

Shantideva's
Bodhicaryâvatâra
བྱང་ཆུབ་སེམས་པའི་སྤོང་བ་ལ་འཇུག་པ།

Group Study with Venerable Lama Sangyay Tendzin
Session 13 – April 17, 2021
Chapter Two (followed)

Good morning,

REFUGE – MANDALA - REQUEST
Lama's invocation – Calm abiding

Last week, we ended with the sloka 34, dealing with the confession of one's negative actions. In the next few stanzas Shantideva points out the futility of all our involvements with acquaintances and situations.

Indeed, every experience in the phenomenal world as well as every single being are subject to the law of impermanence and will disappear.

Chapter Two - Stanza 35:

My foes will vanish.
My friends also will vanish. I too shall vanish.
But the consequences of my misdeeds
Still remain ahead of me.

For even if he has failed to overcome them, his enemies will die in any case and cease to exist. Even if he is successful in guarding and caring for his friends and loved ones, nothing is achieved; they too will vanish in death. And he himself will die and cease to be.

The entire universe, with its continents and mountains, with all the beings that it contains, friendly, hostile, or indifferent—be they strong as thunder, rich as nagas, beautiful as gods or as fascinating as rainbows—all is destined to perish.

Whatever strongholds have been built, wealth has been accumulated, families have come together: everything will go. Why does Shantideva look at things that way? It is so that we come to realise how absurd it is, to do evil for their sake!

Chapter Two - Stanza 36:

Just like the experiences in a dream,
Anything I enjoy
Will become an object of memory.
Everything that's passed, I won't see again.

Shantideva gives the example of the objects of the five sense consciousnesses that he enjoyed the previous night in his dreams, together with whatever was done in their regard: enemies he defeated, friends he protected, the wealth, honours, and all the rest that he gained. He wakes in the morning to find he has nothing to show for it; everything is no more than a memory.

In just the same way, he says, everything done the day before, all distinctions and discriminations made concerning the five objects of sense—accepting some, rejecting others, subduing rivals, supporting friends.

Everything done in the name of business, lands, wealth, honour, renown, food, and clothes.
Everything that was wanted and experienced—all is now no more than a memory.
It all comes down to: “This I did, and this was done to me.”

Nevertheless, everything that has passed no longer exists and will never be seen again; no matter what, it can bring no active benefit or harm. It is pointless to engage in action because of it.

Chapter Two - Stanza 37:

Even within this brief lifetime itself,
Many friends and foes have passed and so will I pass.
But whatever unbearable there are
From the negative acts I've committed for their sake still lie ahead.

Not mentioning the friends and enemies we met during our past lives, just in this present existence, many people whom we liked or disliked have passed away. They are now no more than memories, unable to help or harm us in the slightest way.

We might think that the same applies to the evil actions we committed for their sake; we might think that these too are gone and can have no effect on us. This, however, is a big mistake: the fully ripened, unbearable effects of the evil deeds we committed under the power of attachment or hatred, on account of friend or enemies, have still to be experienced. Our karma is like our shadow. The law of cause and effect cannot be bypassed.

Chapter Two - Stanza 38:

Through not having realized
That, all of a sudden, I can die like this,
I've committed negative acts of so many sorts
Out of naivety, desire, and anger.

In brief, Shantideva says that the thought never came to his mind that he himself was only a transient phenomenon—like a traveller passing through. The time will soon arrive when he will cease to be.

Without knowledge or understanding, he says, he has clung to the notion that things are permanent. Through attachment to the things, he wanted and to the people he perceived as close to him; through aversion for what he disliked and whatever he perceived as alien, he killed, robbed, and committed many wrongdoings.

Chapter Two - Stanza 39:

Day and night, without a stop,
This life is always getting shorter
No extension ever comes from the side.
Why should someone like me not die?

For the fact is that his span of life is not increasing. Never halting night and day, the moments that bring death close, are slipping by. Not a single instant can remain. As the saying goes, when the karma that propels the present life is spent, there is no way to prolong it even if the king of physicians were to appear in person.

No external force, says Shantideva, can increase his lifespan. For himself and everyone else, what is there to look forward to but death? All these point to the importance of confessing one's misdeeds.

Chapter Two - Stanza 40:

While lying in bed,
Even if I'm surrounded by all my relatives and friends,
I alone shall experience
The feelings of my life being severed.

Shantideva pictures to himself most lucidly—when his lifespan will come to end and death arrives, there he will be powerless upon his last bed surrounded by those close to him, all of whom will suffer as though they themselves were dying instead of him.

They will do all they can to protect him, but all will be in vain as no one can take away the unbearable anguish that comes from the severance of life's thread. He alone will be the one to feel it.

Chapter Two - Stanza 41:

When seized by the messengers of the Lord of Death,
What help are relatives? What help are friends?
Only my positive karmic force will provide me a safe direction then,
But I've never relied on just that.

When the process of dissolution sets in, the hallucinations produced by his evil karma will take the form of the terrifying messengers of the Lord of Death. They will seize and catch him by the neck with a black noose, and, in lonely torment, he will be beaten with hammers.

What help to him will be his parents, family and close friends? No one, says Shantideva, will be able to protect him. At that time, only the merit that derives from positive action—if it has been performed and accumulated—will be of any help. This is the best, indeed the only, protection; and yet it is precisely what in the past he neglected and shrugged away.

Chapter Two - Stanza 42:

O Guardians! Not (really) caring, I didn't know
There'd be such terror as this,
And so, for the sake of this impermanent life,
I've caused so much negative karmic force to build up.

Crying out in misery, he calls upon his protectors, the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas endowed with great compassion. For he failed to understand what was to be done and what was to be avoided. He had no faith in the karmic principle of cause and effect. He was careless of his actions in thought, word, and deed, and has done evil things.

Not realizing the dreadful horrors in store—death, the bardo, and the lower realms in the next life—he killed and did many other evil things in order to get the better of his enemies, protect his friends, and accumulate wealth and sustenance. All of this, for the sake of his present life, so insubstantial, so transient! In the hour of his death, he will have to suffer terribly, and his lot will be miserable indeed.

Chapter Two - Stanza 43:

If someone even just being led to where
His limbs will be lopped off today is so terrified that,
With dry mouth, sunken eyes, and worse,
He appears transfigured from before,

As an example, Shantideva considers the situation of a man convicted of a serious crime and handed over for punishment. He is dragged away to the scaffold by his fellowmen, who will do no more than amputate his limbs. Even so, he is terrified. His gaping mouth is dry, his eyes are glazed and protruding, his face is livid and his head downcast. He is completely transfigured by terror.

Chapter Two - Stanza 44:

What need to mention the tremendous torment
When grabbed by the macabre physical forms
Of the sinister messengers of the Lord of Death
And fallen into a fit of great panic.

Shantideva then reflects on the reality he will experience when caught by the messengers of the Lord of Death? Hallucinations conjured up by his bad karma, he will be subjected to naked ghosts, seven times the size of a human being. Their hair bristles and they have glassy, staring, triangular eyes. Their fangs are visible, biting down on their lower lips and their hissing breath is as strong as a hurricane.

Ferocious and frantic with rage, armed with iron hooks, nooses, and hammers, they are frightful. They will bind him with ropes and drag him off to his next existence in hell. There in the terror of infernal darkness and burning ground fuelled by his negative karma, shouting "*Strike him! Kill him!*", the servants of the Lord of Death will catch him, beat him, cut off his arms and legs. No need to speak of fear and misery, he will suffer the most horrible tortures!

Chapter Two - Stanza 45:

"Who can show me a safe and sound direction
Out of this monstrous horror?"
Staring with terrified, bulging eyes
I'll search the four quarters for anyone who can show me safe direction out.

It is at such times says Shantideva, that people cry out calling "*Lama Rinpoche...*" to anyone who might have compassion. They are terrified and in a great state of panic. Because the skin of their faces is stretched toward the back of their skulls, their eyes are not closed but wide open and staring, looking desperately on all sides for help and refuge.

But not even the Buddha can protect them from experiencing the bad karma that they have accumulated. When Devadatta fell into hell he cried, "*Gautama, I am burning, I am burning!*" Yet, the Buddha could not save him.

Chapter Two - Stanza 46:

And then, seeing no one in the four quarters who can give safe direction,
I'll become filled with total despair from that.
If no one having safe direction is there in that place,
What can I do at that time?

When realizing that there is no protection, no escape, then comes a feeling of being utterly abandoned. At this point one remembers having been born on Jambudvīpa, a feat that was so difficult to achieve; Having gained a human body endowed with the freedoms and advantages, all so hard to gain; Having met a holy teacher, so difficult to meet; Having encountered the sublime Dharma, so difficult to find, and even gained some slight understanding of what conduct should be adopted and what should be abandoned.

Nevertheless, this rare opportunity has been wasted in wrong actions; one's conduct has been destitute of virtue, and much evil has been committed. Now defenceless and without a refuge, one faces death helpless; there is nowhere to go but to the lower realms.

Remembering all the evil committed, their eyes bursting with tears, their breath rattle in their throats; their heads and limbs shake and twitch as they die in great suffering.

So it is that at the time of death, there is no security apart from the sublime Dharma and one's good action. Shantideva wonders what a wicked person like himself will be able to do as there is no escape. The only solution is to rely on the power of the support.

Chapter Two - Stanza 47:

Therefore, from this very day, I take safe direction
From you, the Triumphant, you Guardians of those who wander,
Who strove to become safe directions for wandering beings
And who can remove all my fears with your stupendous forces.

When the time of death occurs, in terror, people look everywhere for protection. But there is none! Consequently, it is essential to resolve that, from this day forth, we will take refuge in the victorious and perfect Buddha. He is the guardian of all beings without exception, who, in order to protect from sorrow beings as infinite as the sky is vast, first engendered the aspiration to supreme enlightenment. He then laboured for the good of all that lives, and became the great and powerful Protector, the Buddha endowed with the ten powers:

1. The power to know what is correct, and what is incorrect
2. The power to know all the ripening results of action
3. The power to know the different types of beings
4. The power to know their aptitudes
5. The power to know their interests
6. The power to know all different paths
7. The power to know all the absorptions
8. The power to know recollection of past lives
9. The power of The Divine Sight
10. The power to know the exhaustion of defilement.

Possessing these ten strengths of knowledge, the Buddha perfectly instructed beings in the sacred Dharma. If we act according to his words, the fears and sufferings of samsara and especially the lower realms will be dispersed.

This is the way to think: we should receive the teachings, reflect on them, and meditate on them by turns.

This will be it for today. Let us take a few minutes to experience some quietness before dedicating our session to the benefit of all.

