

Bodhicharyāvatāra
བྱང་ལྷན་སེམས་པའི་སྤྱོད་པ་ལ་འདུག་པ།
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Session 6
January 16, 2021

Reading the text that appears on your screen, we take Refuge, develop Bodhicitta, present unlimited Mandala Offering. And request the teachings with a noble state of mind.

Lama invokes the Buddha and the Lineage blessings inviting the guests for the teaching and arouse the noble Bodhicitta Aspiration.

Good morning everyone, I invite you to join me to value the present moment by pursuing our study of the precious Dharma. We are currently about to conclude our study of the Bodhicharyāvatāra - Chapter One, which is comprised of 36 stanzas.

Last session, we completed the stanzas 20 to 30 in which Shantideva used the way of reasoning as a skilful method to demonstrate the importance and benefits of engendering Bodhicitta:

- Chapter 21 to 25 were related to the benefits of engendering the Bodhicitta of intention
- Chapter 27 to 30 addressed the benefits of the Bodhicitta Action.

The next six chapters come as a conclusion of the first chapter to describe the qualities of the noble being that a Bodhisattva truly is.

Stanza 31:

If some consider as worthy of praise
Even someone who's paid back for helping,
What need to mention a bodhisattva,
Who does good without seeking anything in return?

Those who acknowledge and repay the good that others have done to them in the past through the gift of such things as food or money are considered in this world to be worthy of praise.

"Honour and protection stay close by the man who recognizes and repays the favours done to him".

Those who show their gratitude, are protected by the gods themselves, and they possess other great excellent qualities. What then to say of the Bodhisattvas, who do good where no good has been previously done to them and who strive only to achieve the benefit of beings both now and in future lives, without ever being asked? Is there any need to say that they are worthy of offerings and praise?

Stanza 32:

People honour as someone who acts constructively
Someone who gives, for only a short while, merely a morsel of meagre food
In a demeaning manner to a few wandering beings,
Satiating them for half a day.

Here Shantideva shows us in detail how much honour we give to someone of little generosity. To do this, he puts us in situation, analysing the various aspects of the karma of giving of someone supplying food on a regular basis, for example a month or just a day to a restricted group of people.

- This is a limited or inferior object of generosity.
- The period of time in which the act is performed is limited to the time it takes to complete this gift and therefore also inferior.
- The gift itself is also inferior, this is only a little food, and no great gift.
- We may easily imagine too that the act is performed in a disdainful manner, striking and hitting the beneficiaries, and is thus an inferior mode of giving.
- Finally, the benefit itself is inferior for the people in question are nourished for only half a day. Even so, many people in this world will consider such a donor to be worthy of praise and honour. "How virtuous," they will say, "to make such charitable donations!"

Stanza 33:

What need to mention someone who constantly looks to give,
For an eternity of time, the peerless bliss of the Blissfully Gone.
To endless numbers of limited beings,
Fulfilling the wishes of all their minds?

The gift bestowed by the Bodhisattvas, on the other hand, is not limited to just a few, but it addresses all sentient beings, the number of which is infinite and identical to the vastness of space. Also, we could consider that their act of giving is not limited to a certain point in time, such as at a certain occasion. It is far more reaching and long-lasting until the very end of samsara.

Their gift is no meagre pittance given to a beggar, but it is the unsurpassable bliss of buddhahood, and their mode of giving or attitude is marked by great serenity and devotion. Consequently, the benefit involved is not small but thoroughly outstanding, seeing that it is the fulfilment of all wishes that is bestowed continuously and without interruption.

What need then is there to say that the Bodhisattvas are generous benefactors worthy of respect and praise?

Stanza 34:

The Sage has said that if someone generates negative thoughts
Toward a philanthropist offspring of the Triumphant like that,
That person will remain in a joyless realm for as many eons
As the number of negative thoughts that were spent.

The Buddha has said that all those who have evil thoughts in their minds against the Bodhisattvas described above and all those who do as little than to wish that something unfortunate might happen to them (to say nothing of actual physical or verbal aggression), will remain in hell in great torment for aeons equal to the moments of their malice.

And here, a moment is to be understood as the shortest possible unit, corresponding to one sixty-fourth of the time it takes for a strong man to snap his fingers.

Stanza 35:

However, if someone has an extremely clear-minded belief in such persons,
Its fruits will multiply far more than that.
For even in the most acute situations, Triumphant's offspring never will generate anything negative.
Rather, their positive actions naturally increase.

By contrast, when one simply gazes upon the face of a Bodhisattva with an attitude of joy and sincere devotion, the effects are incalculable.

One will have the joy of the gods of Tushita for more kalpas than there are instants of one's gazing.

The outcome is even greater than the result of malevolence:

- Even in times of famine, when there is a lack of clothing and possessions,
- when there is loss of life of human beings and animals,
- when there is disease, harm by negative forces, enemies and spirits,
- in all such terrible conditions, the Bodhisattvas, the offspring of the Buddha, are people for whom bad omens turn to good and for whom adversity becomes a friend.

On the other hand, Bodhisattvas who are without much courage and who are unskilled in means are unable to bear even the slightest difficulties. As it is said: *"When sun is warm and stomach full, You look like a practitioner. When setbacks and hard times befall, You're really very ordinary!"*

Stanza 36:

I prostrate to the bodies of those in whom
The sacred state of mind, the gem, has arisen.
I take safe direction from those sources of bliss
Who join to bliss even those who harm them.

Shantideva pays respectful homage in thought, word, and deed to everyone, whether of high or low condition, in whose heart the precious mind of enlightenment has arisen, i.e., a most sacred state of mind—the wish to dispel all the drawbacks of both existence and peace.

Even when Bodhisattvas are attacked and reviled, it is through the strength of their compassion, bodhichitta, skilful means, and prayers of aspiration, that they forge links that connect their attackers with happiness both in the immediate and ultimate term. And they help them to attain it.

This is illustrated by the story of the sage Kshantivadin and the king Maitribala.

In one of his many previous lifetimes, the Buddha turned away from the householder's life and became a wise ascetic. He was renowned for his many saintly virtues, and especially for his patience and restraint, thus earning the name Kshantivadin, 'the teacher of restraint'. He lived in a forest glade and devoted all his time to spiritual practice.

One day, a king from a nearby realm was out on a trip to a beautiful lake with his entourage of young wives. After indulging in various hedonistic activities, the king was quite drunk and fell asleep while his wives roamed the region picking flowers. The women strayed further and further away from the lake until they reached the dwelling place of Kshantivadin. They were awestruck by his saintly presence. They asked him to teach them, and Kshantivadin proceeded to give a talk on the virtues of modesty, patience, and restraint.

The king woke from his sleep and when he saw that some of his wives had left the lake, he immediately had his servants lead him in the direction they travelled. When he arrived at the ascetic's glade and saw his wives sitting before Kshantivadin, he became filled with a terrible jealous rage. He accused the Bodhisattva of being a hypocrite who pretended he was saintly while coveting his wives. Kshantivadin and the women all tried to explain that his actions were innocent, but the king's rage was impenetrable. He stated that he was going to torture Kshantivadin until he admitted that he was a hypocrite, a fraud, and a false ascetic, and then proceeded to chop Kshantivadin's hand off with a sword. He then chopped off Kshantivadin's arms, nose, ears, and feet as well. Aware of the inevitability of death, the Bodhisattva said nothing to stop him.

When the king was done and began to walk back towards the lake, the earth opened up and swallowed him into a fiery pit. Seeing this, one of the servants was scared that Kshantivadin had cursed the king and started to beg him to spare the innocent people of the kingdom. Kshantivadin explained that he did not cause the earth to swallow the king and that he had no ill will towards him or his people. Kshantivadin said that he only pitied the king's jealous mind because it was going to hurt him more than anyone else. The Bodhisattva then died. Word that the king had slaughtered an innocent ascetic spread throughout the kingdom, and his reputation was destroyed, and his royal line ended.

Shantideva therefore takes refuge in the Bodhisattvas. For they are supreme beings, the source of happiness in this and future lives. Any kind of relationship with them is always beneficial. We should do as Shantideva does. We should make prostrations to the Bodhisattvas, the children of the Buddhas, and take refuge in them.

The principal reason for acquainting oneself with the qualities of those who have bodhichitta in their minds is that one will then confess all the faults of thought, word, and deed that one has formerly committed against the Bodhisattvas. One will refrain from such faults in the future and take the Bodhisattvas as one's refuge. This in effect is what the result should be. On the other hand, simply to know about all this and to explain it to others is of no avail. It is vital to take all this to heart and to meditate on it.

It is generally said that Tibet is the field of the benevolent activity of the noble and compassionate Avalokiteshvara and that Tibetans belong to the lineage of the Mahayana. And overall, there is no one there nowadays who has not received an empowerment. They are consequently Bodhisattvas, worthy of the homage of both gods and humankind, and are thus an exceptional people endowed with many qualities. Indeed they are the Buddhas of the future. Consequently, if one has entertained wrong ideas about them in the past, imputing faults and imperfections to them that they do not have, while denying the qualities that they possess, one should confess this and resolve never to repeat such an action. Henceforth, one should train in pure vision in their regard, pay them respect, and take refuge in them.

It is said in the sutras moreover that, in the age of decadence, Bodhisattvas may make mistakes when they relate with other people. It is therefore important not to dwell on the faults of others, but to train in pure perception of them. It is said, furthermore, that we should revere the Bodhisattvas, imitating the brahmins of India who, taking the moon as their deity, venerate it while it is waxing, but not when it is full. Even if Bodhisattvas do have faults, they will nevertheless become Buddhas. Their faults, after all, are compounded phenomena and will consequently be worn away by dint of practicing the path. Nobody becomes enlightened by being faultless from the beginning. It is therefore said that to avoid dwelling on the defects and faults of others is a most important pith instruction.

This ends the first chapter from the Bodhicharyavatara, called "The Excellence and Benefits of Bodhichitta."

As announced previously, we will engage in a Q&A session to bring clarity where some of you seems to need it.



Q&A Session on Bodhicharyavatara - Chapter One

QUESTION: Session 3, strophe 9

Is the “One Thus Gone” the Buddha?

ANSWER:

Sugata, Tathagata etc.

The One Gone to Bliss, “The One Thus Gone” are commonly used expressions to designate the Buddha.

QUESTION: Session 4, strophe 13

What is the Avici Hell?

ANSWER:

མཐར་མེ - Avicih is the 8th of the hot hells. The Hell of Unending Torment': Here there is the worst pain of all, constant and unwavering. Beings are trapped in a building of blazing hot metal with walls of double or fourfold thickness in which there is no breach. They are indistinguishable from the fire that suffuses and burns them. It is specified in the Description of the Hells that beings who do great harm to persons who have sublime qualities or who kill their parents, or their spiritual teachers will surely burn for an entire kalpa in this Hell. The duration of life in this hell is equal to an intermediate kalpa - 'antahkalpa', a period of time immeasurable in human years.

QUESTION: Session 4, strophe 16

Who is Atisha?

ANSWER:

Lord Atisha is a Grand Kadampa master who brought Dharma back to Tibet in the 11th century after the reign of Langdharma who tried to exterminate Dharma. Mentioned by me many times and we have visited Drolma Lhaxhang.

He was a Bengali Buddhist religious leader and master from the Bengal region. He was one of the major figures in the spread of 11th-century Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhism in Asia and inspired Buddhist thought from Sumatra to Tibet.

Atisha is recognised as one of the greatest figures of classical Buddhism.

His chief disciple, Dromtönpa, was the founder of the Kadampa later supplanted by the Gelugpa tradition in the 14th century, adopting its teachings and absorbing its monasteries.

I invite you to rest for a little while before we dedicate this session to the benefit of all.

May all beings manifest swiftly their true essence of a Buddha.

