

The Urban Well

The Mercy Seminar 2026, Term 1

Reading I.6

Santideva, *Bodhicaryavatara*: The Perfection of Meditative Absorption

1 Increasing one's endeavour in this way, one should stabilize the mind in meditative concentration, since a person whose mind is distracted stands between the fangs of the defilements.

2 Distraction does not occur if body and mind are kept sequestered. Therefore, one should renounce the world and disregard distracting thoughts.

3 The world is not truly renounced because of attachment and the thirst for acquisitions and other rewards. Therefore, to renounce these, anyone with sense would reflect as follows:

4 Realizing that one well-attuned to insight through tranquility can destroy the defilements, one should firstly seek tranquility, and that by disregarding one's delight in the world.

5 For what person is it appropriate to be attached to impermanent beings, when that person is impermanent, when a loved one may not be seen again for thousands of lives?

6 Not seeing them one finds no pleasure and cannot remain in meditative concentration, and even when one does see them one is not satisfied. One is tormented by longing, just as before.

7 One does not see things as they really are. One loses the sense of spiritual urgency. One is consumed by that grief, by hankering after contact with the one who is loved.

8 While uselessly preoccupied with that person, life gets shorter by the minute. For a friend who does not last, the everlasting *Dharma* is lost.

9 Someone who associates with fools invariably goes to a bad rebirth, and someone who disassociates himself is not liked. What is gained from contact with fools?

10 They are friends in a moment, enemies the next. At an occasion for being pleased they get angry. The multitude of people are impossible to satisfy.

11 When given good advice they get angry, and they prevent me from taking good advice. If they are not listened to they get angry and go to a bad rebirth.

12 Superiority causes jealousy. Equality causes rivalry. Inferiority causes arrogance. Praise causes intoxication and criticism causes enmity. When could there be any benefit from a fool?

13 Between one fool and another something detrimental is inevitable, such as self-advancement, complaining about others, or conversation about the pleasures of cyclic existence.

14 So in this way contact with a fool brings harm to the other person too. I shall live apart, happily, my mind undefiled.

15 One should flee far from a fool. Once met one should gratify with things that please— not with the intention of intimacy, but rather as would a person who is well disposed but impartial.

16 Taking only what serves the *Dharma*, as the bumble-bee the nectar from the flower, I shall dwell without acquaintance in any place, as if I had not been before.

17 ‘I receive plenty of alms, I am honoured and many ask for me’: one who thinks this will still die and fears death when it comes.

18 Wherever the mind, deluded about happiness, goes for pleasure, a thousand-fold suffering will arise and attend it.

19 Therefore a wise person would not desire it. Fear arises from desire, yet it goes of its own accord. Be firm and bear it impartially.

20 There have been many who have received alms-gifts and many have been popular. It is not known where they have gone with their alms-gifts and popularity.

21 Some detest me. Why am I exultant when praised? Some extol me. Why am I depressed when criticized?

22 Beings have different dispositions. They are not satisfied even by the Conquerors, let alone by the ignorant likes of me. So what is the point of worrying about the world?

23 They blame a person who does not receive alms. They begrudge a person who does. How can there be any pleasure with those who by their nature dwell in misery?

24 The Tathāgatas taught that a fool is a friend to no one, because a fool is not pleased unless his own purpose is served.

25 Joy at the means to one’s own good is simply joy at one’s own good, just as distress at the destruction of material goods is really caused by the loss of comforts.

26 Trees do not bear grudges nor is any effort required to please them. When might I dwell with those who dwell together happily?

27 Staying in an empty shrine, at the foot of a tree, or in caves, when shall I go, free from concern, without looking back?

28 When shall I dwell in vast regions owned by none, in their natural state, taking my rest or wandering as I please?

29 When shall I live free from fear, without protecting my body, a clay bowl my only luxury, in a robe that thieves would not use?

30 When shall I go to the local charnel ground and compare my own rotting body with other corpses?

31 For this body of mine will also turn putrid in that way, its stench so vile even the jackals will not slink near.

32 Even the bits of bone born together in this single body will be scattered apart; how much more so other people one holds dear?

33 Man is born alone and alone he dies. No one else shares his agony. What help are those one loves, creators of obstacles?

34 As one travelling a road takes lodging on his way, so too one on the path of existence takes lodging in each birth.

35 Before four men bear him out from there with the world lamenting him, he should go forth to the forest.

36 Free from acquaintance, free from conflict, he is quite alone in his body. Having already died to the world, he does not grieve as he dies.

37 Neither do any cause him distress, staying close by him, grieving, nor are there any to distract him from the Buddha and the other recollections.

38 Therefore I shall always follow the solitary life, which is delightful and free from strife, leading to the auspicious and calming all distractions.

39 Freed from all other concerns, my own mind in a state of single-pointed thought, I shall apply myself to taming and increasing the meditative concentration of my mind.

40 For passions bring forth misfortunes in this world and the next: through imprisonment, beatings, and dismemberment in this world; in hells and other lower realms in the next.

73 Some who are prey to unwholesome desires, exhausted by a full day's work, on coming home at the end of day just sleep like the dead.

74 Others, on military expeditions, suffer the hardships of living far from home. Though the years pass they do not see the wife and children for whose sake they strive.

75 Deluded by their desires, they sell themselves to get what they never receive. Instead, their life is uselessly wasted doing work for someone else.

82 This exhausting effort is made for all time for the sake of a puny body which inevitably dies, which falls into hells and other low realms.

83 With a fraction even one hundredth of a billionth of that effort one obtains Buddhahood. For those who follow their passions the suffering involved is greater than the suffering on the Path, and there is no Awakening.

84 No sword, no poison, no fire, no precipice, no enemies can compare with the passions when one remembers the torments in hell and other lower realms.

85 Thus one should recoil from sensual desires and cultivate delight in solitude, in tranquil woodlands empty of contention and strife.

86 On delightful rock surfaces cooled by the sandal balm of the moon's rays, stretching wide as palaces, the fortunate pace, fanned by the silent, gentle forest breezes, as they contemplate for the well-being of others.

87 Passing what time one pleases anywhere, in an empty dwelling, at the foot of a tree, or in caves, free from the exhaustion of safeguarding a household, one lives as one pleases, free from care,

88 One's conduct and dwelling are one's own choice. Bound to none, one enjoys that happiness and contentment which even for a king is hard to find.

89 By developing the virtues of solitude in such forms as these, distracted thoughts being calmed, one should now develop the Awakening Mind.

90 At first one should meditate intently on the equality of oneself and others as follows: 'All equally experience suffering and happiness. I should look after them as I do myself.'

91 Just as the body, with its many parts from division into hands and other limbs, should be protected as a single entity, so too should this entire world which is divided, but undivided in its nature to suffer and be happy.

92 Even though suffering in me does not cause distress in the bodies of others, I should nevertheless find their suffering intolerable because of the affection I have for myself,

93 In the same way that, though I cannot experience another's suffering in myself, his suffering is hard for him to bear because of his affection for himself.

94 I should dispel the suffering of others because it is suffering like my own suffering. I should help others too because of their nature as beings, which is like my own being.

104 You may argue: compassion causes us so much suffering, why force it to arise? Yet when one sees how much the world suffers, how can this suffering from compassion be considered great?

105 If the suffering of one ends the suffering of many, then one who has compassion for others and himself must cause that suffering to arise.

106 That is why Supuspacandra, though undergoing torture at the hands of the king, did nothing to prevent his own suffering out of sacrifice for many sufferers.

107 Those who have developed the continuum of their mind in this way, to whom the suffering of others is as important as the things they themselves hold dear, plunge down into the Avici hell as geese into a cluster of lotus blossoms.

108 Those who become oceans of sympathetic joy when living beings are released, surely it is they who achieve fulfilment. What would be the point in a liberation without sweetness?

109 In fact, though acting for the good of others, there is neither intoxication nor dismay, nor desire for the resulting reward, with a thirst solely for the well-being of others.

110 Therefore, just as I protect myself to the last against criticism, let me develop in this way an attitude of protectiveness and of generosity towards others as well.

111 Through habituation there is the understanding of 'I' regarding the drops of sperm and blood of two other people, even though there is in fact no such thing.

112 Why can I not also accept another's body as my self in the same way, since the otherness of my own body has been settled and is not hard to accept?

113 One should acknowledge oneself as having faults and others as oceans of virtues. Then one should meditate on renouncing one's own self-identity and accepting other people.

114 In the same way that the hands and other limbs are loved because they form part of the body, why are embodied creatures not likewise loved because they form part of the universe?

115 In the same way that, with practice, the idea of a self arose towards this, one's own body, though it is without a self, with practice will not the same idea of a self develop towards others too?

116 Through acting like this for the good of others, there is neither intoxication nor dismay. Even after giving oneself as food, there arises no hope for reward.

117 Therefore, in the same way that one desires to protect oneself from affliction, grief, and the like, so an attitude of protectiveness and of compassion should be practiced towards the world.

118 That is why the Protector, Avalokita, empowered even his own name to drive away even such fear as the shyness people have in front of an audience.

119 One should not turn away from difficulty, because by the power of practice the very thing one once feared to hear becomes something without which one has no delight.

120 Whoever longs to rescue quickly both himself and others should practice the supreme mystery: exchange of self and other.

125 ‘If I give, what shall I enjoy?’ Such concern for one’s own welfare is fiendish. ‘If I enjoy, what shall I give?’ Such concern for the welfare of others is divine.

126 By oppressing another for one’s own sake, one is roasted in hells, but by oppressing oneself for the sake of another, one meets with success in everything.

127 A bad rebirth, inferiority, and stupidity result from the mere desire for self-advancement. By transferring that same desire to others, one achieves a good rebirth, honour, and intelligence.

128 By commanding another to one’s own end one attains positions of servitude, whereas by commanding oneself to the benefit of others one attains positions of power.

129 All those who suffer in the world do so because of their desire for their own happiness. All those happy in the world are so because of their desire for the happiness of others.

130 Why say more? Observe this distinction: between the fool who longs for his own advantage and the sage who acts for the advantage of others.

131 For one who fails to exchange his own happiness for the suffering of others, Buddhahood is certainly impossible. How could there even be happiness in cyclic existence?

132 Never mind the next life! Even right here and now the objective of a servant who does not work or of a master who does not pay the wages cannot be achieved.

133 Having forsaken the promotion of one another’s happiness, the fountain of happiness now and in the future, by causing mutual distress, the deluded seize upon gruesome suffering.

134 The calamities which happen in the world, the sufferings and fears, many as they are, they all result from clinging onto the notion of self, so what good is this clinging of mine?

135 If one does not let go of self, one cannot let go of suffering, as one who does not let go of fire cannot let go of burning.

136 Therefore, in order to allay my own suffering and to allay the suffering of others, I devote myself to others and accept them as myself.

137 Hey Mind, make the resolve, ‘I am bound to others’! From now on you must have no other concern than the welfare of all beings.

155 Immeasurable aeons have passed while you sought to realize your own well-being. This mighty effort of yours has led only to suffering.

156 At my entreaty proceed in this way right now without delay. Later you will see the virtues of this, for the word of the Sage is true.

157 This condition, without success, happiness, or Buddhahood, would not have come to pass if you had done this before.

158 Therefore, just as you have formed the notion 'I' regarding others' drops of sperm and blood, you must also develop that notion regarding other people.

165 In brief, whatever malicious act you performed upon others in order to benefit yourself, cause that same predicament to befall yourself for the benefit of living beings.

184 Therefore, without regret, I abandon my body to the benefit of the world. For this reason, though it has many faults, I carry it as a tool for the task.

185 So enough of worldly affairs! I shall follow the learned ones, remembering the teaching on vigilance, warding off sloth and torpor.

186 Therefore, in order to tear down the obscuring veil, I shall concentrate my mind in meditation, constantly on the proper object, dragging it from false paths.