



Bodhicharya

AWAKEN THE HEART BY OPENING THE MIND

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Lessening the Attachment to Our Body
In Order to Accumulate More Positive Actions
5th Chapter, Stanzas 59-70



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Teachings on the Bodhicharyavatara for the Bodhicharya Online Shedra

So now we come to stanza number 59 of the fifth chapter of the Bodhicharyavatara. So we talked about three *shilas* or three disciplines. First - refraining from doing negative things. Second - accumulating more and more positive actions. And third - to work for the benefit of sentient beings.

So we have come to the second point and this second point has two sections. One is – first, in order that we do lots of positive things, we need to lessen our over attachment to our body. And then the second is on how to accumulate more positive actions and positive deeds.

So the first one is rather long - it's from stanza number 59 to stanza number 70. I will read it through. I [don't] think the words need too much explanation. Then I will try to integrate what I understand from it.

This is not saying that we should not care for ourselves, or for our body - it does not say that we should not take care of our body. What it means to say is that, we should not just become a slave to the desires or greed (rather than the needs) of our body. I think it is sometimes said:

“Our body is a very good servant, but a very bad master.”

So if we give in to all the desires of our body then that will make us slaves of our bodies and then we [will have to] toil all of our lives in order to satisfy the wishes and desires and attachments of our body. And at the end, we have to leave - we have to let go of the body. So we will never really be benefited at all. So therefore, we need to think [along] these lines. It says,

*If, O mind, you will not be aggrieved,
When vultures with their love of flesh
Are tugging at this body all around,
Why are you so besotted with it now? [59]*

The meaning [here is] that with death, the dead bodies are sometimes taken by birds and [other beings]. In India you can see dead bodies out in the cemetery places or other places that are being eaten by vultures and other animals. Because after you are dead, then the body is not yours. It's bound to be rotten - it's useless. So,

*Why, O mind, do you protect this body,
Taking it to be your own?
You and it are each a separate entity;
How ever can it be of use to you? [60]*

*Why, O foolish mind,
Don't you appropriate a clean form carved in wood?
How is it fit to guard
An unclean engine for the making of impurity? [61]*

*First, with mind's imagination,
Shed the covering of skin,
And with the blade of wisdom, strip
The flesh from off the bony frame. [62]*

*And when you have divided all the bones,
And searched right down amid the very marrow,
You yourself should ask the question:
Where is the essential core? [63]*

Because the body is made of cells, if you look into your body [you will find] there is absolutely nothing other than the cells. The brain is also made of cells and cells are made of molecules and molecules are made of other things. So there is really nothing - no core - no real thing that exists on its own.

*If, persisting in the search,
You see no underlying essence,
Why do you protect with such desire
The body that you now possess? [64]*

*Its filth you cannot eat, O mind;
Its blood likewise is not for you to drink;
Its innards, too, unsuitable to suck—
This body, what then will you make of it? [65]*

*And yet it may indeed be kept
As food to feed the vulture and the fox.
The value of this human form
Lies only in the use you make of it. [66]*

So this is really the main thing. When you talk about precious human life, it's nothing - there's nothing precious - except that it's a medium. When you have this life, we can do something for others, we can do something for ourselves, we can do something that brings - that can bring - long term benefit. So therefore it is precious life. So if you don't make it precious, there's nothing precious in it. But it has the potential to be very precious, because we can use it. It has all these capacities to do very good things and also to do very bad things. So we have to use this [opportunity].

*Whatever you may do to guard and keep it,
What will you do when
The ruthless Lord of Death
Will seize and throw it to the dogs and birds? [67]*

So however much possible care we take, we can't keep it forever. It will be lost anyway.

*If servants who cannot be set to work
Are not rewarded with supplies and clothing,
Why do you sustain with such great pains
This body, which, though nourished, will abandon you? [68]*

So if I give everything to my body - if I fulfill all its desires - I don't do anything other than to fulfill its desires - then it's wrong. We need to discipline our body. We need to use this body to do something that's really beneficial and worthwhile - would bring long term benefit for ourselves, life after life after life - long term benefit for others. If we can do that, then we've used this body in the best way - and we need to do that, we need to do that. We should not spoil our body, because it can be easily spoiled. If we give it whatever it wants then we will be doing all sorts of crazy things that would even be very bad for ourselves, our own body, in the long term – we eat too much, we

drink too much, we only sleep too much and it's not good for [our bodies]. We have to exercise it and we have to give it food - but limited [amounts]. [Say] we like chocolate - if we only give chocolate, chocolate, chocolate, after sometime we get very fat - we get high blood pressure - we get diabetes. So even for our own body it's not good. So therefore, we need to discipline our body. We need to give it what is necessary to sustain it to make it healthy, to make it keep [in a] good way - and then use it. Use it - let it work - let it do things that will be very useful - that's the main understanding. Otherwise you kind of worship your body as we talked about [with the] emotions. Giving everything it wants is not good for the body itself and not good for your continuum of mind. And it doesn't bring anything good for you in the long run and even for the body itself it's not good. So therefore,

So pay this body due remuneration,

Give it whatever is necessary to sustain it in a good way. Give it food, give it medicines, give it the right kind of environment to live - food, drink, all sorts of things - exercise and things like that

And then be sure to make it work for you.

We must let the body work for us because if you give it too much freedom then it will ruin you and it will ruin itself [as well]. So therefore, we need to know how to treat this body in the right way and then let it work - and let it work quite hard - because work, especially purposeful work, is good for it and that is what makes the body precious and worthwhile and,

But do not lavish everything

On what will not bring perfect benefit. [69]

So if you make it do dharma practice - you make it work to bring an end of suffering to other people - you make it work so that you can learn things - you can get trained in things - you improve yourself. You accumulate causes and conditions for long term happiness and well being for others as well as yourself and eventually it will bring perfect enlightenment - lasting peace and happiness for yourself and others. Towards that [end] you let your body do things. So therefore –

*Regard your body as a vessel,
A simple boat for going here and there.*

Because you need a boat but you don't need a boat just for having a boat - you need a boat so that you can cross the ocean - cross the river. So therefore use this boat in order to cross the ocean of samsara.

*Make of it a thing that answers every wish
(To bring about the benefit of beings. [70])*

Whatever wishes you have – lasting peace and happiness [for] all sentient beings – [an] end [to] all the sufferings of yourself and others, and great benefits to all beings – towards that end you make your body work. And if you do that then you have made your body a precious human body – a wish fulfilling gem. It is a wish fulfilling gem if you make it a wish fulfilling gem. But if you just let it rule, go wild and out of control, only fulfilling all its desires and whims, then it will become your master and then it will lead you to downfall – for this life and also for lives to come. So therefore we need to know how to use our body in a proper way. So therefore it's not useful, it's not good, to pamper it too much. We cannot [afford to] pamper our body. We have to see this body as an asset that we need to use for our long term benefit and to serve other people - not just to pamper it. I think that's the main understanding. So this is where I will stop. Stanza number 70. Thank you.

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