

Bodhicaryâvatâra

བླ་མ་རྣམས་ཀྱི་མཚན་མོ་ལྷན་དུ་བཟོ་བའི་སྒྲིག་འཛུགས་ལྟར་། །

Study Group with Venerable Lama Sangyay Tendzin

Session 2 - November 21, 2020

Good morning,

I pray that the current meeting will benefit each of us as well as all sentient beings.

For this to be more than mere words, it is essential that we keep to the ethics of sacred Dharma, thus continually thriving to maintain and develop a genuine state of mind and attitude to benefit all living beings caught in the ocean of suffering.

This must become a steady endeavour and the target of our Dharma practice. In this way, not only will we manifest an ocean of merit but also, we can be certain to adopt the motivation of the ocean of the great bodhisattvas and receive their support and blessings. Only then do we possess the certainty to receive this teaching.

Foreword:

The entire text is articulated on the famous Mahayanist quatrain:

May bodhichitta, precious and sublime,

Arise where it has not yet come to be.

And where it has arisen may it never fail,

But grow and increase ever more and more.

In this way, the ten chapters of the treatise are presented into four parts:

1. The first three chapters address the generation of bodhichitta (where it has not previously been aroused);
2. The following three chapters address the prevention of bodhichitta (from weakening once it has been generated);
3. The next three chapters address the increase of bodhichitta that has been stabilised; and,
4. The last concluding chapter is the dedication of the resultant merit for the benefit of others.

5.

REFUGE

MANDALA

REQUEST for Teachings

Lama's invocation

Generate a positive mind

MEDITATION

Explanation of The Title

It is not a waste of time to develop further understanding of the full title given by Shantideva

Although I will not present here extensive explanations you may find in commentaries, I will nevertheless provide you with some basic yet sufficient understanding of what Shantideva meant in his title.

”Bodhisattva caryâ avatâra”, the full title in Sanskrit, has been translated into the best Tibetan, as “བྱེད་པ་ཚུ་བྱ་བ་ལ་མཚན་པར་བྱེད་པ་ལ་རྒྱུ་གཞུང་།”. It can be rendered in English as “Entrance to the Bodhisattvas’ activities”.

Remember that today’s languages do not possess the specific vocabulary to designate spiritual concepts that are not existing in the modern world. Therefore, it is worthy to acquire personal understanding of basic terminologies used in Sanskrit and/or Tibetan.

བྱེད་པ་ཚུ་བྱ་བ། - Bodhi - Enlightenment

བྱེད་པ་། - Purity, indicates that enlightenment involves the cleansing away of all that is to be discarded, namely, the two veils together with their habitual tendencies. What are these two veils? Emotional and cognitional obscurations.

ཚུ་བྱ། - Accomplishment, indicates that enlightenment also involves the assimilation of all that is to be realised, namely, the qualities of primordial wisdom.

མཚན་པར་བྱ། - Sattva - Heroes, indicates that those who strive for such a goal have great courage and do not shy away from actions that are difficult to perform, on account of which they are referred to as “heroic beings”. As mentioned in the Sutralankara: “*The Bodhisattvas are unalarmed by pain or evil friends or hearing the deep teachings*”.

མྱེད་པ་ལ་རྒྱུ་གཞུང་། - Activities, with regard to the word the great Master Longchenpa said: The Buddha’s children must be trained in everything, Especially the six transcendent perfections.

Every Bodhisattva activity is included within the six transcendent perfections.

རྒྱུ་གཞུང་། - Entrance, the text is itself a perfect and unmistakable “entrance” to such activities.

It is adapted to the training of beginners and provides a clear presentation of the ways and methods by which, the conduct of Bodhisattvas is to be practiced.

The title fully reflects the subject of the treatise in a way, that can be understood by the three types of students:

- A person of superior capacity, merely on seeing it, will have a grasp of the entire message of the text.
- A person of moderate capacity will understand its general substance.
- A person of only modest ability will be able to find the volume easily, just as one can identify a medicine by looking at the label on the bottle.

We could wonder why titles are given in Sanskrit. There are several reasons for this that we might consider:

- First, because India was the pure wellspring of the Dharma, the Sanskrit title inspires the reader with confidence in the perfect authenticity of the text.
- Second, all the Buddhas of the three times set forth their Doctrine in Sanskrit, the divine and well-structured tongue. Therefore, if we ourselves pronounce and explain the title in that language, the enunciation itself will act as a vehicle of blessings for our minds.
- Third, since in the ages to come, the Dharma will again be taught in Sanskrit, a predisposition for it is thus imparted to us.
- Finally, given that all the texts have, like this one, their names in Sanskrit, once we appreciate the difficulty even of pronouncing their titles, let alone the

understanding and explaining of their contents, we will be inspired with gratitude toward the ‘translators who made these teachings available to us.

Last time that we met, time was running late, and I did not have the opportunity to review what we went through, let me remind it to you very briefly:

We learned that the main topic of the Bodhicaryâvatâra addresses the core of the Mahayana teachings; that of generating a stable Bodhicitta. As such it is part of the Madhyamaka philosophy expounded by Nagarjuna.

For those interested in deepening their knowledge, I made reference to three important commentaries available in western languages.

We then went through a brief presentation of the author followed by the outline of the text and an overview of the Bodhicaryâvatâra.

The current session, Session Two, is engaging the study of the text and today, the first four stanzas will be explained.

Remember that in Session One we understood that the Bodhicaryâvatâra is composed of Four Parts.

We are now starting the first of these parts.

First Part: The Generation of Bodhichitta Where It Has Not Previously Been Generated

This first part contains three chapters:

- **Chapter ONE: The Benefits of Bodhichitta**
- **Chapter TWO: Openly Admitting Previous Negative Acts**
- **Chapter THREE: Gaining Hold of a Bodhichitta Aim**

Chapter ONE: The Benefits of Bodhichitta

This chapter contains 36 stanzas, which will be now explained in details.

Chapter ONE: Stanza 1

***“Respectfully, I prostrate to the Blissfully Gone endowed with Dharmakaya,
As well as to their offspring and to everyone worthy of prostration.
Let me explain how to engage in the Blissfully Gone offsprings’ code,
Which I’ve compiled and condensed in accord with Buddhas’ words. “***

L1. “Respectfully, I prostrate to the Blissfully Gone endowed with Dharmakaya,

Upon the attainment of buddhahood, enlightenment manifests at three levels, which are known as the three bodies of the Buddha: the Absolute or Truth Body, or Dharmakaya; the Enjoyment Body, or Sambhogakaya; and the Compassionate Emanation Body, or Nirmanakaya.

As stated in the Uttaratantra-shastra, the Dharmakaya should be understood as twofold:

1. The Dharmadhatu utterly unstained; and,
2. The corresponding causes of the same: The teaching in its aspects both profound and vast.

In other words, there is the “Dharma-body” that is the realisation of the ten strengths of a Buddha, and there is the cause of this realisation, the cause that is attuned to it, namely, the “Dharma-body” that is the profound and vast Dharma of transmission in all its categories.

L2. As well as to their offspring and to everyone worthy of prostration.

“Buddha’s offspring” refers to the supreme Jewel of Sangha. It is generally said that the child of the Buddha’s body was his son Rahula. The offspring of his speech are the Shravakas and Pratyekabuddhas. The offspring of his mind are the Bodhisattvas.

In this way, the supreme offspring of the Buddha’s mind are the holders of the lineage of the Conquerors. They have in their possession the treasury of the sublime teaching and protect and care for the entourage of beings who remain to be trained. The Bodhisattvas are the Sangha of the Mahayana.

To these Three Jewels -and not only to them but also to the Shravakas and Pratyekabuddhas, and indeed to anyone superior to him in even a single quality (such as slight seniority in training) or some benefactor- to all who are thus worthy of veneration, all without exception, the author bows down, paying homage with his body, speech, and mind.

As said by Nagarjuna,

*“The writer of a treatise who pays homage to the Buddha
cannot fail to have success,
for he is stimulating faith and interest both,
toward the Buddha and the text itself”.*

L3. Let me explain how to engage in the Blissfully Gone offsprings’ code,

Supreme beings never give up their pledges.

Thus, the purpose of Shantideva’s promise to compose the text is to ensure the completion of his work.

As it is said in the *Prajnadanda* by Nagarjuna:

*“Holy beings do not promise many things.
But if they pledge themselves to some demanding task,
It is as if they carve a picture on a stone:
They do not turn from it though it may cost their lives”.*

L4. Which I’ve compiled and condensed in accord with Buddhas’ words.“

And he will do so “according to the scriptures” so that we may have confidence in it.

Dharmakirti in his *Commentary on Valid Cognition* wrote:

*“The teachings of Buddha we may trust.
For since he is exempt from fault,
There is in him no cause for lies.
Know therefore that the scriptures are exempt from error”.*

Chapter ONE: Stanza 2

I’ve nothing to say here that’s not come before,

***And I lack any skill in the crafting of verse;
Yet, though I lack even the thought to help others,
I've composed this to familiarise my mind.***

L1. *I've nothing to say here that's not come before,*
With regard to the art of composition, Shantideva shows the greatest humility.

L2. *And I lack any skill in the crafting of verse;*
He says that, as far as the art of prosody is concerned, he has no literary skill that might distinguish him above other
For this reason, Shantideva says that in composing the Bodhicaryâvatâra, he does not claim to be of significant help to others. Saying this, he rids himself of intellectual pride regarding the form and meaning of his words.

As observed by the great master **Vibhutichandra**:
*"Within the fold of Buddha's Doctrine,
Many have appeared who were great masters, mighty beings.
But someone to compare with Shantideva,
In wisdom and experience, is nowhere to be found".*

To appreciate this reference, one must know that Panchen **Vibhutichandra** gave these teachings to many great masters of Tibet, including the tantra, empowerments, explanations, and instructions. In particular, he gave the Six Yogas of the Kalachakra tradition known as the Six Limbs Practice of Vajra Yoga which he received from the lineage as well as in a direct vision of **Shavaripa**.

Figuring prominently in the early lineage of the Mahamudra transmission, -see your Ngöndro text on the Guru Yoga-, let us remember that **Shavaripa** was one of the 84 Indian Mahasiddhas, one of the forefathers of the Kagyud Lineage.

L3. *Yet, though I lack even the thought to help others,*
Shantideva rids himself of intellectual pride regarding not only the form but also, the meaning of his words.

L4. *I've composed this to familiarise my mind.*
Why then to engage in this writing? Shantideva says that he has composed his work to meditate upon and habituate himself to the conduct of the Bodhisattvas. I.e, which consists in the motivation of bodhichitta and the practice of the six paramitas.

As said by the master **Chandragomin**:
"Therefore, of the threefold craft of scholars, There may be some uncertainty in discourse and debate, But there's no room for this in commentary".

What is the reason for taking a humble attitude?
It is said that *"On the peak of pride, the water of good qualities does not stay."*

When the mind is puffed up with conceit, it cannot contain the water of the excellent qualities of the Dharma of transmission and realisation. Rather it is liable to be deceived by Mara. While in this state, therefore, even if one composes treatises, they will be of no benefit to others.

Chapter ONE: Stanza 3

For, due to acquaintance with what is constructive,

The force of my belief may increase for a moment, even just through these words.

And if others, equal to myself in fortune, happen to see them, Perhaps they might find them meaningful too.

L1. For, due to acquaintance with what is constructive,

Saying this, Shantideva stirs up a joyful and enthusiastic attitude in his own regard.

L2. The force of my belief may increase for a moment, even just through these words.

By such means, the strength of his faith རྟོན་པ། in the activities of the Bodhisattvas will intensify for a little while, so that he can meditate upon and cultivate virtue.

ཡོད་ཆེ་མཁྱེན་པ། - Confident faith;

དང་བཟང་ཉེན་པ། - Vivid faith; and,

འདོད་པར་འདོད་པ། - Yearning.

It is indeed through continuous meditation and cultivation that bodhichitta is intensified.

L3. And if others, equal to myself in fortune, happen to see them,

Humbling himself once again, he says that other people, with a karmic fortune equal to his, i.e., who are sincere and take an interest in Bodhisattva activities, if ever they chance upon his Bodhicaryâvatâra-, might also rejoice in the ways of the Bodhisattvas and so be happy to engage in them. He thus stirs up an enthusiastic attitude regarding others, telling himself that his work might be of some value to them.

L4. Perhaps they might find them meaningful too.

In this way, Shantideva sets an example and invite others to do so.

Chapter ONE: Stanza 4

Having gained leisure and endowments, so hard to find,

Which can fulfil the wishes of every being,

If, in this lifetime, I don't actualise its benefits,

When later will a perfect endowment with one come?

L1. Having gained this body with leisure and enrichments, so hard to find,

As taught in the Mahamudra Ngöndro, more precisely in the བཞུ་ལྷོ་ལྷོ་གྲོ་རྒྱལ་མཁའ་བཞུ་། - four mind reversers, the first topic is this precious human body endowed with eight freedoms and ten endowments so difficult to obtain.

To be in hell, to be a preta or a beast,

To be a long-lived god or else a wild barbarian,

To have false views, to live in ages when a Buddha has not come,

To have one's faculties impaired—all these 8 are absences of freedom.

As all of us have engaged these practices or will do so as the basis of the Vajrayana Path. There is no need for me to provide further comment currently here.

L2. Which can fulfil the wishes of every being,

Once we have obtained the Refuge, we can achieve the state of a Buddha and fulfil the wish of long-lasting happiness through listening, studying and practicing the Sacred Buddha Dharma.

L3. L4. *If, in this lifetime, I don't actualise its benefits, When later will a perfect endowment with one come?*

This is a reminder of the Laws of Impermanence and Causality

This will be it for today; let us now experience some quietness and dedicate our session to the benefit off all.

