

Bodhicharyāvatāra

བྱང་ཆུབ་སེམས་པའི་སྡོད་པ་ལ་འདུག་པ།

by Venerable Lama Gelong Sangyay Tendzin

Session 7

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Q&A Session (Part 2): Bodhicharyavatara - Chapter One

Refuge & Bodhicitta

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Requête d'Enseignements

Good morning,

This session is the continuation of Q& A on the first chapter of the Bodhicharyavatara started two weeks ago. Before pursuing, I want to go back to a question for which, I had little time during the last session.

QUESTION: Who is Atisha?

ANSWER:

Atisha was born in India in A.D 982. He was first initiated and became an adept in the esoteric and practices of Tantra, which were very popular in India at his time. However, although successful he made a decision to renounce the search for siddhis achieved through the tantric practices.

Wishing to develop compassion and selflessness, at the age of thirty, he took Buddhist vows and wishing to study with the master of compassion Dharmakirti (Tib. Serlingpa), he travelled to his abode in the land of Suvarnavdipa (present-day Sumatra).

He stayed there for twelve years, learning, among many other things, the Mind Training practice. Such was Atisha's gratitude to Dharmakirti that he was unable even to hear his name without bursting into tears.

On his return to India, Atisha taught for fifteen years at different monasteries and was recognized as both the most learned and the most personally realized teacher in all India. At that time Tibet had an enormous hunger for true Buddhist teachings due to severe persecution of Buddhism by the King Langdarma. He was invited to teach in Tibet, yet he refused to go.

A few years later, while holding the function of Master of Discipline at the Vikramashila monastery, he concurred to the expulsion of a monk for drinking alcohol as part of a tantric ceremony. The goddess Tara, his Yidam, then appeared to him in a dream and said that he was responsible for the expulsion of a sincere practitioner, and that as penance he should go to Tibet and teach.

At the next invitation he accepted. He had difficulty getting permission to go from the head of Vikramashila, since his prestige in India was so great. Eventually could

go to Tibet only on condition that he would return in three years. However, the need for him and his teaching in Tibet was so great that he never returned but died there twelve years later.

QUESTION: What is a Chakravartin?

ANSWER:

A Chakravarti King is a king who rules all the four great continents (Pubbavideha, Jambudipa, Aparagoyana, Uttarakuru) of earth. The King wins all the continents with peace. Since he is virtuous, seven miracle treasures appear including a large wheel spinning in the sky.

The king and his army can travel anywhere with that spinning wheel in the sky. He travels over the world and teaches all kings how to rule with peace. He can travel to the lower heaven realms with the power of Chakraratnaya if he wants.

A Chakravarti king only appears when humans are virtuous and long lived. The Jataka tales, a part of the Pali Canon, describe Buddhist Chakravarti Kings.

QUESTION: Who are Indra and Brahma?

ANSWER:

Brahma is identical to "creator god" of the Rupa dhatu, the world of form. It is a state made manifest as we cultivate the first of the four Dhyani in meditation.

In Hinduism it corresponds to the personal conception and visible icon of the impersonal universal principle called "Brahman" something that we could identify as the cosmic principle.

Indra is the highest god in the Karma dhatu. Indra resides above Mount Sumeru, in the heaven of the 33. He rules over the *Devas* of the world of desire. Rebirth in the realm of Indra is a consequence of very good Karma owning much merit, yet not free from desire.

QUESTION: What are the five Sciences taught at Nalanda Monastery?

ANSWER:

The Five Major Sciences taught at Nalanda University (known as the Five major Ones) are:

1. Grammar including translation theory and etymology.

The Classical Tibetan language remains a rich source of carefully compiled vocabulary expressing the meaning of the Buddhadharmas. Traditionally one begins the study of Tibetan language using ancient grammatical treatises such as 'the 'Thirty verses' and 'The Use of Gender Signs' by "the scholar Thonmi Sambhota.

2. Logic based on the writings of Dinaga and Dharmakirti

3. Buddhist Arts such as Thangka paintings, sculpture, architecture

4. Medicine & Wellness such as the knowledge of the Nyepas, pulses, treatments, and all knowledge derived from the medical treatises brought to Tibet by Abbot Shantarakshita. This includes also Tibetan geomancy, the ancient science of health and well-being

5. Philosophy is extensively taught in all the various schools. We follow the Madhyamaka school of the Nalanda tradition.

In addition, students also were offered instruction in the “five minor sciences” known as the “ordinary sciences”. Bodhisattvas were trained in these five ordinary sciences so that they could perfect and attain pristine cognition ཡེ་ཤེས་ཀྱི་ཚོགས།

The Five ordinary sciences included

1. Astrology
2. Poetry
3. Prosody (the patterns of rhythm and sound used in poetry)
4. Lexicography (compiling of dictionaries, the study of synonyms)
5. Dramatical Composition

QUESTION: In reference to Aspiration bodhicitta: how can we be sure that we are full of Bodhicitta?

ANSWER:

Aspiration Bodhicitta is something to practice. How do we do that? By reading the great Monlam or aspirations of great bodhisattvas of the past, such as these that we have been reading with His Holiness Karmapa last week. Monlam is one of the aspects of Paramita so it is endless until you achieve the fulfilment of these aspirations and that is called Buddhahood.

QUESTION: Is there not an indicator that lets us know that we are in tune with our Buddha nature?

ANSWER:

Well, I would say... when this question does not arise anymore. When the mind is at peace and this can be only when it is inseparable of everything and everyone. When “Khor-sum tong-pa” is realised and permanent. There is also a state of constant felicity. Bliss inseparable from emptiness. No craving.

QUESTION: About stanza 15: What is meant by « insight »?

ANSWER:

“Insight” is one of the two aspects of Mahamudra meditation. It is called “Lhag-Tong” in Tibetan and is more known in the west by the Sanskrit terminology “vipaśhyanā” or “vipassanā” in Pali.

All meditation practices of Buddhism can be categorized as either འཛིན་གནས་ - Zhinay - Samatha, “calm-abiding” or ལྷག་མཐོང་ - “Lhag-Tong” - “insight” practices and all levels of Buddhism contain these two types of practice.

It is about to acquire and stabilize the ‘penetrating insight’ that becomes naturally accessible as one achieves the highest level of samatha. The essential feature of “calm-abiding” is that the mind is calmed and brought to rest. By doing so, the mind comes to abide one-pointedly.

In the sūtras, the Buddha said that this practice should precede the practice of “insight” because calming the mind allows the faculty of insight to focus on its object one-pointedly and hence understand it easily.

Without calm-abiding, the mind will waver into distraction and the insight will not be able to penetrate its subject fully. It is also taught that calm-abiding by itself is not sufficient. Calm-abiding by itself produces a peaceful state of mind and brings many other advantages for the practitioner. However, it does not cut the root of ignorance that binds sentient beings in cyclic existence. For that, insight is needed.

QUESTION: The classification Heat/Tsemo-Peak experience/Shey-Zöd patience in learning/ "Zöd-Shey" learning patience, is it part of the path of the training of a Bodhisattva? If so, may Lama give us these four steps in Tibetan?

ANSWER:

What you are pointing at is related to the second path amongst the five paths to enlightenment, that of ལྷུང་ལམ - "Jor-Lam" - "The Path of Union", which connects the first path and the subsequent third path, མཐོང་ལམ - "The Path of Seeing".

Therefore, it concerns of course the training of a Bodhisattva. In Hinayana and Mahayana both, this path has four levels. In the two Hinayana vehicles, these levels are called respectively from lowest to highest:

- 1) ལྷོད་ - 'dröd' - 'Heat'; it points to an increasing amount of experience or realization in the meditation practice. It means that one has attained a degree of proficiency and is approaching the actual realization. We could say "Meditavely hot".
- 2) ལྷེ་མོ་ - 'tse mo' - 'Peak'. This term has the general sense of the tip of something, which can include the idea of gaining a peak experience.
- 3) འཇོག་པ་ - 'zöd pa' - 'Forbearance'
- 4) མཚོས་ཚོག་ - 'chö chog' - 'Highest Dharma'.

In Mahayana alone, the Path of Accumulation and the Path of Connection are referred to as belonging to "The bhumi of Intentional Conduct". When the four sub-levels of the Path of Connection are discussed within 'The bhumi of Intentional Conduct' they are called 'The four levels bhumis of Intentional Conduct'.

The next Path, མཐོང་ལམ - 'thong lam' - 'The Path of Seeing' is the maturation of the sixteen aspects resulting the fourfold moments of the realization of the four Noble Truths and concomitant abandonment of discards related to that realisation.

1. ཚོས་ཤེས་ - 'chö shey' - 'cognition of dharma';
2. ཚོས་བཟོན་ - 'chö zöd' - 'acceptance of that dharma';
3. རྗེས་ཤེས་ - 'jey shey' - 'subsequent cognition' (of it); and
4. རྗེས་བཟོན་ - 'jey zöd' - 'subsequent acceptance' (of it).

This applies to each Noble Truth. Altogether thus, there are "eight cognitions of the path of seeing" and "eight acceptances corresponding to them". There is much more to learn and practice about this but I think that this way you get a more correct perspective. Take one thing at the time and it will become clear and lead you to your goal, that of all bodhisattvas.

QUESTION: This first chapter of the Bodhicaryâvatâra, gives a succession of comparisons to explain us the benefits and the diverse types of bodhicitta. At first sight, I felt it was only a repetition of each point, yet, each one appears to develop a particular view bodhicitta. Is this construction particular to Shantideva or common to Tibetan rhetoric?

ANSWER:

This way of expounding the topic is of course that of Shantideva. Nevertheless, it does express the views and ways of his teachers and mainly of the Nalanda school of Madhyamaka philosophy, which most Tibetans do follow.

QUESTION: Stanza 31 - What is the best way to praise and making offering to the noble ones and the Gurus, do we daily thinking about their quality in our heart or do we actually do Sadhana and write praises in letter to offer to Guru?

ANSWER:

This seems very good. First do sadhana practice. In this way you learn how to do it spontaneously from the heart. If you write praises in letter to the Guru, it is a fine way to develop more clarity in your devotion. Yet, one risks becoming emotional or develop attachment. Attachment to one's words and feelings, attachment to the Guru. "The Emptiness of the Three Circles" is easier to practice in sadhana. However, many praises to the Guru have become sadhanas.

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.

