary concludes, *one should look after all sentient beings, cherishing them like oneself.*

[Symbolically, there was a pause here as a lost frog that had made its way into the gompa was collected to be returned to an appropriate habitat. We recited the OM MANI PADME HUM mantra, followed by the Four Immeasurables.]

3.1.2. Extensive explanation

This has four subdivisions:

3.1.2.1. Explaining the meaning of equalising self and others

3.1.2.2. The way of meditating on equalising self and others

3.1.2.3. The benefits of meditating on it

3.1.2.4. If one meditates on equalising self and others, one can develop it

3.1.2.1. EXPLAINING THE MEANING OF EQUALISING SELF AND OTHERS

This hypothetical question precedes the verse.

Argument: As there are infinite different sentient beings, and it is not suitable to generate the mind thinking 'I' with regards to them, how can the acceptance of their happiness and the rejection of their suffering possibly be one's own?

The verses that we have covered are essential for our practice. Therefore, it is good to really familiarise ourselves with them, reading and rereading them and thinking about their meaning. Just reading them once or twice doesn't help to move the mind, and without that there will be no transformation. But by reading them again and again and thinking about their meaning we can derive real benefit from them – it can bring great solace.

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

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Edited Version

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Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

22 March 2016

While maintaining the motivation generated during the refuge and bodhicitta prayer, we will now engage in our regular meditation practice. [meditation]

We can generate the bodhicitta motivation for receiving the teachings along these lines:

For the sake of all mother sentient beings I need to achieve enlightenment. So 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 very strong positive imprints in one's mind.

This part of the text explains very profound ways of engaging in the actual practice of exchanging self with others, which becomes very meaningful when we put it into practise.

The earlier verses explained how one needs to overcome strong attachment to desire objects To overcome strong desire for sensual objects, one needs to rely on solitude. This pacifies one's physical and mental defects, making them serviceable for applying single-pointed meditation on developing bodhicitta.

3.1.2.1. EXPLAINING THE MEANING OF EQUALISING SELF AND OTHERS

Firstly, the commentary presents this hypothetical argument:

Argument: As there are infinite different sentient beings, it is not suitable to generate the mind thinking 'I' with regards to them. How can the acceptance of their happiness and the rejection of their suffering possibly be one's own?

What is being presented here, in the form of an argument or doubt, is that *there are infinite different sentient beings*, if one cannot possibly regard all sentient beings as oneself, then how could it be possible for one to accept their happiness and reject their sufferings?

The verse reads:

91. *Although there are many parts such as hands
and so forth,
They belong to the same body that is the object
of protection;
Likewise, the happy and suffering migrators
All equal oneself in desiring happiness.*

The commentary explains the meaning of the verse, which serves as an answer to the earlier hypothetical argument:

Answer: Although the body has many parts such as the feet and hands, they are all the same in being parts of the one body that is regarded as 'mine' by the person. Likewise, although there are many different migrators, such as gods and humans, their happiness and sufferings are not different. Focusing on how they are the same, one beholds all others as oneself, holds them as self, and thinks, "I shall establish that happiness and I shall clear away this suffering." This is the meaning of meditating that all of them are equal to oneself.

The first part of the commentary presents the analogy, *although the body has many parts such as the feet and hands, they are all the same in being parts of the one body that is regarded as 'mine'*, which means that although there are many distinct parts to our body such as the arms, the legs, the head etc. the reason we cherish and protect all parts is because of clinging to them as 'mine'.

This is an analogy to illustrate that although there are an infinite number of distinct sentient beings, *such as gods and humans etc.*, they are all the same in wanting to experience happiness, and not wanting to experience any misery or suffering. As there is no difference between one's own likes and dislikes and their likes and dislikes, if one begins to cherish all beings it is possible to regard their suffering as one's own suffering, and their happiness as one's own happiness. One then takes the initiative to establish their happiness and eliminate the suffering of all sentient beings.

As will be presented further on, the key point is to develop the mind that cherishes other sentient beings. When one develops this mind then it is possible to establish their happiness and remove their suffering, just as one would for oneself.

3.1.2.2. THE WAY OF MEDITATING ON EQUALISING SELF AND OTHERS

This is subdivided into two:

3.1.2.2.1. Refuting that the acceptance and rejection of happiness and suffering is unsuitable to be the same

3.1.2.2.2. Explaining the reason why it is suitable to meditate on it as equal

3.1.2.2.1. Refuting that the acceptance and rejection of happiness and suffering is unsuitable to be the same

What is being established here is that it is suitable to regard the acceptance of happiness and the rejection of suffering in others as being the same as, or equal to, oneself. Without first accepting this, there is no possibility of being able actually engage in the practice of exchanging self with other.

The practice of exchanging self with other depends upon first accepting others' suffering and happiness as being equal to one's own. What is being explained here is that not accepting this is unsuitable.

The next two verses explain this point. The next hypothetical argument presented is:

Argument: Since other's sufferings do not harm one's body, and one's own sufferings do not harm the body of others, it is invalid that the clearing away of their suffering equals the clearing away of one's own suffering.

This hypothetical argument represents a doubt that arises in most of us, where we think, 'How can I be equal to others?'

The next two verses provide the answer:

92. *If, 'One's sufferings
Do not harm the body of others.'
Yet, they are one's sufferings,
Holding them as mine, they are unbearable.*
93. *Similarly, others' sufferings
Do not fall upon oneself.
Yet, they are one's sufferings,
Holding them as mine, they are difficult to bear.*

The commentary further explains:

Answer: There is no fault. Even though one's suffering does not harm the body of others, and the suffering of others does not harm oneself, their suffering is one's own suffering. By grasping at oneself as 'self' one

finds one's own suffering unbearable. Similarly, by meditating on holding other sentient beings as self, even though their sufferings do not fall upon oneself to experience, their sufferings become sufferings to be cleared by oneself, because by holding sentient beings as one's own self, if they experience sufferings, they become difficult to bear for oneself.

In relation to the earlier argument, what is being presented here as an answer is, *even though one's suffering does not harm the body of others, and the suffering of others does not harm oneself, their suffering is one's own suffering*, because one is affected by it. Of course others' physical suffering is obviously not one's own suffering. In other words, when someone else is suffering from a physical ailment, it is not as if we experience the actual pain of that ailment in our own body. While it is true that the suffering of someone else's body does not harm one's own body, nevertheless their suffering is akin to one's own suffering, because one is affected by it. Thus, one needs to overcome their suffering, which is the main point.

By grasping at oneself as 'self' one finds one's own suffering unbearable. This confirms that in relation to oneself, the suffering one experiences is due to a strong grasping at the self, and so one's suffering becomes unbearable.

Similarly, by meditating on holding other sentient beings as self, even though their sufferings do not fall upon oneself to experience, their sufferings become sufferings to be cleared by oneself. This acknowledges that while others' sufferings are not experienced by oneself, when others are experiencing suffering, if one holds them as self, then their suffering becomes one's own suffering.

In reality we do experience this. For example, when close and dear ones are experiencing pain and suffering, even though we do not actually experience their pain, it is unbearable to see them suffering, because of our strong bond with them. In contrast, if a stranger, or someone we feel indifferent towards, experiences pain and suffering, it doesn't affect us very strongly. That is something we can see through our own experience.

What is also apparent is that while we feel close to someone their suffering can be unbearable for us, however when they start to become distant their suffering becomes less unbearable to us. Once it was unbearable, but then it becomes less unbearable. We might even feel glad that they are suffering now.

The main point here is that just as one's own suffering is due to strong clinging to one's own self, clinging to others also produces suffering for oneself when they experience suffering. *Their sufferings become suffering to be cleared by oneself.* If this is the case, one cannot reject their suffering by saying, 'It's not my suffering. I don't experience this suffering so it doesn't concern me.' Rather one needs to resolve, 'Because this suffering affects me, it is a suffering that I need to overcome'. When one holds sentient beings as dear as oneself, then it becomes difficult for one to bear their suffering; this is the point. The logical reasons meticulously explained here, show that it is reasonable to clear away the sufferings of other sentient beings.

We have personal experience of this reasoning. When we are not able to bear the sufferings of others then we are more inclined to remove that suffering, and if their suffering is not unbearable, then we will not be inclined to do anything to clear away their suffering. We notice more readily that when those very close us are suffering, we take the needed action because it's unbearable for us to see them suffer. That's why

we take the initiative to do something to remove their suffering. So even though their suffering is not one's own suffering, their suffering does become a concern because it is unbearable for us to see.

When we apply this on a practical level, first we need to feel that their suffering is unbearable, then that becomes the initiative for one to actually act to clear away the suffering of other sentient beings.

We need to relate this first to a close friend or relative, then we can understand this on a larger scale, in relation to all sentient beings. We will be able to see that this is very true and reasonable. These sentiments are very meaningful and a practical way to put good attitudes into practice.

While we many not yet be anywhere near developing actual bodhicitta, if we can practice by really seeing how, just like oneself, other sentient beings do not wish to experience any suffering, and wish to only experience happiness, then we will be able to recognise others as being exactly the same as ourselves.

We need to contemplate how 'It is reasonable for me to have concern for other sentient beings and take initiative to do something to help them be free from suffering and endowed with happiness'.

On a more practical level, one would take into consideration the genuine concerns of those that we live with, and those who we deal with every day, if one had a strong feeling for their wellbeing. The point is thT when you see the other suffering and you cannot bear it, you will take initiative to help clear away their suffering. Similarly, when the other is deprived of happiness, doing something to establish them in happiness is an initiative one would take. This is indeed a very practical and meaningful strategy to foster better relationships with others.

To make one's mind familiar with these positive attitudes one needs to take initiative to actually contemplate and meditate on this points. I can definitively share with you that in my regular practice, after reciting the Prayer of the Four Immeasurables, I pause for a while to contemplate on the sentiment I need to devote myself to, in order to bring about happiness for other beings and remove their suffering.

Just thinking on that, making that resolve in my mind and spending a few moments meditating on this is, I feel, akin to generating superior intention. And on the basis of developing superior intention, one can easily develop the aspirational mind of enlightenment.

While I cannot claim of doing great practices, these are the points I really pay attention to and try to spend some time on. As I mention regularly, just making this strong resolve in the morning 'today I will not intentionally harm any living being, I will only engage in benefiting other sentient beings', and spending a few moments on it in the morning, is very meaningful, and in itself quite a powerful practice. To start the day with this intention is indeed very meaningful.

3.1.2.2.2. Explaining the reason why it is suitable to meditate on it as equal

That is again subdivided into three:

3.1.2.2.2.1. Extensive explanation

3.1.2.2.2.2. Short summary

3.1.2.2.2.2. Refuting objections

3.1.2.2.2.1. Extensive explanation

This is then subdivided again into three:

3.1.2.2.2.1.1. Stating the reason

3.1.2.2.2.1.2. Establishing the pervasion

3.1.2.2.2.1.3. Clearing away obstructing thoughts of 'It is unsuitable to meditate on equalising self and others'

3.1.2.2.2.1.1. Stating the reason

The verse reads:

94. *I shall clear the sufferings of others
Because they are suffering, like my own
suffering.
I shall benefit others
Because they are sentient beings, like my body.*

The commentary explains:

Take the subject 'the sufferings of other sentient beings': they are suitable to be eliminated by oneself—because they are suffering, e.g. like one's own suffering.

It is appropriate for one to establish the benefit and happiness of others—because the other person is a sentient being, e.g. like establishing the happiness of one's body.

The commentary explains the meaning of the verse in the form of a syllogism.

- ∞ Take the subject 'the sufferings of other sentient beings' is the subject;
- ∞ they are suitable to eliminate by oneself is the predicate;
- ∞ because they are suffering is the reason;
- ∞ The example is, like one's own suffering.

In the example, one understands that it is suitable to remove one's own suffering for no other reason than it is suffering and unbearable.

It is the same when one establishes that upon others, i.e. it is suitable to eliminate the suffering of others because, like one's own suffering, their suffering is also unbearable. That's the first part of the syllogism.

The next part is the predicate, *it is appropriate for one to establish the benefit and happiness of others*, for the reason *because the others are sentient beings*. Again using oneself as an example, just by virtue of the fact that one is a sentient being, one naturally wishes to establish benefit and happiness for oneself. Likewise because others are also sentient beings, with the same wishes as oneself, it is appropriate to establish benefit and happiness for them as well.

The example is that just as one wants to establish the happiness of one's own body, it is the same for others; they wish to experience happiness, and that is the reason to establish it.

These points are meticulously presented as topics to contemplate and meditate upon. When one can read these verses, quote this reasoning, and then really reflect upon them, they are not difficult to hold as an object to meditate on, they are quite easy to relate to. Just contemplating it can bring great release to a stressful state of mind and make it more relaxed.

3.1.2.2.2.1.2. Establishing the pervasion

That is subdivided into two:

3.1.2.2.2.1.2.1. The actual pervasion

3.1.2.2.2.1.2.2. Clearing away obstructions

3.1.2.2.2.1.2.1. The actual pervasion

This statement is presented first in the commentary:

It follows that it is appropriate to equally reject and accept upon having focused on the happiness and suffering of self and others—

The verse then reads:

95. *When both self and others
Are the same in desiring happiness,
What difference is there to me,
Why do I strive only for my own happiness?*

The commentary then explains:

That is because when both self and others are the same in desiring happiness—then what difference is there between others and myself? There is no difference whatsoever. For what reason do I strive only for my own happiness? It is unsuitable not to strive for the happiness of others.

As presented here, *when both self and others are the same in desiring happiness – then what difference is there between others and myself?* Being a hypothetical question, it explicitly implies, that *there is no difference whatsoever*.

So therefore, *for what reason do I strive only for my own happiness?* Again this implies that there is no real reason to strive selfishly only for one's own happiness. *It is unsuitable not to strive for the happiness of others*. The main factor that prevents one from not striving for the happiness of other sentient beings, and only working to alleviate one's own suffering, is not yet being able to replace self cherishing with the attitude of cherishing other sentient beings.

When one is able to reverse self-cherishing, then it becomes possible for one to completely embrace the need to strive for the wellbeing other sentient beings.

In practical terms, understand that one must change one's attitude in whatever one does, particularly when engaging in accumulating virtue. Without a clear motivation directed towards others it just becomes a means to focus on one's own benefit.

However if one's attitude is that 'I'm engaging in this virtue not just for myself, but to create a cause to benefit all beings', then due to the power of the motivation, the virtues and positive deeds one engages in actually become a means to benefit other sentient beings.

We need to think in these practical terms rather than thinking that one has to actually engage with others, and become really busy in order to benefit others. Without this practical approach one may not even see that it's possible to actually benefit other sentient beings. If, at our level, one can just focus on the motivation to be of benefit to other sentient beings, and make sincere dedications, then whatever positive deeds one engages in become a cause to actually benefit other sentient beings.

For your daily practice, take heed of Shantideva's advice and remind yourself: I'll generate positive motivation to engage in positive deeds for the benefit of other sentient beings; and at the end I'll make sincere dedications. In this way, when one dedicates whatever virtues one accumulates, to the aspiration to ultimately benefit sentient beings to achieve enlightenment, then that definitely secures all one's own virtues to become a cause towards that end. These are really important points to understand on a personal level for one's personal practice.

The next verse reads:

96. *When both self and others
Are the same in not desiring suffering
What difference is there to me?
Why do I protect myself but not others?*

The commentary then explains:

When both oneself and others are the same in not desiring suffering, what difference is there between others and myself? There is no difference. For what reason do I work for my own happiness, and protect my own happiness from degenerating, but do not protect the happiness of others? It is suitable to work for the happiness of others, as both are equally the same.

The commentary highlights, *when both oneself and others are the same in not desiring suffering, what difference is there between others and myself?* Insofar as not wishing to experience suffering, *there is no difference whatsoever.*

This being the case, then the logical argument is that, *for what reason do I work for my own happiness, and protect my own happiness from degenerating, but do not protect the happiness of others?* Following these reasons, it is unsuitable just to work for one's own happiness. The conclusion presented here is that *it is suitable to work for the happiness of others, as both are equally the same.*

3.1.2.2.2.1.2.2. Clearing away obstructions

The verse reads:

97. *If, 'I do not protect them
Because their suffering does not harm me.'
Since also the future sufferings
Do not harm, why protect from them?*

The commentary explains the meaning of this verse with another hypothetical argument:

Argument: If one were to say, I do not protect sentient beings when they experience suffering because their suffering does not harm me.

Then it presents the answer:

Answer: This is highly unsuitable. Otherwise, it would also be unsuitable to accumulate wealth when young out of fear of suffering in old age, or to engage in the morning or in the day in a method to avoid suffering in the afternoon or tomorrow, since the later future suffering does not harm the earlier person. Even if one fears there could be suffering, it would be inappropriate to protect oneself.

The commentary answers the hypothetical argument *I do not protect sentient beings when they experience suffering because their suffering does not harm me.* We often hold on to the very narrow and self-centred view 'If the suffering doesn't concern me, I don't have to do anything about it. Why should I care about other beings' sufferings?'

The commentary explains that this is a misconception and that the reasoning is flawed. If it were the case then, *it would also be unsuitable to accumulate wealth when young out of fear of suffering in old age.*

The reasoning here is a way to refute the earlier argument that it is a common practice in youth to accumulate wealth to secure your wellbeing in old age. However, with this line of reasoning, one would have to say 'Oh, since the old person being deprived of wealth doesn't affect me in my youth, why would I need to accumulate wealth to make that old person more comfortable? In effect it is saying that the old person is not the same being as the young person, and that

that they are completely different people. Although it is true that the old person's suffering doesn't affect the youth now, is it really unsuitable to accumulate wealth for the old person?

This is the same as the earlier argument: that one does not need to consider others' suffering because it doesn't harm oneself. This example overcomes that doubt.

We need to understand how the very meticulous reasoning presented here is a way to counteract that flawed reasoning, that we don't have to strive to work for other sentient beings to remove their suffering, because their suffering doesn't harm us. If that were so, then someone in their youth would not engage in accumulating wealth to relieve the suffering of their old age. Why? Because, according to the argument presented here, that older person's suffering doesn't affect the young person now.

Using this reasoning, you would not take measures in the morning to relieve the likely sufferings to be experienced in the evening. Why? Because the suffering you might experience later in the evening doesn't harm you now. Likewise you would not relieve sufferings for the next day because those sufferings don't harm you today.

Here we can see the meticulously logic showing that just because something doesn't affect one now, that no reason not to take measures to relieve one's sufferings in the future. Likewise, one should also strive to relieve the sufferings of all sentient beings even though they are separate from us, and don't affect us directly.

The commentary further explains, *since the later future suffering does not harm the earlier person, then even if one fears there could be suffering, it would be inappropriate to protect oneself.* So, the absurdity being pointed out here is, even if one were to fear one would suffer in the future, following that flawed reasoning it would be inappropriate to protect oneself. This points out the absurdity of that earlier hypothetical statement that one need not protect the other beings from suffering because it doesn't affect oneself.

Then this hypothetical argument is presented:

Argument: If one would not wonder in this life whether one could experience suffering in a later life, then one would have to experience sufferings in the later life. It is therefore appropriate to make an effort to prevent that situation.

Again, what is being presented is the absurdity that if one were to follow this flawed reasoning one would think that one does not need to work on relieving the sufferings of future lives because it doesn't affect one now. This follows from the previous hypothetical argument.

The verse reads:

98. *The conceptual thought thinking,
'I will experience this,' is wrong.
The dead person that takes rebirth
As another, is another.*

Basically, the meaning presented in the verse which serves as an answer is:

Answer: The conceptual thought thinking that the self of this life experiences sufferings in the later life is distorted. This would be like a dead person that takes rebirth as another person in a later life. This later person is not suitable to be the same as the earlier person.

This was a refutation of the unsuitability of one to eliminate the sufferings of another with the reasoning

of the similarity of the earlier and later different moments. The meaning of the text is not that it is a refutation based on the ultimate.

The commentary indicates that *the conceptual thought that the self of this life experiences sufferings in the later life is distorted*, because, of course, there is a different person. The individual person of this life and the individual person in the future life are separate and distinct. What is further explained is the absurdity that a dead person that takes rebirth as another person in a later life, is not suitable to be the same as the earlier person.

This is a refutation of *the unsuitability of one to eliminate the sufferings of another with the reasoning of the similarity of the earlier and later different moments. The meaning of the text is not that it is a refutation based on the ultimate.*

The reasoning is that the need to remove the suffering of the future is not because they are the same person. Rather, because of the continuity from moment to moment, one does actually affect the later person. From moment to moment one affects the next moment. So in this way we actually see how they are related.

The verse reads:

**99. When something is suffering
And one protects another,
The suffering of the foot is not that of the hand
Why should it protect it?**

The commentary explains:

Further, when one part of the body needs to eliminate the suffering of another body part and protect that body part, since the suffering of a foot pained by a thorn is not the suffering of the hand, why should the hand eliminate this suffering of the foot? It would follow that it is unsuitable.

What is being presented here is that if the flawed reasoning is that one does not take the initiative to remove the suffering of another just because it is separate, then it is also true that if, *the suffering of a foot pained by a thorn is not the suffering of the hand, why should the hand eliminate this suffering of the foot?* This shows the absurdity of not following logic. While the foot is separate from the hand, if there is pain from a thorn in the foot, then even though the hand is separate from the foot, it can eliminate the suffering of the foot by taking out the thorn.

We can see how the reasoning in relation to the first hypothetical argument has been meticulously presented. If one sees that just because others' suffering is not one's own as a reason not to eliminate their suffering, then all this reasoning is presented to show this is a flawed conception.

The next reads:

**100. If, 'though unsuitable, here
It engages due to grasping at self.'
This unsuitable self and other,
What can they do? They are to be abandoned.**

The commentary explains it as an argument:

Argument: Even though it is inappropriate for one to eliminate unrelated suffering, here it is appropriate for one to eliminate the sufferings of the other because the bodies of earlier and later lives, and earlier and later moments of this body are all held by one person as mine due to familiarisation.

Then provides an answer:

Answer: What can that unsuitably held as independent self and other accomplish? They are

suitable to be abandoned because the grasping at the self of person is mistaken and generates all faults.

This presents a way to back up the earlier hypothetical argument. In thinking it is not necessary to remove the sufferings of sentient beings because it is unrelated to oneself, the reason presented is that it is not the same here, because here the suffering to be removed is related to oneself from this life to the next life, and from earlier moments to the next moments, because this body *is held by one person as mine due to familiarisation.*

As a way to refute that counter argument, the commentary explains, *what can that unsuitably held as independent self and other accomplish?* This means that what you hold as being related from this life to the next life, and from earlier moments to the second moments, as an independently existent self. The 'experiencer' is seen as being one independently existent self that is experiencing the sufferings from this life to the next life, and from earlier moments to later moments.

If we hold onto the individual self, i.e. the person as an independently existent self, then what can that independent self accomplish for others? This means that you cannot actually accomplish anything by grasping at an independently existent self.

What is explained in conclusion is, *they are suitable to be abandoned because the grasping at the self of person is mistaken and generates all faults.* This very notion of an independent self that experiences suffering from earlier moments to the next moments, from one life to the next life, is in fact the misconception of grasping at an independent self which is the root, and fundamental cause, of all faults. It, *generates all faults* and thus is what has to be completely abandoned. Holding onto such misconceptions is completely wrong.

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

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Exam Answers

Block 1

1. Explain how love and compassion is really the basis for our own well-being and happiness.

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

3. The reality is that if the body is left in its natural state, it can be a frightening object. Explain.

4. So, if we generate the proper motivation while engaging in actions involved with caring for our body, then those actions become meaningful — they can even become a practice. Elaborate on these points.

5. 'So this life is ruined as well as the next one as well, and we don't even achieve what we desire!' Explain this statement.

6. Shantideva uses the example of an ox which, *while pulling the cart, grabs a bit of grass from time to time*. What is this example an analogy for?

7. Describe how to develop the practices of the small, medium and great scope.

8. 'While we may not have all the necessary conditions right now to go into solitude and remain in

9. Give the definition of Calm Abiding.

10. Explain the Three Higher Trainings

**11. With regards to Verse 94 the commentary explains the meaning of the verse in the form of a syllogism.
Give the syllogism.**

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