
Shantideva's *Bodhisattvacharyavatara*

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

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

Now we can re-generate the bodhicitta motivation for receiving the teachings along these lines:

For the purpose of all mother sentient beings, in order to liberate them from all suffering, and lead them to the ultimate state of happiness, I need to achieve enlightenment myself. So for that purpose I will engage in listening to the profound Mahayana teachings, and put them into practice well.

2.1.2.1. IDENTIFYING THE ANTIDOTE

2.1.2.1.2. *Identifying the antidote that abandons attachment (cont.)*

We covered this topic last week. It explained that the two main antidotes for overcoming attachment are calm abiding and special insight. The sequence in which one first needs to obtain calm abiding followed by special insight was also explained, as well as their definitions. So it's good to keep all of that in mind.

2.1.2.2. THE METHOD FOR GENERATING THE ANTIDOTE

Having identified the antidote that abandons attachment, the text goes on to explain the methods for generating that antidote under two main headings:

2.1.2.2.1. Abandoning attachment to the inner object—sentient beings

2.1.2.2.2. Abandoning attachment to the external

2.1.2.2.1. *Abandoning attachment to the inner object—sentient beings*

Again, this has two subdivisions:

2.1.2.2.1.1. The faults of attachment

2.1.2.2.2.2. Abandoning upon having understood the faults

2.1.2.2.1.1. The faults of attachment

The faults of attachment are further subdivided into five:

2.1.2.2.1.1.1. One will not meet with the desired object

2.1.2.2.1.1.2. Being abused by the sense objects

2.1.2.2.1.1.3. Although attaining it there is no contentment

2.1.2.2.1.1.4. Obstructing liberation

2.1.2.2.1.1.5. Squandering the freedoms and endowments

The essential points presented in the following verses are very poignant, and we really need to contemplate them.

2.1.2.2.1.1.1. *One will not meet with the desired object*

It is essential that we understand the faults of attachment. As presented, some of the faults of attachment are that the object of attachment is difficult to obtain and even when one obtains it, one is not content and happy. This is indeed very true, and verified by one's own experience. Of course if we don't pay attention, then these faults may

not be apparent. But when we do an honest internal investigation it is very clear that attachment is the main cause for many of our problems.

As I've said in the past, talking about the faults of attachment may not be a particularly interesting topic for you. But if I were to start talking about the benefits of attachment, you might start paying very good attention and think: 'Now this is what I need to hear'. It is strange how the mind works and reacts when the faults of attachment are mentioned.

This goes to show how the mind is strongly habituated with desire and attachment, to the point that it appears to be an integral part of ourselves. We have such a deeply-rooted association with attachment that it's hard for us to even acknowledge the faults, let alone overcome them. Thus, we don't find listening to the faults of attachment very appealing.

We need to think about these points very carefully, examine them, and investigate them thoroughly as a way to fully acknowledge them, for as long as we befriend attachment it will be extremely difficult to practise true Dharma. Therefore, to help us acknowledge these faults Shantideva takes great care to explain them in detail. The more we begin to acknowledge, contemplate, and make a genuine attempt to overcome attachment, the greater our extent of practising the true Dharma will be.

The presentations of these faults are not all that difficult to understand—they are presented in a straightforward and clear manner. The main thing is to actually adopt this understanding and incorporate it into one's practice.

The verse relating to this outline reads:

5. *An impermanent person strongly attached
To an impermanent person
Will not see anything beautiful
For thousands of lifetimes.*

The commentary explains the meaning of the verse as follows:

The faults of attachment: Who that is impermanent and dying soon can be strongly attached to family and friends that are also impermanent? They, who are thus attached to the beautiful, will not see anything beautiful in the thousands of lifetimes that are karmic ripening results.

The initial rhetorical question, *Who that is impermanent and dying soon can be strongly attached to family and friends that are also impermanent?*, basically implies that both the person experiencing attachment and the object of that attachment are equally impermanent, as by their very nature, both will naturally decay and die.

If it were the case that one's object of attachment is firm and stable and never changes, then one might feel that perhaps it's acceptable to have attachment, because it's never going to change and will remain stable. However the fact is that the nature of the object that one is attached to is impermanent, and thus naturally disintegrates and decays. The point being made here is the absurdity of being strongly attached to an object that will naturally decay and disintegrate.

Furthermore, due to strong attachment to what is attractive and beautiful, the ripening result is that one will not see attractive objects for a long period of time in

future lifetimes. That is the karmic result of being attached to beautiful objects.

In contrast to that, a buddha's mind is said to remain perpetually in a state of bliss where everything—the surrounding environment and the beings within—all appear to be appealing and pleasant. That is because a buddha's mind is completely free from attachment. That is the result of completely abandoning attachment.

From our limited experience we might have noticed that once we start letting go of things, then they seem to become more abundant. Some have confided to me that when they reduce attachment to certain things, whether it is other people or objects, then the object of that attachment starts to (respectively) come closer, and be more abundant. When you are attached to money, for example, it seems to be difficult to obtain it, but when you start letting go of that attachment and not care too much about it, then money appears to come more easily. Many people seem to have actually experienced this. So even in the short term we can see that letting go of our attachment to things, situations and so forth, can actually make them even more appealing, more abundant and more enjoyable. This is one point we need to understand.

Another significant point we need to recall here is that the fault does not lie in seeing things as being appealing; rather, the fault lies in being attached to them. This is very clearly illustrated by the way sentient beings appear to bodhisattvas: because of their great endearing love, all beings appear to be very appealing and dear to them, yet they are not attached to them. In our situation the reverse seems to operate: other sentient beings appear appealing to us, and we immediately become attached to them.

A bodhisattva's lack of attachment is due to the wisdom realising emptiness that they have developed. This is a very significant point. It is that wisdom realising emptiness which protects their mind from feelings of strong attachment. As explained in the presentations on emptiness, for the person who has a deep understanding of emptiness, there's a discrepancy between the appearance and the actual mode of existence. While things appear to be truly existent, they do not actually exist in the way they appear to exist.

So when an object appears to be very attractive to us, we need to immediately apply the understanding that it does not exist in the way it appears to us, and that will immediately reduce strong interest in the beautiful features of the object. Applying the understanding of emptiness in this way immediately helps to overcome strong attachment. As explained in the teachings, having even a doubt about emptiness begins to shatter the core of cyclic existence.

Understanding emptiness means understanding that things do not exist in the way that they appear, and that there's a discrepancy between appearance and the actual mode of existence. Although things appear to our eye consciousness in a certain way, the actual mode of existence is contrary to the way it appears. Applying this understanding to objects of attachment will have an immediate impact and reduce that attachment to beautiful and appealing objects. Then, whatever

understanding of emptiness one has will have served its purpose.

One might assume that one has meditated on emptiness and understood it. But as soon as one sees an attractive object, one's mind becomes attached and one's heart starts pumping with excitement, or, on the other hand, strong aversion arises when one sees an unappealing object. That indicates that one has not derived even a drop of essence of practice from the meditation. Any understanding of emptiness would have been superficial and not deep-rooted, and hence unable to overcome afflictions. This will be an instance of where one has not even begun to taste the real Dharma. This is an important point that you really need to keep in mind.

The main point from the instructions presented here is that if we don't see the faults of attachment, and apply antidotes to overcome that attachment when it arises, then we will experience negative consequences. Conversely, if we start to recognise and accept the faults of attachment and slowly overcome its influence over our mind, then gradually our wellbeing will improve.

In simple terms, if we ask ourselves whether we want a more relaxed and happy mind, or a more troubled state of mind, then our response will naturally be that we want a genuinely calm and happier state of mind. Thus, the advice being presented here is that for a happy state of mind we should not allow our mind to be completely obsessed with attachment and desire, and this is done by recognising and acknowledging the faults of attachment. This is really the main point.

2.1.2.2.1.1.2. *Being abused by the sense objects*

The first two lines of the next verse are:

*6ab. Not seeing it, one will not have joy,
And the mind will not enter equipoise.*

In a sense, Shantideva is pointing the finger right at our hearts.

The commentary reads:

If asked: 'What will happen when one does not see anything attractive?'

Answer: If one does not see anything beautiful, one will not have joy. Since one's mind will be unhappy, it will be distracted, it will not enter equipoise of concentration and one will not attain happiness.

The hypothetical question posed in the commentary is, *what will happen if one does not see anything attractive?* What would be the consequences if one doesn't see anything attractive?

As the commentary explains very clearly, *if one does not see beautiful or pleasant things, then that will deprive one of a sense of joy.* If we just constantly see unpleasant things then that will weigh our minds down, and we will not be joyful.

If the mind is unhappy then it will be easily distracted. What follows from this is that the mind *will not be able to enter into the equipoise of concentration*, i.e. one will not be able to concentrate on an object because it is unhappy, or depressed. If the mind is depressed or unhappy, then it will be impossible for the mind to maintain complete focus on an object. And if one is not able to enter into the

equipoise of concentration, then there will be no way of gaining a genuine sense of happiness.

The presentation of this fault of attachment follows directly from the previous verse, which indicated that attachment will prevent one from seeing pleasant things in the long-term future. The explanation in these two lines shows the negative effects of not seeing pleasant things. Although the words *attractive* or *beautiful* are used, their meaning in this context is that people or environmental objects are suitable objects for interaction, which can be when they are pleasant, as opposed to unpleasant.

If one has a strong attachment to objects then the consequence will be not seeing pleasant things in the future. Not seeing things as being pleasant and attractive and so forth can cause unhappiness and a lack of joy, and the result of that is that the mind will not be able to develop the equipoise of concentration.

2.1.2.2.1.1.3. *Although attaining it there is no contentment*

However when things do start appearing as nice and beautiful, then there is the danger for attachment to these beautiful objects to arise, which will then cause discontentment.

The next two lines of the verse are:

*6cd. Although seeing it, one is not satisfied
And will be miserable due to craving as before.*

The commentary explains:

Even if one sees the desired objects, one is not satisfied due to craving. Due to craving one will be as miserable as before, when one did not see the desired object.

As explained clearly in the commentary, *if one sees the desired objects, one is not satisfied due to craving*. Due to attachment one desires to possess an object, or if it is a person, then you want to be close to them. However, even when one is in close proximity to the object, or one possesses it, there's a lack of contentment, and because of that lack of contentment one will again be miserable.

When one did not meet with the object there was a certain level of mental suffering, and now, having met with the object, one would assume that one is released from the suffering of not being with the object. However one experiences further suffering from not being satisfied, even though one owns the object, or is in close proximity to the other person.

If we were to take a contemporary example, when two people are initially attracted to each other then there's attachment, and because of that fascination they want to be close to each other. So they agree to live together, and perhaps even get married. But after they have lived together for some time, then a similar suffering to what they experienced before they met will arise. It is as if they are still lacking something; that is because they are still not content.

Therefore, *one will be as miserable as before, when one did not see the desired object*. The suffering that occurs in the mind will be similar to the suffering one experienced when one did not possess the object.

As the teachings explain in detail, attachment is one of the worst of the afflictions, because it is one of the main

causes of being perpetually reborn in samsara again and again.

More precisely, in reference to the twelve links of interdependent origination, at the time of death it is the links of craving and grasping that lead to the link of existence, which is how one is reborn again into cyclic existence. Both craving and grasping are aspects of attachment. So we can see how, as the teachings explain, attachment is the primary cause for one to be reborn in samsara.

2.1.2.2.1.1.4. *Obstructing liberation*

This fault is presented in the following verse:

*7. If one is attached to sentient beings
The mere perfect meaning is obscured.
It will also destroy the mind of disenchantment
And lastly, one will be overwhelmed by misery.*

Here Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

For those reasons, if one is attached to sentient beings, one will be completely obscured with regard to the perfect meaning itself, and thus it will obstruct the direct perception of ultimate truth. In addition, by craving contaminated phenomena, the mind of disenchantment with cyclic existence will be destroyed and one will not attain liberation. As one will finally be separated from everything that is pleasant, one will be overwhelmed by misery.

If one is attached to sentient beings, one will be completely obscured with regard to the perfect meaning itself, and thus it will obstruct the direct perception of ultimate truth, indicates that attachment to the internal object of sentient beings obstructs the perception of ultimate reality, or emptiness.

We have all seen how strong attachment can affect normal judgements, and how it leads to mistakes and poor decisions. For example, strong attachment can obscure the faults of the other person, so that only qualities are seen. There's no question that attachment obscures faults; it impairs the wisdom or intelligence needed to be able to make sound decisions.

This verse specifically relates to attachment to sentient beings. It is explained in the teachings that attachment to animate objects is much more difficult to overcome than attachment to inanimate objects. That's why attachment to sentient beings is specifically explained here.

Furthermore, as explained here, *by craving contaminated phenomena, the mind of disenchantment with cyclic existence will be destroyed and one will not attain liberation*. Renunciation cannot be developed when one's mind is obsessed with desire and attachment. For as long as one is attached to the pleasures of samsara it is impossible to develop renunciation, and it is only when one develops a mind of disenchantment with the pleasures of samsara that one can actually start to develop renunciation.

Disenchantment with the objects of desire comes from the development of a full understanding of the sufferings of samsara. Without acknowledging and recognising the three sufferings of samsara, it is impossible to develop disenchantment with samsara and renunciation of it.

a. The first of these sufferings, **the suffering of suffering** is not too difficult to recognise. It is something we have all experienced—even animals can recognise the suffering of suffering.

b. The second suffering is **the suffering of change**. Attachment to the sensual pleasures leads to disenchantment with change. Even non-Buddhists can develop that level of disenchantment.

c. The true suffering that one needs to recognise, and seek to overcome, is **all-pervasive compounded suffering**, which is said to be much more subtle and thus much harder to recognise and overcome. It is only by fully acknowledging and recognising all-pervasive compounded suffering that one is able to develop disenchantment with samsara.

As one will finally be separated from everything that is pleasant, one will be overwhelmed by misery indicates the extent to which suffering is an obstruction to liberation.

When the commentary refers to *craving contaminated phenomena*, we need to understand that this refers specifically to craving for the appropriated contaminated aggregates. By *craving for contaminated phenomena the mind of disenchantment with cyclic existence will be destroyed*, means that being strongly attached to the appropriated contaminated aggregates destroys disenchantment with samsara, and one will not be able to develop renunciation.

Thus liberation is obstructed by craving contaminated phenomena.

2.1.2.2.1.1.5. *Squandering the freedoms and endowments*

This fault is presented in these two lines:

*8ab. Because of being obsessed with it
This life will pass meaninglessly.*

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je explains:

By thinking exclusively about the objects of desire, this life will pass meaninglessly and the power of the freedoms and endowments will be squandered.

This explanation is, of course, quite clear, and we need to really take it to heart, and apply it to our own practice. As explained here, *by thinking exclusively about the objects of desire, this life will pass meaninglessly and the power of the freedoms and endowments will be squandered*. We currently possess a precious human life with its freedoms and endowments. However, if we become completely obsessed with the objects of desire, then that will prevent us from obtaining any significant personal spiritual goal.

To see this as a personal instruction we need to recall how a mind that is obsessed with an object of desire experiences perpetual problems and difficulties. When we look back, we can see how, in one form or another, all the problems that we have been experiencing are mainly due to not having fulfilled our desires. We keep going from one point to the next trying to pursue an object of desire that keeps eluding us. If one continues in this way then one's life will be empty, and one will not have extracted the essence from one's life. If we behave like that, then we have definitely *squandered* our *freedoms and endowments*.

At a personal level, one should think: 'What prevents me from fully utilising my precious human rebirth to achieve goals such as a good status (which is a good rebirth in the next lifetime), and liberation and enlightenment, is none other than my own mind, which is obsessed with desires. If I continue to be obsessed like this, my mind of desire

will prevent me from using my potential to obtain these great goals. All my problems, from external ones to psychological problems, come down to the feeling of not obtaining the objects of my desire'. That is how we destroy our own temporary and ultimate happiness. So this is what we need to keep in mind.

2.1.2.2.2. *Abandoning upon having understood the faults*

That is subdivided into two:

2.1.2.2.2.1. Contemplating the faults

2.1.2.2.2.2. The way of abandoning

2.1.2.2.2.1. Contemplating the faults

Here there are two subdivisions.

2.1.2.2.2.1.1. Extensive explanation

2.1.2.2.2.1.2. Summary

2.1.2.2.2.1.1. Extensive explanation

The extensive explanation is subdivided into three:

2.1.2.2.2.1.1.1. The great purpose will be destroyed and one will be led to the lower realms

2.1.2.2.2.1.1.2. Childish friends are unreliable and they are difficult to count upon

2.1.2.2.2.1.1.3. One will not receive benefit from them and they will harm one

2.1.2.2.2.1.1.1. **The great purpose will be destroyed and one will be led to the lower realms**

Again, some very significant points are being presented under these headings. They relate to what we need to be wary of in our life. First of all *the great purpose will be destroyed and one will be led to the lower realms*. The next point is that *childish friends are unreliable and they are difficult to count upon*. Thirdly, childish friends are friends who have a bad influence over oneself. Thus, if one were to completely rely on such 'friends', one's own purpose will be destroyed and one will not even be able to help them.

We can go over the explanations in our next session.

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

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Based on the motivation we have just generated, let us engage in the regular meditation practice. (*Meditation*)

We can now generate the motivation for receiving 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 profound Mahayana teachings and then put them into practice well.

If we can put into practice whatever understanding we gain from listening to the teachings, then it serves its purpose and makes it most meaningful. The advice in the next couple of verses is in fact very profound and should be integrated in this way.

2.1.2.2.1.2. Abandoning upon having understood the faults

2.1.2.2.1.2.1. Contemplating the faults

2.1.2.2.1.2.1.1. Extensive explanation (cont.)

2.1.2.2.1.2.1.1.1. *The great purpose will be destroyed and one will be led to the lower realms*

The last two lines of the earlier verse and the next verse read:

- 8cd. *Friends and relatives lacking permanence
Destroy even the eternal Dharma.*
9. *If one acts on the same level as the childish
One will definitely go to the lower realms.
If they lead one to unequal fortune
What is reliance on the childish supposed to
accomplish?*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

Friends and relatives, who are without permanence in that one will quickly be separated from them, destroy and degenerate even eternal liberation and the method for achieving it, i.e. the holy Dharma. If one acts on the same level as the childish then one will definitely go to the lower realms.

If one is led by the childish to a place unequal to the fortune of superior beings and deprived of the presently obtained human body that we have now, then what is supposed to be accomplished by relying on ordinary individuals? One will not achieve one's wishes, and that which one does not wish for will increase.

While the explanation is quite clear, what we should reflect upon as the essential point - *friends and relations who are without permanence in that one will quickly be separated from them* - is that whatever relationships we have with others are in the nature of impermanence. If we have this understanding from the very outset then, when separation does take place, it will help to release one from great agony. With a lack of this understanding at the beginning, and if one has very strong attachment, then one will grasp and strongly hold onto the object of

attachment. The stronger the attachment one has to the object, the more it taints one's perception and thus one sees it as permanent and long lasting. Thus when the situation changes from either side, it can cause great mental agony. Inevitably change will occur and if one is not able to accept it then it causes great pain in one's mind.

Of course we rely on relationships, especially when we live with others, but the main point is to be mindful of impermanence, which will help to reduce strong attachment and clinging to relationships. In fact, we need to integrate an understanding of impermanence in to everything we engage in. To the extent that we lack the understanding of impermanence, the stronger the attachment and grasping to that object will be.

An understanding of subtle impermanence definitely helps to overcome attachment, but even recognising the grosser levels of impermanence, such as the obvious changes that lead up to death, will definitely reduce strong attachment. The more we reflect on this reality, the less we cling and grasp to the meaningless affairs of this life. Our strong preoccupation with worldly affairs will naturally reduce to the extent that we overcome our grasping to them. Then happiness will naturally occur in one's mind. Even if one says, 'I don't wish for happiness', happiness will naturally occur. The shortcomings being presented here are the faults of attachment, and if one does not overcome attachment, there is no way one can develop renunciation.

It is important to develop **renunciation** as it is the first of the three principles of the path. The reason it is presented as one of the principles of the path is that without developing renunciation one cannot possibly develop disenchantment to samsaric pleasures. **Bodhicitta** is the second principle of the path because without developing it one cannot possibly obtain enlightenment. Whatever virtues we accumulate, without bodhicitta they cannot become causes for enlightenment, so virtuous actions need to be held with bodhicitta. The **wisdom realising emptiness** is the third principle of the path, because without it one cannot possibly overcome the grasping to the self. This is how we need to understand overcoming attachment and developing renunciation in the context of the principles of the path.

The commentary explains that if one holds onto attachment to friends and relatives it will *destroy and degenerate even eternal liberation and the method for achieving it, i.e. the holy Dharma*. Here 'eternal' refers to the unceasing state of happiness experienced when one obtains liberation. This is destroyed if one acts on the same level as the childish, and if one does that, then one will definitely go to lower realms.

I have conveyed the significant points presented here in previous teachings over and over again, specifically how we must be careful not to be misled by negative friends and act like them. What is called 'childish' here refers to those who have no qualms about engaging in negativities, and so if we follow their example we'll destroy our own potential to obtain liberation, and bring ourselves to the lower realms. An example of childish would be if others engage in a negativity such as killing and we think that is fine, and engage in the same

behaviour. That is how the negativity of killing is transferred to us. Likewise if others engage in sexual misconduct and we follow that example it destroys our own virtues and we create negativity. These are significant points that Shantideva points out, and of course we can relate it to the other negativities as well.

While we may *destroy and degenerate even eternal liberation*, ultimately failing to gain the wisdom realising emptiness can also be explained in relation to renunciation. If we do not develop renunciation, and are attached to engaging in the activities of the childish, we become influenced by those negative friends. So we need to be mindful of not associating with negative friends, while maintaining compassion for them. Shantideva clearly explains later on that not associating with negative friends is about protecting oneself so that one is not influenced by negativities. That doesn't mean one does not hold them in compassion, of course one does, but at the same time being mindful not to be influenced by their example.

The commentary states, *If one is led by the childish to a place unequal to the fortune of superior beings and presently obtained a human body*, which means that when one is influenced by one's association with those who engage in childish activities (negative friends), then this destroys one's own virtues, and leads one to a place that does not have the fortune of superior beings. Superior beings can refer to actual arya beings, but it can also refer to holy beings. The Tibetan term *kyiwo-dampa* (which can be translated as 'holy being' or 'noble being') is defined in the *Abhidharma* as beings who are engaged in pure and virtuous conduct and shun negativities.

As explained in the *Abhidharma* there are four types of aryas or holy beings: 1) one who is content with poor clothing 2) one who is content with meagre alms 3) one who is content with a poor dwelling and 4) one who takes joy in ascetic practices. Being led to a place which is unequal to the fortune of superior beings means that following the childish and engaging in non-virtues deprives one of opportunity to engage in virtue; perpetually engaging in non-virtue is exactly the opposite to having the fortune of a superior being.

Likewise, *presently obtained a human body that we have now*, means one will be led to a place where one does not have the opportunity that we have with our presently obtained body. Again, one cannot completely avoid associating with others, and in certain circumstances one may have to be with relatives, friends etc., but if any of these people engage in childish or negative behaviours we need to be mindful not to be influenced by them. We need to use our own intelligence and wisdom to distinguish between what is proper behaviour and what is improper behaviour. So when one is associating with others, even if one has to be with those who are engaging in immoral behaviours, one immediately needs to be able to hold the dignity of virtue in one's mind and be composed, and not allow oneself to follow their example. This is the main point to derive from the instruction.

The commentary further explains *then what is supposed to be accomplished by relying on ordinary individuals*, which implies that one cannot accomplish anything by relying

on ordinary individuals, and so one will not ultimately achieve one's wishes. Conversely, what one does not wish for will increase. These are the negative consequences.

If one were to take these lines literally in a worldly sense, one might think, 'so, it is good to achieve whatever one wishes for'. However the wishes referred to here are not worldly wishes but rather virtuous wishes, those that relate to the Dharma, such as liberation, enlightenment, opportunity to engage in accumulating virtues and merit. Those are the wishes being presented here. One has to understand these meanings to relate to virtues etc. because of the type of advice being presented here. The advice presented here is related to Dharma practice, and in many cases exclusively to a monk's practice. So it is important to understand and relate the advice and instructions given in the text to its proper context. However a lot of the explanations are also very practical and useful to apply by anyone in their daily life. I have presented many of these points previously, so here I am being backed up by Shantideva.

2.1.2.2.1.2.1.2. Childish friends are unreliable and they are difficult to count upon

This topic is something you can relate to your own experiences in life. There are many who might say 'Oh I cannot relate with that person, it is very difficult to rely on them' but in saying that, one is already in a committed relationship with them. Prior to engaging in the relationship one may not have taken this attribute into consideration, so once one is in a relationship with them, it is almost too late to complain that they are difficult to rely upon.

The verses read:

10. *In one instant they become friends
But in a mere moment they also turn into
enemies.
As they become angry at that which is likeable
Ordinary individuals are difficult to please.*
11. *If one says something beneficial, they become
angry
They will even reverse one from the beneficial,
If one does not listen to their words
They will go to the lower realms due to anger.*

The commentary explains:

As their mental continuum is unstable, they become friends in an instant but in the mere moment it takes to say some bad words they become enemies again.

As they become angry if one brings them into contact with virtue, which is likeable, ordinary individuals are difficult to please. Not only do they become angry if one says something beneficial, in many ways, they will also turn oneself away from the beneficial cause that is virtue. If one does not listen to their words, they become angry and go to the lower realms.

The commentary states that, *their mental continuum is unstable*, highlighting the need to understand the importance of having a stable mind. When one's mind is unstable it is vulnerable to all the faults presented here. There are so many stories I could also share about this. What is being presented here is that people become friends, but in the instant it takes to say some bad words they become enemies. This is really very true. We can see

there are many examples where someone who is supposed to be a very close friend can in an instant turn around and take a person's life. Instances like this have occurred.

These points are actually quite clear, but one should reflect on their significance. For example, the first point reflects upon how just a few words can change the sentiments within oneself or others, even strangers. But sometimes even with strangers, just a few unpleasant words can create a very hostile situation. There are many instances like that which we can reflect upon. The attribute of being childish refers to those who, if you try to connect them with virtue, and things which are actually useful and meaningful for them, become angry and do not appreciate your actions. In this way we see that ordinary beings are very difficult to please. We can also see that by befriending childish, ordinary beings one can easily be misled. There are many instances of someone who is known to be a good Dharma practitioner but because of the influence of their associates they later start to go astray and not practise the Dharma. It is in this way that we can see the disadvantages of befriending the childish.

Furthermore, *not only do they become angry if one says something beneficial, in many ways, they will also turn oneself away from the beneficial cause that is virtue.* This refers to the fact that it is one thing not being able to benefit them, but in fact associating with childish or negative friends can lead you into engaging in non-virtuous deeds and so turn you away from what has been beneficial. We can see in normal relationships that, *if one does not listen to their words, they become angry and go to the lower realms,* which occurs all too often. When you try to explain something using nice words, sometimes they don't listen, and at other times they get angry. If they get angry they are creating the causes to go to the lower realms themselves, but it is in the interaction with oneself that this happens. It is in this way that one should contemplate on the faults.

As one of the great Tibetan Masters Padampa Sangye said:

By relying on a non-virtuous friend, one's own negativities will increase rapidly. Therefore one must definitely shun association with negative friends. By relying on a virtuous friend one's virtues and positive merits will increase rapidly. Thus one must definitely rely on a virtuous friend.

The literal meaning of the term for a Dharma teacher is 'virtuous friend'. So, one must rely on those who help to increase virtues within us, and not rely on those who increase negativities. These few lines have explained the disadvantages of relying on negative friends and the great advantage of relying on a virtuous friend in a clear way. We need to take the essence of this.

2.1.2.2.1.2.1.1.3. One will not receive benefit from them and they will harm one

The verse reads:

12. *Jealous of the higher and competing with the equal,
Pride towards those lower; conceited when
praised.
If one expresses something unpleasant, they
become angry.
When does one derive benefit from the childish?*
13. *If one associates with the childish*

*One will definitely acquire every non-virtue there
is,
Such as praising oneself and criticising others,
And conversation taking pleasure in cyclic
existence.*

As the commentary explains,

Further, the childish are jealous of those higher, compete with those that are equal and if they observe those that are lower, they are proud. When praised they generate conceit, but if one says something unpleasant they become angry.

Hence, when does one receive benefit from involvement with the childish? Not only does one not, but one will definitely acquire every kind of non-virtue by keeping company with the childish. One will definitely take on praising oneself and criticising others, or get in the habit of conversation that takes pleasure in cyclic existence, such as stories that deal with the king, the people in the country and so forth. Therefore, one should not associate with the childish.

This Tibetan verse is written in such an eloquent and poetic way it is good to reflect on the words in the verse itself. You could memorise it and reflect on it, *Jealous of those higher,* and *competing with those that are equal,* is quite clear. *Pride towards those who are lower and being conceited when praised* is also quite clear. Then if one expresses *something unpleasant they become angry* so *when does one receive benefit from the childish?* These are all very significant points as further explained in the commentary.

The attributes of the childish are that they are jealous of those who are higher, and this is something about which many people lament. Many have confided in me that they feel very jealous about work situations or relationships. Jealousy is one of the main factors that cause agony in the mind, especially in a work situation when others are doing better than oneself. Rather than feeling joyful for them it is easy to experience jealousy from which many kinds of faults and spiteful words can occur.

To *compete with those who are equal* refers to being competitive with one's peers. This is something that often occurs. And then with those who are less advantaged, or a bit lower in status, one develops pride and contempt for them. What is being presented here are the shortcomings of engaging in sentiments such as pride, jealousy, and a sense of competitiveness as these are the ones that causes us a lot of problems in everyday life.

One needs to relate these points to oneself, and not think it is referring to others as being childish, and that oneself is excluded from that. If one actually has these sentiments one must reflect, 'If I have these faults then it makes it very difficult for others to relate to me. Just as I find it difficult to relate to others who have these faults, then it is the same for others who have difficulty relating to me'.

By acknowledging these shortcomings we need to apply the antidote. There are antidotes for overcoming each of these negative states of mind, and one needs to resort to them. Jealousy is a dominant sentiment which causes a lot of problems. There are many who say the boyfriend is jealous of their girlfriend, or the girlfriend is jealous of their boyfriend, or in a work situation that they are jealous of their colleagues etc. A lot of jealousy occurs in everyday situations which causes a lot of problems. The antidote for overcoming jealousy is to rejoice. To

contemplate how it is good that others have good things happening for them. If one can train one's mind to feel joy in these situations then basically that will help one to overcome jealousy.

I don't claim that I am a great practitioner, but I have protected my mind from jealousy and while there might be small occasions where jealousy might occur in the mind, I have not gone out of my way to cause disruption by back-biting, and so forth, out of jealousy. This is something I can say I have definitely not engaged in. This is how we need to protect ourselves. If we are jealous, we might go around spreading rumours or backbiting, so one really needs to protect oneself from this kind of behaviour. While the verses here are very clear, applying them in one's own practice is what one really needs to do.

2.1.2.2.1.2.1.2. Summary

*14ab. Thus, the relationship between self and other
Will create ruin.*

As the commentary explains the meaning of these two lines:

Thus, through the mutual relationship between oneself and other childish ones, they become negative friends and one will be ruined.

The commentary explicitly mentions *they become negative friends*. The reason someone would be referred to as a negative friend is that by associating with them one's own negativity increases. That would be a clear sign that one is associating with negative friends. If by associating with someone one's virtues increase, then that is by default a virtuous friend. So while we protect ourselves from associating with negative friends, we need to ensure that we don't become a cause to be a negative friend for others. For example, in our conversations if we start talking about likes and dislikes and gossip, it increases the delusions in one's own mind and creates negativity in the other's mind. Then one is, by default, serving as a negative friend for others. This is why one needs to be mindful of one's speech.

2.1.2.2.1.2.2. The way of abandoning

*14cd. As they have not produced one's purpose
And one also does not become meaningful for them,*

15a. One should get far away from the childish.

The commentary explains:

As childish ordinary individuals have not produced one's purpose and one also does not become meaningful for them, one should retreat far away into isolation.

Having earlier presented the faults of relying on, or associating with the childish, the verse and commentary explain further that *as childish ordinary individuals have not produced one's purpose*, they have not helped to fulfil one's own purpose. *One also does not become meaningful for them* means that one cannot help them. If this is the case, one needs to resolve to go into isolation, which means finding an appropriate place to abide where there are no worldly distractions.

The following lines explain what to do when one goes into isolation.

They read:

*15bcd. If one meets them, make them happy through joy
Without creating great familiarity.
Act well in an ordinary way.*

*16. Like the bee takes the honey from the flower
Take only the meaning of the Dharma and,
Like not having seen them before,
Abide without familiarity.*

The commentary states:

When occasionally meeting them, first make them happy through joy but then do not become greatly familiar. Act well, without attachment or anger, like an ordinary person just pointing the way.

Also when one goes to seek alms in the town, like the bee that takes the honey from the flower without being attached to its colour and so on, whilst being there physically, take only robes and food for the purpose of the Dharma. Abide without involvement in the distractions, and treat all people as if not having seen them before.

Thus when abiding in isolation, on occasions when one meets with ordinary people who may, for example, bring provisions etc., then the advice for that time is not to engage in lengthy conversation. Of course, make the people happy and joyful, but do not become too familiar. In this way one acts without attachment or anger towards them. Just briefly make one's point and keep one's conversation short. This is the way to avoid worldly talk, lest one gets involved in non-virtuous discussions.

When one is in isolation one still needs to eat and be clothed, so if one has no means oneself then one has to depend on alms and go out and beg. The manner of getting alms is explained with an analogy of a bee taking the essence from a flower without being attached to the colour etc. That is, when the bee actually lands on the flower it does not disturb it, it does not get distracted by the flower itself, it just takes the essence, the nectar, and flies off.

Likewise, whilst in the town, one just takes what one needs for one's purpose of Dharma, such as clothes and food, and then return to isolation. There have been times in the past, after I finished my studies, when I have aspired to go and stay in isolation, and do my practice. If that had occurred I would have gone out to seek alms, just as Shantideva is advising here. However I didn't get that opportunity in the past and now, at my age, I don't think it is possible to do it. But living simply in this way, and practising the Dharma, was something I aspired to.

The commentary advises:

Abide without involvement in the distractions, and treat all people as if not having seen them before.

In summary, when one goes out into a town, one should not allow oneself to become immersed and get caught up in frivolous activities and distractions which go on within it. Just go out for one's own purpose, to sustain oneself and for the Dharma practice. Then even if one meets people, act as if one has not known them, not seen them before, and avoid too much familiarity so that one does not get caught up in frivolous activities. This is the advice.

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Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

20 October 2015

Based on the motivation that we have just generated let us engage in our regular meditation practice.

Now we generate the motivation for receiving the teaching along these lines:

For the sake of all mother sentient beings I need to achieve enlightenment, so for that purpose I will listen to this Mahayana teaching and put it into practice well.

2.1.2.2. THE METHOD FOR GENERATING THE ANTIDOTE

2.1.2.2.1. Abandoning attachment to the inner object of sentient being

2.1.2.2.1.2. Abandoning upon having understood the faults

2.1.2.2.1.2.2. The way of abandoning (cont.)

As we learnt last week, there is no benefit whatsoever for oneself or others in associating with the childish.

*14cd. As they have not produced one's purpose
And one also does not become meaningful for them,*

15a. One should get far away from the childish.

It was explained very clearly that one cannot serve the purposes of the childish. As we cannot benefit them and they cannot benefit us, it is best to resort to isolation to engage in our Dharma practice.

This of course has its own significant points. Of course teachers also advise some, who might be inclined to go into isolation, to remain with their students and disciples in order to teach as it would be much more beneficial for them to engage in propagating the Dharma. So for the purpose of the Dharma and benefiting sentient beings they follow their teacher's advice, forsaking their wish to go into isolation and help to propagate the Dharma. These lines from the root text are a general explanation of why one should rely on isolation in order to engage in the practice of Dharma, and they serve to remind and encourage us to engage in the real means of practising the Dharma.

2.1.2.2.2. Abandoning attachment to outer gain, praise and the like

Here there are two sub-divisions:

2.1.2.2.2.1. The faults of the object possessor

2.1.2.2.2.2. The faults of the object

2.1.2.2.2.1. The faults of the object possessor

This is further sub-divided into two:

2.1.2.2.2.1.1. The faults of pride

2.1.2.2.2.1.2. The faults of attachment

2.1.2.2.2.1.1. The faults of pride

We really need to take measures to overcome pride. When one is affected by strong pride, not only does it harm oneself, but it also affects others. No-one

appreciates someone who is full of pride and contempt for others, and we often hear comments like, "Oh, he is just so proud"—such people are scorned. Having seen the faults of pride, it is good to then take measures to overcome one's own pride. It's fair to say that pride in others is never really appreciated. However, not taking any initiative to look into one's own pride and then to claim that others are being very proud, isn't really an honest and sincere approach.

This advice seems to be particularly applicable to those of high status, such as renowned lamas. It is indeed very useful advice for teachers who have a large following.

The verse reads:

*17. By saying "I have a lot of gain and praise,
I am very popular with others."
If one holds such arrogance
One will be frightened after death.*

Then the commentary reads:

If one says, "I have a lot of gain, I am praised and I am very popular with others" and holds such arrogance and conceit, one will go to the lower realms due to the faults of pride and attachment, and thus one will generate fear after death.

As clearly explained, if one is not mindful then gifts, offerings or praise can generate attachment to such things, along with pride. One could begin to think, "Oh I am admired by so many and there are many who praise me", which causes a mind of pride and conceit. In fact one needs to be particularly careful with how one uses the offerings made to one by others. It is explained in the teachings that when offerings are made with sincere faith, one needs to be very mindful to utilise them in a proper manner, and not to misuse those offerings. Personally, I am very careful about such offerings and so forth. They need to be used in an appropriate manner, and put it towards a good purpose as a means to accumulate more virtue or merit. That will then be beneficial for both oneself and the person making the offering. Basically, one needs to be really careful when obtaining and using offerings, ensuring that they are treated appropriately.

You will recall there are also detailed explanations in the lam rim teachings about the danger of making offerings and so forth that have been obtained through wrong livelihood. In addition to these extensive explanations in the lam rim, there are also explanations in the *Vinaya*, the text for monastics; as monastics we need to pay extra care to not misuse offerings.

In my own case, when someone, for example, cooks lunch for me, they might also bring a cake or some biscuits. Occasionally I ask for the cake or the biscuits to be left behind, and that they not be opened. That is because my intention is to offer them later. Some might wonder, "Why is Geshe-la not eating the biscuits or cake? Maybe he is saving it all for later". So not everyone understands my intention. I can't claim to engage in any great practices, but I do try to adopt these simple practices, just as the previous great masters did—they always made offerings of what was offered to them. Also I don't consume the offering of lunch mindlessly. I offer it and pay attention to dedicating the offering by thinking, "By consuming this meal may those who offered it be

endowed with all resources, and be able to practise Dharma”.

The main point is that one needs to be very mindful about offerings. When others make offerings of gifts and so forth to oneself, there is a great danger of becoming quite attached to those offerings. Likewise, hearing praise can generate pride. If great teachers have a large following, there is the danger of feeling, “Oh, I’ve got a great following, and many people like me”. Now some of you might feel, “Oh I am not in that situation, I’m in no danger of generating pride with a large following and receiving gifts from others”. But the situation can change, and one may achieve that status, if not in this life, then in the future lives to come. Even though overcoming attachment to gifts and so forth is not an easy practice, contemplating the disadvantages of these faults, and training one’s mind now, can prepare oneself for the future, so that one will not be affected by these faults then.

As I have mentioned previously, at an ordinary level, one may not yet be free from these faults of attachment and pride and so forth. However recognising and acknowledging that they are faults can become an impetus to engage in purification practices i.e. confessing them and purifying them. So in that way we can minimise any negative effects.

2.1.2.2.1.2. *The faults of attachment*

The lines relating to this heading are:

18. *Thus, deluded mind,
You become attached to this and that,
And separated from this and that,
And suffer a thousand times.*
- 19ab. *Therefore, the skilful should not be attached,
From attachment fear is generated.*

The commentary explains:

Hence, a mind that is deluded with regards to projecting karma, to however many objects one becomes attached to if they are summed up, it will add up to a thousand-fold. The result surely is for great sufferings to arise. Therefore, by being skilful in what has to be abandoned and adopted, one should not generate attachment to gain and praise. Due to attachment, one will generate the fear of the lower realms.

The Tibetan word *phen-pe-le* translated here as *projecting karma* can also have a more literal meaning of *actions that benefit oneself*. So if we take the literal meaning, then what is being explained is that the mind of attachment is a *mind that is deluded* into thinking that the objects of attachment will benefit oneself. With that deluded mind, one’s attachment to the object increases more and more. One is not satisfied with being attached to one object; soon one wants two and then more. Furthermore, attachment towards the objects increases.

If they are summed up, the attachments will add up to a thousand-fold, and due to that one experiences the result of great sufferings. Of course, when attachment to an object has increased a thousand fold, then the consequences of the suffering to be experienced in the future will also naturally be great. The thousand-fold increase is not a fixed number, but an indication of the magnitude of the increase. One may think that one is attached to only one

object, but in each moment of attachment to that object one is generating further attachment, thus attachment increases more and more. So what may seem like attachment to just one object becomes a thousand-fold attachment, which then brings about extensive suffering as a result. *Therefore, by being skilful in what has to be abandoned and adopted, one should not generate attachment to gain and praise.* In summary, *due to attachment, one will generate the fear that is the lower realms.*

These explanations of the verses are not all that obscure or difficult to understand. It’s a matter of contemplating them and trying to put them into practice as much as we can.

2.1.2.2.2. **The faults of the object**

This is sub-divided into two:

2.1.2.2.2.1. **Desire objects are unreliable**

2.1.2.2.2.2. **Praise and criticism do not harm or benefit**

2.1.2.2.2.2.1. *Desire objects are unreliable*

One needs to understand that the actual fault being presented here is a mind that relies on, and then develops attachment to objects of desire. The means to overcome this mental fault is to understand that the fault of the objects is that they are *unreliable*. Such objects of desire are never reliable, because they can change at any time. We often hear comments like, “That person is so unreliable — you just can’t rely on them”. Likewise objects of desire are also unreliable.

The lines of verse relating to this heading read:

- 19cd. *Because they have to be given up naturally,
One should generate firm realisation of this.*
20. *Although one may receive lots of gain
And also receive fame and pleasantness,
This accumulation of gain and fame,
One has to give them up without freedom.*

Then the commentary explains:

Though one may attain these objects of desire, they are unreliable. One needs to generate stable conviction and realisation that they will have to be given up naturally. Although one may receive a lot of gain, as well as fame and pleasantness, this accumulation of gain and fame will have to be given up without freedom at the time of death. The meaning is that at the time of death gain and fame will not follow one.

As explained in the commentary, *though one may attain these objects of desire* such as gain, praise and the like, *they are all unreliable*, regardless of their form. Whatever objects of desire one may obtain, one will not hold onto them; eventually a separation has to take place. Although they are inanimate, it’s as if the objects discard you, and you also have to discard objects. The more one contemplates this fact, the easier it becomes to not hold on to objects with strong attachment. Then, when the actual separation takes place, it will not cause mental agony or angst.

Of course, at the end of this life, at the time of death, we will definitely have to leave everything behind. But even before then, there are many times when we are separated from objects of attachment. So the more one contemplates these points now, and thinks about how the very nature of these objects of desire is that they are unreliable, the

easier it will be for the mind to handle the separation that will inevitably occur.

As the commentary further explains, *one needs to generate a stable conviction and realisation that they will have to be given up naturally*. So one has to develop that mind to make it stable and strong. Furthermore, as just mentioned, *although one may receive a lot of gain, as well as fame and pleasantness, this accumulation of gain and fame will have to be given up without freedom at the time of death*.

Understanding that one needs to generate a stable conviction and realisation that objects of desire will have to be given up naturally is neither a subtle, nor an obscure point. We have all seen the agony and suffering that many experience when they are separated from objects of attachment, such as loved and dear ones at the time of death or otherwise because of a break up, or when they experience a great financial loss. Many people are not able to accept that separation, due to the strong grasping of attachment. So when separation occurs, they experience the agony of enormous suffering. Thus the advice being presented here is an instruction on how to prepare our minds, so that when separation does occur, we will not experience great mental distress.

It is, of course obvious that although one may receive a lot of gain and praise and experience pleasant situations and so forth, we will definitely, without any freedom or control from our side, have to give all of that up at the time of death. But if one has created extensive merit, then there is the possibility of obtaining wealth again in future lives. One can definitely create the causes to obtain such good conditions in the next life.

As explained in the teachings in great detail, by practising morality, one will create the causes to secure a body with all of the senses intact in a future life. By engaging in the practice of generosity, one will obtain good resources and wealth in future lives, and by practising patience one will create the cause to obtain a good retinue, or companions in future lives. So rather than being attached to objects, and engaging in immoral deeds to accumulate more wealth and so forth, one should practice the opposite of these deeds: the opposite to engaging in corrupt morality is to practise morality, and the opposite of miserliness is to practise generosity, and the opposite of anger is patience. So while we might not be able to prevent separation from the good conditions that we have now, such as our body and resources, we can at least engage in practices to secure such good conditions again in the future.

Contemplating the cause and effect sequence of how to obtain good conditions in the future encourages one to abide by the law of karma and engage in virtue. This is how we need to apply our understanding of the faults and disadvantages of attachment, and the importance of practising its opposite. There are stories of people who are so overly attached to their objects and possessions that they keep them hidden in their pillows and so forth. If one's mind is a bit more prepared by thinking about the faults and disadvantages of attachment, it will help to reduce a lot of the agony when separation takes place.

When I was in India, an Indian once asked me "Why do you always seem to be so joyful and happy?" My

immediate response was "Because I lost everything, my country, my home, my family. I had to leave everything behind to escape to India". When I said that he was first taken aback and wondered how that was relevant. Soon enough, he seemed to get the point. He said, "Oh, what you mean is that you have given up attachment to all of these things, and that is what is making you happy now". It seems that he had derived a significant point from what I was saying. Even though I had to leave everything behind, I don't recall it causing great agony or mental distress. That is just a small account from my own experience of how we could have to discard everything at any time.

The main point of the practices that are being explained here is the need to reduce strong attachment and grasping at our own body, resources, wealth, fame and so forth. If one contemplates these points now, to that extent it can definitely help at the time of death, for example. When separation is imminent, it will help to relieve mental agony and distress, and while physically we might experience some discomfort of pain and so forth, mentally we can remain calm with a sense of joy.

2.1.2.2.2.2. *Praise and criticism do not harm or benefit*

21. *If there are others who criticise one
Then why be happy when one is praised?
If there are others who praise one
Then why be unhappy if one is criticised?*

The commentary explains the meaning as follows:

It is unsuitable to have attachment and anger for praise and criticism. What does one have to be happy about when one is praised directly, if one is secretly criticised by someone else, as there is interference to that happiness? What does one have to be unhappy about if one is criticised, when there is someone by whom one is praised?

As one does not become high or low through praise or criticism, one should abandon attachment and hate towards them.

These are very significant points for our practice as a means to overcome the eight worldly concerns.¹ If one is obsessed with the eight worldly concerns, one will be happy when praised, and unhappy when criticised. If one has worldly concerns of feeling glad when one is praised, and feeling unhappy at the slightest criticism, then that will cause much mental distress and angst. Therefore, as explained here, *it is unsuitable to have attachment and anger for praise and criticism*.

What does one have to be happy about when one is praised directly, if one is secretly criticised by someone else, is a really significant point to consider. Even though one may be praised directly by some, there are others who may secretly or indirectly criticise oneself. Thus, as a way to not become too attached to any praise one hears, it is good to remind oneself, "Oh, I might be offered praise now, but there are, of course, others who will be criticising me. So I shouldn't let that praise affect me too much". Likewise when one is criticised one can think, "Oh well, there are others who also indirectly praise me!"

¹ Ed: Gain and loss; praise and criticism; fame and notoriety; happiness and suffering.

This kind of thinking prevents criticism from weighing too heavily on one's mind, and having a negative impact.

As also mentioned many times in the past, when one is inclined to practise the mind training teachings to reverse the eight worldly concerns, one needs to practise an attitude of not being happy when praised, and happy when one is criticised. When one is able to transform our immediate responses to these kinds of attitudes, one will have a more stable mind, which will not be easily influenced by the slightest praise or criticism.

This is very practical advice. If someone criticises us we think, "OK, they might criticise me, but that's fine as there are others who praise me. So I shouldn't be too worried about the criticism, and not take it too personally". And if one is praised too much then one should also remember that criticism and the faults that one might engage in if one develops pride. More specifically, when one is praised then that can cause elation and happiness and then one develops strong attachment to that feeling, which is how praise can induce attachment. Whereas when one hears criticism, that can cause the mind to feel unhappy, and due to that unhappy state of mind, anger can arise.

Of course I have discussed these points many times in previous teachings, however I really want you to reflect on them. If one is inclined to put the Dharma into practice, then when one previously liked praise and disliked criticism, one needs to change that. The mind training teachings explain how to equalise these worldly concerns, and then change one's attitude to disliking praise and liking criticism. If one can reach that level of liking criticism and disliking praise, then one has entered the ranks of real Dharma practitioners.

As the lam rim teachings mention, a good Dharma practitioner is someone who has no concern for the worldly dharmas. Through training the mind, one can slowly transform one's attitude towards praise and criticism. From having once sought praise and so forth, and been overly attached to that, one reaches a point where, rather than disliking criticism, one will like it, and then use that for further development and so forth. When one trains one's mind, it is possible to achieve that transformation. So we need to incorporate these practices in our daily life.

Of course, as I have mentioned previously, these are not very profound or subtle points, and they can be easily understood just by reading the text. However, the reason why I take time to emphasise these points, and explain them a little bit further, is to encourage you to put them into practice. That's my intention.

2.1.2.3. THE FAULTS OF DISTRACTIONS

This is sub-divided into two:

2.1.2.3.1. Since it is difficult to be associated with the childish, one should not be attached to their distractions

2.1.2.3.2. Stating supporting quotes

you know, is a good and sincere person, and very hard working. What we can do at this critical time is to generate a mind of love and compassion for him, rely on a powerful practice and dedicate it to the success of his surgery, so that he becomes well and strong again both physically and mentally, and that he continuously has the opportunity to engage in Dharma practice. This is how we can dedicate our prayers for him.

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

*Transcript prepared by Bernii Wright
Edit 1 by Adair Bunnett
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Edited Version*

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We'll conclude the teaching session here and dedicate our Tara Praises to John Frigo who is now undergoing, or has just undergone, major surgery. John Frigo, as many of

Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

27 October 2015

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

Let us now generate the bodhicitta motivation for receiving the teachings along these lines:

For the sake of all mother sentient beings, in order to liberate them from all suffering and lead them to the ultimate state of happiness, I need to achieve enlightenment myself. So for that purpose I will engage in listening to the Mahayana teachings and put them into practice well.

2.1.2.3. THE FAULTS OF DISTRACTIONS

This is divided into two:

2.1.2.3.1. Since it is difficult to be associated with the childish, one should not be attached to their distractions

2.1.2.3.2. Stating supporting quotes

2.1.2.3.1. Since it is difficult to be associated with the childish, one should not be attached to their distractions

The verse reads:

22. *Sentient beings have many wishes,
That even the conquerors cannot satisfy.
What need is there to mention someone inferior
Like oneself?
Therefore, give up worldly thoughts.*

The commentary explains the meaning as follows:

One cannot fulfil the various wishes of sentient beings. If even the conquerors cannot fulfil their wishes with their diverse enlightened activities, then what need is there to mention someone inferior like oneself who does not know their thoughts? Therefore, give up the thought of associating with worldly people.

The commentary explains how worldly friends cannot be relied upon. They have childish wishes, and as their minds are unstable and change all the time, their wishes also change all the time. The point here is that, because their minds are not easily satisfied, they cannot actually fulfil their wishes.

The commentary explains, *one cannot fulfil the various wishes of sentient beings. If even the conquerors cannot fulfil their wishes with their diverse enlightened activities, then what need is there to mention someone inferior like oneself who does not know their thoughts?* As worldly beings only have worldly concerns, such as attachment to the body, possessions, wealth and friends etc., it becomes very difficult to associate with them, and to try to please them. Whilst it is very difficult to fulfil their wishes, they in turn obstruct one from engaging in virtuous activities. The commentary's resolution to this is, *therefore, give up the thought of associating with worldly people.*

When one resolves to go into isolation as a way of engaging in virtuous practice, one needs to do so with a deep sense of disenchantment with the worldly concerns of worldly beings. As just mentioned, the concerns of worldly beings revolve around trying to please one's relatives and friends, acquiring possessions, status, wealth, attachment to the body etc. These are their main concerns.

The emphasis here is to strongly recognise the pointlessness of relying on childish beings: one cannot benefit them by fulfilling their worldly wishes, and it can harm oneself. If this understanding can be deeply established, then when one actually resolves to go into isolation, then there is no danger of turning back. Conversely, if one does not have this deep sense of disenchantment with worldly concerns, then while one may like being in isolation, at times it becomes a bit difficult. Then one may consider coming out of isolation and associating with worldly beings again out of attachment.

Going into isolation and fully engaging in meditation practice is really the way of a pure Dharma practitioner. While it is not easy to leave everything behind and go into isolation to fully focus on practise, generating such a wish and aspiring to do so is very beneficial. Even people from ordinary walks of life have shared with me the fact that they are a bit weary of the everyday concerns of work etc. They have told me that they'd like to leave everything behind and go somewhere where there are no phones, no business agendas or appointments, and no one to hassle them, and that just going to an isolated quiet place would be really nice. Of course even though this isn't possible for them in their present situation, it is something they find very attractive. When one wishes to do this for the purpose of Dharma, and all the conducive conditions come together, then it becomes a very meaningful thing to do.

By reflecting on the great advantages of being able to practise wholeheartedly and virtuously in isolation, even if one does not have the capacity to do it right now, one should make strong aspirations and prayers that one may be able to do so in the future. That will leave a very good imprint on one's mind so that even if it is not possible in this life, it lays the foundations for one to acquire all the necessary conditions to practise in isolation in future lives. There will be a time when all the necessary conditions come together for one to actually go into isolation.

One needs to understand the great significance of making aspirational prayers. The teachings state that when aspirational prayers are made deeply from one's heart, the content of that prayer can definitely materialise in the future.

The next verse continues to explain why the childish are not reliable and why they are difficult to associate with.

The verse reads:

23. *They criticise those who do not have gain
And are unpleasant to those with gain.
How can one be made happy by them
Who are naturally difficult to associate with?*

Here Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

They criticise and put down those sentient beings that have not found gain, saying, "They have no merits." Those who have gain they criticise, saying, "They practise wrong livelihood". As they are difficult to associate with, how can one be made happy by the childish? As one cannot, one should not associate.

We would recognise what the commentary is presenting here! People who associate with others who are less fortunate or less successful than themselves, criticise them for having less wealth than is seemingly suitable. They say, 'Oh, how unlucky', or 'They are good-for-nothings' etc. However when others do have significant wealth they are again criticised, and people say for example, 'They must have cheated to get what they have' or 'They probably got that wealth through devious means'. These are the very worldly companions we associate with, and this is how they either look down upon others or scorn them.

The commentary points out, *they criticise and put down those sentient beings that have not found gain, saying, "They have no merits,"* and so forth. *Those who have gain they criticise, saying, "They practise wrong livelihood".* Therefore, *as they are difficult to associate with, how can one be made happy by the childish?* This implies that as one cannot be made happy by those who have childish and worldly concerns, *one should not associate with them.*

2.1.2.3.2. Stating supporting quotes

This next part is from the sutras.

The verse reads:

24. *As the childish are not happy
If their purpose is not fulfilled,
Those gone thus teach:
Do not be friends with any of them.*

The commentary explains:

Those gone thus teach that as the childish are unhappy if their purpose is not fulfilled, which is more important to them than anything else, one should not associate and befriend them.

The ones gone thus, meaning the buddhas, taught that *as the childish are unhappy if their purpose is not fulfilled, which for them is more important than anything else, one should thus not associate and befriend them.* That is what the Buddha had advised.

An example from the *Sutra of the Moonlight Lamp* is quoted:

Ordinary individuals do not have friends;
Even if one says words endowed with
Dharma;
They do not believe and show anger and hate;
These are the actions of the childish.

Further,

Although one relates well with the childish for
a long time,
One can say that later they will become
unfriendly and disagreeable,
Having understood the causes of the childish,
The skilled do not rely on the childish.

This is quite easy to understand so there is no need for further explanations.

2.1.2.4. THE BENEFITS OF RELYING ON ISOLATION

This is further subdivided into five:

- 2.1.2.4.1. Distinction of company
- 2.1.2.4.2. Distinction of place
- 2.1.2.4.3. Distinction of livelihood
- 2.1.2.4.4. Distinction of individual discernment
- 2.1.2.4.5. Distinction of non-distraction

2.1.2.4.1. Distinction of company

The commentary starts with the statement:

The skilled who have listened to much Dharma should stop associating with the childish and retire to the forest.

The verse reads:

25. *The animals, birds and trees in the forest
Do not say anything unpleasant.
When shall I abide together with
Those whose company is delightful?*

The commentary then continues:

The animals, birds and trees in the forest do not say anything unpleasant. Generate the wish thinking, "When will I abide together with those whose company is delightful?"

The great advantage of going into isolation with just the company of animals and birds is that there is no worry about them criticising oneself, or saying unpleasant things. Likewise one need have no concern about displeasing them. However with ordinary childish beings one always has to be careful not to offend them. There is always doubt about whether what one has said could be taken the wrong way, or if what one has done has pleased them or not. It seems that apart from some exceptional cases, where people know each other very well, and can communicate without causing any sort of dispute or conflict, most people always have to be careful with each other. Even couples that have been together for many years still seem to need to be careful not to say the wrong thing, which could displease the other.

In contrast, when one lives in isolation amongst the animals and birds, one has no doubts whether one would be pleasing them or not. One can remain comfortable without those kind of doubts or fears, and that in itself is a very delightful atmosphere and conducive environment for one's practice. Thus, one generates this thought as an aspirational prayer, "*When will I abide together with those whose company is delightful?*"

Soon after we settled in India, after the escape, there were many very good monks who resolved to go into isolation and practise. Unfortunately many did not survive for long because of health conditions etc. There was one quite young monk named Kelsang in Dalhousie, who was 25 years old at that time, and a student of the late Geshe Ngawang Dhargyey-la, from whom he received many teachings on the lam rim and so forth. He was so inspired to go into retreat that he would go up into the cold mountainous area; altogether he went up for about 12 years. In winter he would come down for some time because it gets extremely cold, but then he'd go up into isolation again in the summer months, then come down to receive more teachings before going back into the retreat area. In this way he spent a long time in retreat mode.

Every three years he would go up for a period of time and then come out for a while, and then go back again for three years. It was on the fourth time, after he'd come out that I met him in Dharamsala and we had some tea together at a tea stall. There he told me that he was out to receive some rare teachings from His Holiness on the *Six Yogas of Naropa*, and then he was planning to go back into retreat again. He was from Amdo in the eastern part of Tibet. The late Geshe Ngawang Dhargyey-la told me in Varanasi that this monk was of good nature and had very good potential. In later years I didn't hear what happened to him, or know his whereabouts.

Some years ago I visited a serene and isolated place in Tasmania. The area is called Lorinna which is not far from Devonport. There were only two families there and I stayed in one of the cabins, and the family there looked after me. They had a small gumpa where I was staying. I remember there was a beautiful peacock and mountains in the distance, and further down some lakes. It was a very quiet and serene area. I remember the family looking after me had a son called Owen, who would bring me my meals. I stayed there for two weeks and did the White Manjushri retreat. I was a very happy to be alone in a quiet and serene atmosphere. The family would send me tea, hot water and other essentials. Apparently the late Geshe Ngawang Dhargyey had also visited that place, and I heard that a hundred people had come at that time. Anyhow, as described in the text, this is a serene and isolated place that I visited in Tasmania.

This verse describes specifically the distinction of company, so the next verse describes a suitable place.

2.1.2.4.2. *Distinction of place*

This refers to a suitable place.

The verses read:

26. *Abiding in a cave, empty temple
Or abiding at the foot of a tree,
When will I not look back
And be without attachment?*
27. *When shall I abide
Without attachment and act independently
In naturally spacious places
Not held as 'mine'?*

The commentary explains the meaning as follows:

Abide as you desire in a cave, empty temple or at the foot of a tree. Having abandoned the family home and not wishing to take it back, generate the wish thinking, "When shall I abide in solitude without attachment and not look back?"

Generate the wish, thinking, "When can I act independently in naturally wide open places not held by someone else as 'mine', and become unattached to body and enjoyments."

The commentary explains the place or abode is to be in a *cave, empty temple or at the foot of a tree*. The Vinaya has a description of an ideal place for retreat as being in an area where there are plenty of trees.

Resorting to such isolated places is further explained as most ideal where *having abandoned the family home and not wishing to take it back*; one goes into isolation with a sense of resolve and commitment that one will not turn back until one achieves one's goals. One generates the wish,

"when shall I abide in solitude without attachment and not look back?" Here an aspiration is presented: may I be able to abide in such places, along with the following wish, *"When can I act independently in naturally wide open places not held by someone else as 'mine', and become unattached to body and enjoyments."* This again refers to leaving aside all worldly pleasures—attachment to one's body, wealth, relatives and friends etc.—and going into isolation with only the intention to engage in practice. It's good for one to read these lines periodically and generate this aspiration in one's mind.

First, the text describes the suitable company to be found in isolation, followed by the suitable place for one's practice in isolation. The next verse explains the distinction of livelihood—which is the type of livelihood one must rely upon. We can see that all of these are the means to practise less desire and contentment.

2.1.2.4.3. *Distinction of livelihood*

The verse reads:

28. *When will I abide without fear,
Despite not hiding my body,
With as little as a begging bowl,
Wearing clothes unneeded by anyone else.*

The commentary explains the meaning as follows:

Generate the wish thinking, "When will I abide without fear of robbers though not hiding this body in an inaccessible abode where there's no cause to be robbed, having only an earthen bowl, a little incomplete food and wearing clothes discarded by others?" Meditate on this again and again and also put it into practise.

This advice would be for fully ordained monks as it refers to, *having only an earthen bowl*, which is the simplest form of begging bowl. Other belongings of a fully-ordained monk would be a walking staff and a sieve. Because of their simplicity one can abide in places with no *fear of robbers*, and one does not have to resort to hiding one's body *in an inaccessible abode*, because one's belongings are so meagre there is no fear of robbers in relation to either one's body or possessions, such as the clothing *discarded by others*.

As explained distinctively in the Vinaya, the clothing of a fully-ordained monk is of two types; either clothes discarded by others, already used and old, and thrown away; or robes which have already been used by others. In either case they are very simple, not new or fancy clothes. With these meagre belongings, which are not valuable, one can reside in isolation without any sense of fear that robbers could come and take things away from oneself. Naturally one would abide in a very relaxed atmosphere without such fears.

As the advice here is about livelihood, it might be directed to the livelihood of going into isolation as a fully-ordained monk. The personal instruction is to live a life with contentment and few desires. We can see the value of having contentment and how having less desire would be a very relaxed and conducive way of living.

After finding an ideal, conducive place in relation to one's company, the place itself, and livelihood, one needs to resolve to meditate on this again and again, and put it into practice.

This advice is quite suitable for someone with a male form because maybe there would be less fear about going out into the wilderness alone. As a woman one might be a bit more hesitant, and one needs to be more careful in how to go about it. In the past I remember an American nun called Thubten Pemo who wanted to go up into a cave, and live in isolation. But she said she needed someone not too far away to help her. Which monk could go and serve her? How could monks decide that anyway? So that was difficult for her.

In either case, male or female, one must resort to strong determination to go out in the wilderness. That definitely requires courage. Without courage I think it would be very difficult to resolve to do it.

2.1.2.4.4. *Distinction of individual discernment*

This is subdivided into two:

2.1.2.4.4.1. Individually discerning the antidote against attachment to the body

2.1.2.4.4.2. Individually discerning the antidote against attachment to friends and relatives

2.1.2.4.4.1. Individually discerning the antidote against attachment to the body

This is presented in two verses, the first reads:

29. *Having visited the cemetery,
When will I equalise
My body with the bones of others,
As being subject to disintegration?*

The commentary explains the meaning:

Bringing to mind the impermanence of the body: Having visited the cemetery make prayers thinking, "When will my body equal the corpse and bones of those others that are subject to disintegration?"

Generate the recognition of decay as explained in the *Mother of Conqueror Sutras*.

This verse presents one of the best methods to overcome attachment to one's body—to go into cemeteries and observe the corpses as a reminder of what one's own body will eventually become. The only difference between the corpse you see there and your own body is that you happen to be living now. When death comes one's body will be no different to the state of the corpse's body one sees in the cemetery. By relating to the corpses, *bringing to mind the impermanence of the body, having visited the cemetery*, one resolves to think, "When will my body equal the corpse and bones of those others that are subject to disintegration?" and contemplate in this way.

One will generate the recognition of decay as explained in the *Mother of Conqueror Sutras*, refers to eight different ways of meditating on the imperfections of the objects, such as body. Look up the eight different methods yourselves; I've presented them in earlier teachings. Amongst the eight there are those who are attached to the body's shape, then one meditates on the decomposition or disintegration of the body's shape. Then for those who are attracted to the colour of the body, meditating specifically on the change of the corpses' colour etc. In this way the eight specific types of meditations unfold.

The next verse reads:

30. *Also, this very body of mine
Will cause even the coyotes
To stay away from it with its stink.
It will come like this.*

The commentary explains the meaning as follows:

Regarding generating the recognition of the impure body, also this very body of mine will cause even the coyotes, which crave the impure, to want to stay away from it and its stink of decay. Equalise your body with the corpse in the cemetery, thinking, "It will come definitely like this, it is its nature."

Here the commentary emphasises the impurity of that body to which one is so attached. The way to reduce this strong attachment is to think, *this very body of mine will cause even the coyotes, which crave the impure, to want to stay away from it and its stink of decay*. So even wild animals like coyotes and animals that normally devour corpses would be repulsed and not approach the corpse due to the stench and decay of putrefaction. One's own body is in that same nature. The only thing keeping our body fresh and lustrous now is the fact that it has a consciousness in it. But once the consciousness leaves, it is only a matter of days before one's own body is the same as explained here. One should resolve that it will definitely occur like this; it is its nature. The personal instruction here is recognising the means to overcome attachment to our body because often we succumb to strong attachment to it.

2.1.2.4.4.2. Individually discerning the antidote against attachment to friends and relatives

This is subdivided into three:

2.1.2.4.4.2.1. It is unsuitable to be attached to friends and relatives

2.1.2.4.4.2.2. The reason for that

2.1.2.4.4.2.3. Thinking of oneself as a guest that stays each day in a different place

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

3 November 2015

There was no teaching on this date.

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