

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

Group Study with Venerable Lama Sangyay Tendzin
Chapter Three: Gaining Hold of the Bodhichitta Aim
Session 16– May 8, 2021
Stanzas 01 to 10

Good morning,

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

Continuing our study, last week we concluded with a Q&A session on the second chapter on confessing our negative actions.

We now turn to the principal topic of Bodhicaryâvatâra: the adoption of the enlightened mind.

Chapter Three- Stanza 01:

With pleasure, I rejoice in the positive actions
That relieve the sufferings of the worse rebirth states for all limited beings
And that place these, who suffer,
In better rebirth states.

The explanation of the accumulation of merit has eight sections or “branches.” Four of these have already been dealt with in Chapter Two. (The first four branches are the acts of veneration, refuge, offerings, and confession of negative actions).

Chapter Three starts by addressing the remaining four. The subject of “Rejoicing in virtue” analyses positive actions in relation to the three types of beings: those of lesser, medium, and great capacity.

First, Shantideva rejoices in the “*Virtue tending to happiness*” which belongs to beings of lesser ability. In relation to the cause, Shantideva rejoices in the practice of virtue that is not associated with the determination to leave samsara, nor with Bodhichitta, nor even with the practice of egolessness.

This type of virtue releases beings from the suffering of the lower realms leading them to the bliss of the higher states. He rejoices also in the result of such virtue: although the situation of gods and human beings is happy by comparison with the lower realms, it is nevertheless tainted by the three types of suffering. (The suffering of pain itself, the suffering of change, and all-pervading suffering in the making).

Shantideva however rejoices at the happiness enjoyed by beings while they enjoy the fruit of their previous positive actions and experience physical beauty, youth, power, renown, wealth, etc.

Chapter Three- Stanza 02:

I rejoice in that build-up of positive mind
That became the causes for the arhats' purified state.
I rejoice in the definite freedom of these embodied beings
From the miseries of uncontrollable rebirth.

In addition, Shantideva rejoices in the cause and result of “*virtue tending to liberation*” of beings of medium scope.

With regard to the cause, Shantideva celebrates the virtue performed in conjunction with a determination to leave samsara and with the practice of egoless-ness, causing the achievement of the Shravakas and Pratyekabuddhas.

With regard to the results of such virtue, beings are definitively freed from birth, sickness, old age, and death, and all the other sufferings of the three worlds of existence. They achieve the state of the levels of the Shravakas on the paths of learning (stream-enterer, once-returner, and nonreturner) and the condition of Arhats on the path of no-more-learning.

Remembering the qualities of realization and abandoning of such beings, Shantideva has faith and rejoices. It is indeed due to their kindness that we can receive the sublime Vinaya teachings, which the Buddha in his compassion left for us as both teachings and teacher.

Chapter Three- Stanza O3:

I rejoice in the purified state of the Buddha and in the levels of mind of their heirs.
And with pleasure, I rejoice in the ocean of positivity
From their having developed Bodhichitta aims to bring every limited being joy
And in their deeds that have aided limited beings.

Shantideva also rejoices in the "*virtue tending to liberation*" of beings of the great scope of the Mahayana, in both its causal and resultant aspects.

He delights in its final result, namely, perfect enlightenment endowed with the infinite qualities of elimination and realization achieved by the Buddhas, but he rejoices in recognizing the qualities of abandonment and realization achieved by the Bodhisattvas on the bhumis.

Going on to consider the cause of such attainments, he delights sincerely and without envy in the profound virtues of Bodhichitta, the pristine motivation that aims to establish all beings in the supreme bliss of Buddhahood.

Shantideva rejoices also in the training that consists of the six paramitas, which brings untold help to all beings. The benefits of such wholesome actions are as vast and long-lasting as space itself. This was described in the first chapter.

To rejoice in the good deeds of others is an essential pith instruction for it allows us to accumulate a great deal of merit easily and swiftly without falling into arrogance and pretension. It is therefore said that when we see or hear of the virtuous actions of others, we should always rejoice in them.

Next comes the branch of "Requesting the Buddhas to turn the wheel of the Dharma":

Chapter Three- Stanza O4:

With palms pressed together,
I beseech The Buddhas of all directions:
Please shine Dharma's lamp for limited beings
Suffering and groping in darkness.

When Lord Buddha attained perfect enlightenment under the bodhi tree, he declared:

*"Deep and peaceful, thought-free, luminous, unfabricated: The 'nectar-truth' now I have discovered.
Would I teach it, none would understand! And so, I will remain silent, in the forest."*

Thus, He remained so for several weeks until the great gods Indra and Brahma presented him a dextrorotatory white conch and a thousand-spoked golden wheel, requesting Him insistently to turn the wheel of the Dharma. The Buddha then began to teach.

In the same way, to all the Buddhas of the three times who look on him in their perfect wisdom and think of him with compassion and love, Shantideva considers that he respectfully offers a golden wheel and invokes them with joined hands.

For all beings tormented in samsara who have no idea what is to be done and what is not to be done, Shantideva prays the Buddhas to turn the wheel of the sublime Dharma, thereby overcoming and removing the ignorance of beings in ways appropriate to their various abilities. May the Buddhas reveal the authentic light of primordial wisdom.

When making such prayers, we should consider that the Buddhas promise to turn the Dharma Wheel. This will be the cause that, in all our lives, we will not entertain false views and wrong views, and we will never be separated from the light of the sublime teaching.

Chapter Three- Stanza 05:

With palms pressed together, I beseech
The Triumphant who would pass beyond sorrow:
I beg you, remain for countless eons
So as not to leave in their blindness these wandering beings.

Now comes the sixth branch of requesting the Buddha not to pass into nirvana. Although from the point of view of the ultimate truth, the Buddhas residing in the pure fields of the ten directions do not "enter nirvana," it may be that some Buddhas wish to display the truth of impermanence.

Therefore, Shantideva joins his hands and prays them not to abandon beings in their ignorance. So that they might further explain what behaviour is to be adopted and what is to be abandoned, Shantideva requests the Buddhas not to pass into nirvana, but to remain for many countless kalpas. And as we also make such prayers, we should consider that the Buddhas accept them and agree to remain among us.

Next and last branch is the dedication of merit:

Chapter Three- Stanza 06:

By whatever positive force I've built up
Through all of these that I've done like that,
May I remove every suffering
Of all limited beings.

Shantideva makes the wish that all the virtue amassed by him in the past, present, and future (which he exemplifies by the virtue accumulated by the seven branches previously explained) should clear away all the sorrows of samsara and especially of the three lower realms as experienced by beings who are as numerous as the sky is vast.

Chapter Three- Stanza 07:

So long as wandering beings fall sick,
May I serve as the medicine,
The doctors and their nurse,
Until they've been cured of their illness.

In particular, because of the evil behaviour of beings, the gods are losing the fight against the asuras. And the latter, who are now victorious, exhale the source of eighteen kinds of plague.

Beings are afflicted by these ailments, and therefore until such time as they are cured of their sickness, he prays that he himself might become a perfect medicine to heal them.

Indeed, generally speaking, all the medicines that exist have manifested thanks to the compassionate blessing of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. And so Shantideva prays that he might become a physician able to instruct beings and provide them with medicinal remedies.

Chapter Three- Stanza 08:

May I eliminate the pain of hunger and thirst
With a shower of food and drink.
And, in the times of the middle eons of famine,
May I myself change into food and drink.

Shantideva wishes that he may become a rain of sustenance with a hundred tastes, a nectar showering down unceasingly on all those in the world who are tormented by want of food and drink. He prays to be able to dispel their every famine and drought so that they will be satisfied and content.

Chapter Three- Stanza 09:

For limited beings, destitute and poor,
May I become a treasure that never runs out
And remain in their presence
As a variety of sorts of useful things.

It is said in the teachings that in order to avoid being born in a universe that is passing through the intermediate kalpa of disease, war, and famine, we should make offerings, here and now, to the precious Three Jewels of all the various kinds of medicine and weapons, and we should offer food and drink to the sangha, praying that we and other beings be spared from being reborn in such situations.

Again, for all those living in the world who are poor and destitute, without food, drink, clothes, wealth, and possessions, Shantideva prays that he might himself become an inexhaustible treasury of whatever they may wish for: food for the hungry and drink for the thirsty. "May I lie before them," he says, "closely in their reach, a varied source of all that they might need."

Chapter Three- Stanza 10:

To fulfil the aims of all limited beings,
I give, without sense of a loss,
My body and likewise my pleasures,
And all my positive forces of the three times.

Bodhichitta is brought into being by mind-training. The mind is trained by relinquishing, for the sake of others, the three foundations of ego-clinging (the body, possessions, and the roots of virtue). Beginners, however, should not actually surrender them in reality because if we try to do so without being truly able, the outcome will not be a positive one.

If therefore we train and habituate our minds to the generous attitude of offering these three foundations to others, there is no contradiction in saying that we will perfect the paramita of generosity, even if in reality we do not actually give any of them even slightly.

On the other hand, when people make charitable donations without having a generous attitude, their action is a mere imitation of generosity. It is therefore crucial to train us in order to get familiar with a generous frame of mind.

Of the three foundations of self-clinging, the body is most important. Because we cling to our bodies as ourselves or as our property, we egocentrically seize upon possessions, enjoyments, and virtue as means to secure our physical well-being. In view of this, it is of vital importance to sever attachment to the body.

We must reflect, following Shantideva's example, declare that we will give away all that we hold dear: our bodies and our belongings (riches, clothing, and sustenance), as well as all our roots of virtue accumulated in the past, present, and future.

We must relinquish everything for the benefit and happiness of all without exception—and we must do so sincerely and without counting the cost or expecting some recompense or karmic advantage in return. This is an essential pith instruction that drives out the devil of ego-clinging, the root of samsara.

Whenever thoughts of cherishing and attachment toward our bodies arise, we should face up to them squarely and at once, never losing sight of the view of No-Self, emptiness, and nonreferential compassion. This will ensure that we are on the supreme path.

As we find in the *Shikshasamucchaya*^(*),

"Once you have given your body and possessions to others, you should continue to use the food and clothes that were formerly yours only as servants might use the food and sustenance of their employers: solely to keep your body alive for the benefit of others. To do anything else is stealing."

Indeed, if you use for yourself what has been donated to others, you are robbing beings of what has been given to them.

(*) བསྐྱེད་པ་གྲུབ་བརྒྱུ་ལྟུང་། - The *Shikshasamucchaya*, *The Compendium of Precepts* by Shantideva presents clearly and in detail the conduct that bodhisattvas should embrace at all times. It is the longest of the three texts written by Shantideva, the *Sutrasamucchaya* is the short one and the *Bodhicharyavatara* (the middle length one). However, the text referred to here by Shantideva, is a composition with the same name and topic by Nagarjuna which is no longer available.

This will be enough for today. I wish everyone a pleasant weekend.

Let us remain a few moments in mental peace before dedicating the merit of this session for the benefit of all beings.

