

Bodhicharyāvatāra

བྱང་ཆུབ་སེམས་བའི་སྨོན་པ་ལ་འདུག་པ།

by Venerable Lama Gelong Sangyay Tendzin

Session ONE

November 7, 2020

Tashi deleg! ...

First of all, let me tell you how happy I am to have this opportunity to see you today and even more so, to be able to share the precious Dharma with you again.

To start with, I wish to express my heartfelt welcome and warm greetings to each and every one of you. Let us make strong wishes for our good health, both physical and mental.

This year has been a year of major shift for most of us, challenging us to adopt new ways to function both physically, socially, as well as spiritually.

The positive aspect of this shift, is that it calls for us to reconsider the core values in our existence and bring us to be more conscious of the way we use our body, speech and mind... with renewed and more meaningful sense of respect.

Simultaneously from time to time, we might experience mixed feelings : our spontaneous compassionate attitude to the current suffering created by the pandemic is often challenged, leading to a sense of distress. These feelings are even reinforced by the increasing violence that takes place all over the world. It is difficult to keep the head above the water, so to say.

To clarify such mixed feeling is only feasible by keeping calm and clear through applying the dharma teachings that we have received so far and bring our compassion to the level of Bodhicitta.

That brings us to the topic of this webinar as the most comprehensive yet accessible method to do so: The study and practice of བྱང་འདུག་, the *Bodhicharyāvatāra* composed by Shantideva.

Time is a major factor. Let-us therefore make the most of it and go to the essential.

I am asking all of you to abide quietly and within your mind, turn to the Refuge and develop the resolve to achieve enlightenment for the benefit of all...

Having done so, let us offer the Refuge with most exquisite limitless mandala and request teaching from the heart.

✓ ...meditation

As I was requested for quite some time by several members of our Sangha, I cannot delay anymore to engage such an important topic. Far from considering possessing

the qualities needed to explain such profound scripture, I make the prayer that my pure intention will not wane but remain clear and stable.

Through the blessings of the refuge and that of my Guru in particular, may this humble endeavour reach the heart of the Victorious Ones.
May they guide my words as I will do my very best to share the ornament of explanations given by eminent masters.

To come across such teachings is rare and magnificent. So please develop this awareness and consider the merit that it took you to come across such eminent text.

Having done so, generate a most positive and sacred outlook.

✓ ...meditation

The *Bodhicharyāvatāra*, is nowadays the most accessible, yet profound exposition of the *Madhyamaka* philosophy.

This philosophy is based on the Mahayana Vehicle given by Lord Buddha Sakyamuni during his Second Turning of the Dharma Wheel at the Vulture Peak Mountain, near Rājagriha in Northern India.

More precisely, these teachings are recorded as the *Prajnaparamita Sutras*.

The tenets of this philosophy were collected by *Nagarjuna* and further elucidated by his followers *Āryadeva*, *Buddhapālita*, *Bhāvaviveka* and *Chandrakirti*.

Let's mention here some essential texts that one may wish to access in order to deepen one's understanding and practice of the Middle Way (*Madhyamaka*).

- The « *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* » - "Fundamental Verses on the Middle Way", is the foundational text of the *Madhyamaka* composed by *Nāgārjuna* in the late second century. This scripture is widely regarded as the most influential text of Buddhist philosophy.
- The « *Satakastrakarikanāma* » - « The (Four) Hundred Stanzas treatise » written by *Aryadeva* is a most famous commentary on *Nagarjuna's* Treatise that explains the paths associated with conventional truths. There are further explanations of this text but it would be presumptuous to mention these at this time.
- The « *Mādhyamakavatara* » is an accessible text by *Chandrakirti* with a commentary by *Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse Rinpoche*.

The Buddha taught that ignorance lies at the root of all suffering. This ignorance is not merely a lack of understanding as we would usually see it. Instead, ignorance is to be viewed as a misconception of how things exist and most importantly of how the self exists.

We know from previous teachings on the Bardo of dying and the Bardo of Dharmata, that after death, from not recognising the nature of our mind by acknowledging its luminous manifestations, we process through the bardo of becoming.

Once reborn, due to karmic latencies, our misconception fabricates a self which is an exaggeration of what exists. Clinging to it, we associate with friends, positions and surroundings that we imagine will bring happiness to this fabricated self.

Anything that acts as an obstacle becomes a source of frustration. We suffer because we are affected by desire and anger and experience the effects of the actions that we continually perform under the influence of these recurring conflicting emotions.

In contrast with an Arhat of Hinayana school of Buddhism who has secured his own liberation from the misery of cyclic existence, a Bodhisattva comes into being with the development of the Awakening Mind, i.e., the purely altruistic wish to achieve the state of a Buddha.

Mahayana Buddhist practitioners, followers of the Nalanda tradition, study and practice the advices given by the great master Shantideva in his "*Bodhicharyāvatāra*".

In this respect, His Holiness the Dalai Lama said that if He has any understanding of compassion and the practice of the bodhisattva path, it is entirely based on this text.

More about the author:

Shantideva was born in the 8th century in the southern country of Saurashtra (a peninsular region of Gujarat, located on the Arabian Sea coast). He was the son of the king Kalyanavarma, known as prince Shantivarman.

From his youth he was very devoted to the past Buddhas and held monastics in profound respect. He was a great benefactor to all regardless to their social status: masters and servants, sick, and destitute.

With an exceptional motivation aiming solely at enlightenment, he cultivated expertise in every form of art and science.

One day, he became acquainted with a particular ascetic from whom he obtained the Manjugosha sadhana (འཇམ་དབུ་མོའི་སྐྱེས་ཐབས།). A sadhana he practiced steadily until he had a vision of the yidam deity.

When his father the king passed away, a great throne made of most precious materials was set in place so that the royal power should be conferred on him. However, in his dreams that night, the prince saw Manjughosha sitting on this throne.

Manjughosha spoke to him saying:

"My dear and only son, this is my throne, And I Manjushri am your spiritual guide. It is not right that you and I should take an equal place and sit upon the same seat."

As he woke up, he understood that it would be wrong for him to assume the kingship. Feeling no desire for leadership nor for wealth, he departed and entered the monastery of Nalanda, where he received ordination from Jinadeva, the abbot of its five hundred pandits.

From then on, he was called Shantideva.

Would one question Shantideva's ability to compose such great a commentary as the Bodhicharyavatara, it is perfectly so. Why? Because Shantideva possessed perfectly the three qualifications necessary for composing shastras:

- The perfect realisation of ultimate reality;
- The vision of his yidam deity; and,
- Complete knowledge of the five sciences.

An overview of the text:

First the language:

The original language chosen by the author is Sanskrit. According to tradition, amongst the 340 languages existing at that time, Sanskrit was the foremost of the four canonical languages used in Ancient India.

It was the language of the gods. The other three were Prakrit, Apabhramsa and Pishachi.

The subject:

From the point of view of the mindset, the Bodhicharyavatara teaches the generation of Bodhicitta;

As spiritual training to achieve this, it teaches extensively how to train in the six Paramitas.

Shantideva wrote three texts on the subject: the Sutrashasamucchaya, the Bodhicharyavatara and the Shikshasamucchaya.

Of these, the first is shortenings and not easy to understand; the last is longer and difficult to engage while the Bodhicharyavatara is most comprehensive and of medium length.

The scriptural source of these teachings are drawn from the Tripitaka, mainly the sutra section.

The Bodhicharyavatara counts ten chapters teaching about three main points followed by a dedication:

Part One. *The Generation of Bodhichitta Where It Has Not Previously Been Generated* 1. The Excellence and Benefits of Bodhichitta 2. Confession of Negativity 3. Taking Hold of Bodhichitta

Part Two. *How to Prevent Bodhichitta from Weakening Once It Has Been Generated* 4. Carefulness 5. Vigilant Introspection 6. Patience

Part Three. *How Bodhichitta Is to Be Developed and Intensified* 7. Diligence 8. Meditative Concentration 9. Wisdom

Part Four. *Dedication of the Resulting Merit for the Benefit of Others* 10. Dedication

The present Webinar's commitment

Due to the scope of such a prospect, I have been asking that the participants commit themselves to the following three points:

1. To practice steadily the development of your motivation: This implies to establish daily again and again, the Bodhicitta motivation; in its both aspects, relative and ultimate;
2. To commit to read assiduously the Bodhicharyāvatāra text in its entirety, thus getting acquainted with and knowing well its progression;
3. To commit to take notes and study thoroughly chapter by chapter ensuring that one understands each stanza properly in order to ensure correct practice.

Just like the current Dalai Lama Tenzin Gyamtsho, Patrul Rinpoche (the 19th outstanding master -famous as the author of "Words of My Perfect Teacher"-, devoted his whole life to practice and teach the Bodhicharyāvatāra. Although he never composed an extensive commentary on this great work, it is said that during his many journeys through Eastern Tibet, he taught it more than a hundred times, sometimes in detailed courses lasting many months.

Khenchen Kunden (Kunzang Palden), a great scholar of his time, spent most of his early life with His Eminence Patrul Rinpoche and was one of his close disciples. His commentary is a compilation of the extensive notes he took during a six-month teaching given by Patrul Rinpoche at the Dzogchen Monastery.

It is thanks to his extensive commentary called "The Nectar of Manjushri's Speech" that Patrul Rinpoche's teachings on the Bodhicharyāvatāra have been preserved. It has even been said that this commentary is the commentary that Patrul Rinpoche so often presented to students, but never actually wrote.

I feel that enough information has been delivered today. Please review it and keep to your heart its essential points. I will be most happy to answer any question you might have at this point.

Let us dedicate this session to the attainment of Buddhahood.
May you be blessed by Lord Buddha himself; now and in all lives to come.

TASHI DELEG!

