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ŚĀNTIDEVA THE BODHICARYĀVATĀRA



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A new translation by Kate Crosby and Andrew Skilton


OXFORD

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Translated with Introduction and Notes by
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With a General Introduction by
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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 tranquillity can destroy the defilements, one should firstly seek tranquillity, 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. One 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 thousandfold 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's 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.
- 41 For whose sake you respectfully greeted messengers and go-betweens many times; for whose sake you hitherto counted the cost of neither misdeed nor disrepute,
- 42 And even threw yourself into danger and wasted your wealth; on embracing whom you experienced the highest bliss;
- 43 She is nothing but bones, independent and indifferent. Why do you not willingly cuddle them and feel bliss?
- 44 You saw that face before; you tried to lift it up when it was lowered in modesty; or maybe it was covered by a veil and you did not see.
- 45 Now that face is stripped by vultures as if they can no longer bear your frustration. Look at it! Why do you recoil now?

- 46 Why do you not jealously shield what was shielded even from the glancing eyes of others, now that it is being devoured?
- 47 Seeing this pile of meat being devoured by vultures and other scavengers, is what is food for others to be worshipped with garlands, sandalwood scent, and jewellery?
- 48 Although it does not move, you are terrified of a skeleton when it is seen like this. Why have you no fear of it when it moves as if animated by a vampire?
- 49 They produce both spit and shit from the single source of food. You do not want the shit from it. Why are you so fond of drinking the spit?
- 50 Taking no pleasure from silky pillows stuffed with cotton because they do not ooze a dreadful stench, those in love are entranced by filth.
- 51 You had this passion for it when it was covered over, so why dislike it now uncovered? If you have no use for it, why do you rub against the cover?
- 52 If you have no passion for what is foul, why do you embrace another, a cage of bones bound by sinew, smeared with slime and flesh?
- 53 You have plenty of filth of your own. Satisfy yourself with that! Glutton for crap! Forget her, that other pouch of filth!
- 54 You want to see and touch it because you think you like its flesh. How can you desire flesh, which is by its own nature devoid of any consciousness?
- 55 That mind that you desire can be neither seen nor touched, and what can be is not conscious, so why embrace it pointlessly?
- 56 It is no wonder that you do not see that the body of another is formed from filth. That you do not understand your own body to be formed from filth is astonishing!

- 57 Aside from the delicate lotus, born in muck, opening up in the rays of a cloudless sun, what is the pleasure in a cage of crap for a mind addicted to filth?
- 58 If you do not want to touch something such as soil because it is smeared with excrement, how can you long to touch the body which excreted it?
- 59 If you have no passion for what is foul, why do you embrace another, born in a field of filth, seeded by filth, nourished by filth?
- 60 Is it that you do not like a dirty worm born in filth because it's only tiny? It must be that you desire a body, likewise born in filth, because it is formed from such a large amount!
- 61 Not only are you not disgusted at your own foulness, you glutton for crap, you yearn for other vats of filth!
- 62 Even the ground is considered impure when pleasant things such as camphor or rice and curries are dripped or spat out onto it.
- 63 If you are not convinced that this is filth even though it is right before your eyes, look at other bodies, too, discarded and gruesome in the charnel ground.
- 64 Great is your fear when the skin has been ripped from it. Knowing this how can you still take delight in that very same thing again?
- 65 Though applied to the body this scent comes from the sandalwood alone, not from anything else. Why are you attracted towards one thing by the scent of something else?
- 66 Surely it is good if its own natural stench prevents passion towards it. Why do people take delight in what is worthless and smear it with scent?
- 67 What if the sandalwood smells good? How does that affect the body? Why are you attracted towards one thing by the scent of something else?

- 68 If, with its long hair and nails, its teeth stained and yellow, bearing blemishes and grime, the naked body is revolting in its natural state,
- 69 Why is such an effort made to dress it like a weapon, for one's own destruction? The world is a confusion of insane people striving to delude themselves.
- 70 Apparently you were horrified when you saw a few corpses in the charnel ground. Yet you delight in your village, which is a charnel-ground thronging with moving corpses.
- 71 Moreover, even though this body is such filth, it is not acquired without a price: the trouble of earning for its sake and torment in hells and other lower realms.
- 72 An infant is not able to earn money. With what can he get pleasure as a young man? His youth is spent in earning. What can an old man do with pleasures of the flesh?
- 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.
- 76 The wives of others who have sold themselves to carry out commissions have to give birth in places like the jungle and scrubland.
- 77 In order to live, it seems, they enter battle at the risk of their lives. For the sake of their pride they enter servitude. They are fools made ridiculous by their passions.
- 78 Some, prey to passion, have limbs cut off. Others are struck by arrows. They are seen being burned to death and slain with spears.

- 79 Understand that a fortune is an unending misfortune with earning and protecting it and the misery of its loss. In their distracted state those whose thoughts are fixed on wealth have no opportunity to find release from the suffering of existence.
- 80 For those prey to passion such misery is abundant, whereas enjoyment is paltry, like snatches at bits of grass made by a beast as it draws a cart.
- 81 For the sake of that snatch of enjoyment which is easy to find even for a beast, this momentary good fortune which is extremely hard to find is lost by one lost to their destiny.
- 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.
- 95 When happiness is liked by me and others equally, what is so special about me that I strive after happiness only for myself?
- 96 When fear and suffering are disliked by me and others equally, what is so special about me that I protect myself and not the other?
- 97 If I give them no protection because their suffering does not afflict me, why do I protect my body against future suffering when it does not afflict me?
- 98 The notion 'it is the same me even then' is a false construction, since it is one person who dies, quite another who is born.
- 99 If you think that it is for the person who has the pain to guard against it, a pain in the foot is not of the hand, so why is the one protected by the other?

- 100 If you argue that, even though this conduct is inappropriate, it proceeds from the sense of self-identity, [our response is that] one should avoid what is inappropriate in respect of self and others as far as one can.
- 101 The continuum of consciousnesses, like a queue, and the combination of constituents, like an army, are not real. The person who experiences suffering does not exist. To whom will that suffering belong?
- 102 Without exception, no sufferings belong to anyone. They must be warded off simply because they are suffering. Why is any limitation put on this?
- 103 If one asks why suffering should be prevented, no one disputes that! If it must be prevented, then all of it must be. If not, then this goes for oneself as for everyone.
- 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 Supuṣpacandra, 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 Avīci 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.
- 11 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.
- 12 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 Though 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 practised 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 practise the supreme mystery: exchange of self and other.
- 121 If even slight danger causes fear because of overfondness for oneself, who would not detest that self like a fear-inspiring enemy?
- 122 One who, wishing to fend off hunger, thirst, and weakness, kills birds, fish and animals, or lurks in wait on the highway,
- 123 One who, motivated by possessions and honour, would even kill his parents, or would take the property of the Three Jewels, who would thereby become fuel in the Avīci hell,
- 124 What wise person would want such a self, protect it, worship it, and not see it as an enemy? Who would treat it with regard?
- 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.
- 138 It is not right to look to one's own good with others' eyes and other senses. It is not right to set in motion one's own good with others' hands and other limbs.
- 139 So having become devoted to others, remove from this body everything you see in it, and use that to benefit others.
- 140 Creating a sense of self in respect of inferiors and others, and a sense of other in oneself, imagine envy and pride with a mind free from false notions!
- 141 He is honoured, not I. I do not receive such alms as he. He is praised. I am criticized. I suffer. He is happy.
- 142 I do chores while he remains at ease. He, it seems, is great in the world. I, it seems, am inferior, without virtues.

- 143 What can be done by one without virtues? Each person has his own virtues. There are those among whom I am the worst. There are those among whom I am the best.
- 144 Such things as the failings in my conduct and views, as result from the power of the defilements, are not in my control. I should be cured as far as possible. I agree even to painful treatment.
- 145 If he cannot cure me, why does he despise me? What use are his qualities to me, when he is the one possessing the qualities?
- 146 He has no compassion for people who stand in the vicious jaws of an evil rebirth. Moreover, out of pride in his virtues he longs to have victory over the learned.
- 147 If he regards himself as being on the same level as someone, he will obtain alms-gifts and honour for himself to increase his own advantage, even at the cost of contention.
- 148 Suppose my virtues were to become apparent to everyone in the world, then no one would even hear of his virtues.
- 149 Were my faults to be concealed there would be worship for me, not for him. Now I receive gifts of alms easily. I am honoured while he is not.
- 150 Delighted we shall watch while at last he is crushed, the object of everyone's ridicule, criticized from all sides.
- 151 Indeed, it seems this wretch even vied with me! Does he have this much learning, wisdom, beauty, good breeding, or wealth?
- 152 Hearing my own virtues being related on all sides in this way, tingling with delight, I shall drink from the fountain of happiness.
- 153 Even if he is given alms we must snatch them from him by force, giving him only enough to live by if he does some work for us.

- 154 We must make him fall from happiness and involve him in continual pain. Because of him we have all suffered the afflictions of cyclic existence hundreds of times.
- 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.
- 159 Acting as the other person, take away from this body every useful thing you see in it, and use that to benefit others.
- 160 'He is well-situated, another badly off. The other is lowly. He is exalted. The other works. He does not.' In this way engender jealousy towards yourself.
- 161 Make yourself fall from happiness and involve yourself in the suffering of others. Saying, 'When does he do anything?', point out his pretence.
- 162 Even if a mistake is made by someone else, on his head alone let it fall, and, even if his error is only minor, inform on him to the 'great sage'.
- 163 Tarnish his reputation with reports of the superior reputes of others and set him to do tasks for people as if he were a despised slave.
- 164 He should not be praised for his chance share of virtues, for he is full of faults. Act so that no one might know of his virtue.

- 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.
- 166 He should be given no encouragement at all which might make him talkative. He should be made to behave like a new bride: modest, timid, and guarded.
- 167 'Do this! Stay like that! You must not do this!' This is how he should be subjugated and punished if he disobeys.
- 168 If, despite being instructed in this way, you do not do it, you it is, Mind, that I shall punish. All faults rest with you.
- 169 Where are you off to? I can see you. I shall knock all the insolence out of you. Things were different before, when I was ruined by you.
- 170 Give up now any hope that you may still get your own way. Unworried as you are by repeated molestation, I have sold you to others!
- 171 If I do not give you away joyfully to living beings, you will hand me over to the guards of hell. There is no doubt.
- 172 Long have I been tormented, handed over by you in that way many times. Recalling those iniquities I shall strike you down, you slave to your own wants.
- 173 If you are pleased with yourself you should take no pleasure in yourself. If the self needs protection it is inappropriate to protect it.
- 174 The more this body is protected, the more fragile it becomes, the more it degenerates.
- 175 And when it has degenerated in this way, even the entire wealth-bearing earth is not adequate to fulfil its longings. So, who will grant its desire?
- 176 One who longs for the impossible is tormented and his hopes are shattered. Whereas, for one who does not hope for anything, there is fulfilment unimpaired.

- 177 Therefore do not give rein to the ever increasing desires of the body. It is really good not to take something when one wants it.
- 178 This ghastly impure form, which is devoid of motion and is impelled by another, is to end up lost in ashes. Why do I cling to it?
- 179 What do I want with this contraption, whether it is dead or alive? What is so special about its clay and other elements? Hah! You do not violate your identification of it as yourself!
- 180 One partial to the body earns suffering to no purpose. What purpose has hostility or kindness for something equal to a block of wood?
- 181 Whether protected by me in this way, or devoured by vultures and other scavengers, it feels neither affection nor dislike. Why do I create affection for it?
- 182 At its ill-treatment, rage; at its worship, pleasure; if it knows neither for itself, for whose sake my exertion?
- 183 Those who are fond of this body are said to be my friends. Why are those who are fond of their own body not also dear to me?
- 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.