

Shantideva's
Bodhicaryâvatâra

བྱང་ཆུབ་སེམས་པའི་སྤོད་པ་ལ་འཇུག་པ།

Group Study with Venerable Lama Sangyay Tendzin
Chapter Three: Gaining Hold of the Bodhichitta Aim
Session 17– May 15, 2021
Stanzas 11 to 21

Good morning,

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

In our study of the Bodhicaryâvatâra, continuing Chapter Three, Gaining Hold of the Bodhichitta Aim, we now read Stanza 11.

Chapter Three- Stanza 11:

Giving away everything brings nirvana,
And my mind is aimed for realising nirvana.
As giving away all comes together with death,
It's best to give now to limited beings.

When we experience fearful situations, such as dwelling in unfriendly environment; remembering that we gave away the three foundations of ego-clinging (body, possessions, and roots of virtue), we have therefore nothing left to cherish, our mind will be at ease, free from anxiety.

While in such state, would ego-clinging arise again, we should reaffirm our abandonment of body and possessions in a more dramatic way: imagine to be in the presence of physical beings like wild animals and disembodied ghosts and demons feasting upon your flesh and blood and stealing away your possessions.

Such practice, called "Chöd", constitutes both aspects: mind-training and the practice of giving. There is no higher "Chöd" practice than this applied on these three levels:

- To wander in a place of peril or in mountain solitudes is outer Chöd.
- To give one's body up as food is inner Chöd.
- To cut through ego-clinging is the final Chöd.

If we can grasp this pith instruction, no downfall will ever occur.

Chapter Three- Stanza 12:

Having given this body to all those with limited bodies
To do with as they like,
It's up to them to do what they want:
Let them kill it, revile it, always beat it, or whatever.

Next, Shantideva gives two arguments to show us the necessity of practicing this kind of generosity regardless of the vehicle one has chosen:

The first argument involves giving up the three foundations of ego-clinging and achieving the state beyond suffering:

- The practice of egoless-ness culminates in giving up our roots of virtue. Progress on the path starts by knowing that the Basis of the Path is the accumulation of merit, which brings rebirth in the higher realms. This is necessary for the Truth of the Path to occur in the mind.
- The personal egoless-ness achieved in the Hinayana, is obtained when emotional obscuration is discarded. Its result, the “*final nirvana*” of the Shravakas and Pratyekabuddhas, is like a fire or a butter lamp going out for want of fuel.
- By contrast, concerning the Truth of the Path, nirvana as understood in the Mahayana, results from the removal of the two types of obscuration, together with their habitual tendencies. It is like a raft, which is left behind as soon as the far shore has been reached.
- Therefore, it is said that worldly virtue, bounded and confined by ego-clinging, is not actually effective in the attainment of liberation. Hence, we must give it away. There is nothing else to be attained apart from this.

The second argument resolves the following objection: “Why it is necessary to abandon the three foundations of ego-clinging even when we are not actually intending to achieve nirvana?”

- The answer is that, even if we do not give them away now, the fact is that at our death, we will have to leave behind both body and possessions. As for our virtues, either these will have been exhausted by moments of anger experienced in the past or else if not so, they will be consumed by the single experience of the full ripening of their result.
- In any case, everything is destined to be entirely and aimlessly lost. Therefore, in the present moment when we have freedom to act, it is best to give everything to others for their happiness and benefit. Doing so, the merit of our action will not be exhausted but will serve the cause of attaining supreme enlightenment.

Shantideva declares that he has given his body away to all beings so that they may use it as they please. Let them forever kill it, slander it, beat it with sticks and stones, or do with it whatever they wish.

Chapter Three- Stanza 13:

Let them toy with my body,
 Make it into a source of ridicule or a joke.
 Having given away this body of mine,
 For what should I hold it dear?

Let them treat it as their plaything or as the subject of all sorts of verbal criticism, pleasant or unpleasant, made just to see what response they get in return. Let them laugh at it, making it the subject of every mockery, ridiculing it in all sorts of ways.
 Now that he has given it away, why should he be so concerned about it, securing its advantage and fending off difficulties? For he has put an end to the thought that it is his to control.

Chapter Three- Stanza 14:

Let them do whatever to my body,
 So long as it doesn't cause them harm.
 But may it never turn out to be meaningless
 For anyone to be focused for any time on me.

Saying that he invites beings to do anything to him, good or bad, provided they do not harm or injure themselves then or at a later time, Shantideva invites them to do whatever is fitting. He makes the

general wish that whatever beings do in his regard should never be in vain, in the sense of being unprofitable to them, and that whatever thoughts that they have of him, will not fail to benefit them.

Chapter Three- Stanza 15:

If anyone, who might be focused on me,
Develops an angry or unkind thought,
May that always turn into a cause
For fulfilling all of his or her aims.

More specifically, whatever thoughts that beings entertain in his regard -anger and the wish to harm him, or kindness and the wish to do him good- he prays that they may always be the cause and means of the fulfilment of the desires and aims of beings, whether spiritual or temporal. Let none of these intentions be in vain.

Chapter Three- Stanza 16:

And may everyone who speaks badly of me,
Or does something else that's of harm,
Or likewise hurls ridicule at me,
Become someone with the fortune for a purified state.

Here again Shantideva prays that the actions of beings should not fail to achieve their better interest. For he wishes that all who slight him to his face or who commit some other outrage toward his person and property—as well as all who blame and slander him when his back is turned—should also attain the fortune of enlightenment.

In short, as it is said in the Pitaputrasamagama-sutra, "May those who give me sustenance attain to perfect peace." We should pray that, whenever beings see us, hear our voices, touch or think of us, regardless of the connection good or bad that they may have with us, they may be brought to the accomplishment of their wishes and to temporary and ultimate happiness.

Chapter Three- Stanza 17:

May I be a guardian for those with no guardian,
A pathfinder for those who are on the road,
And a boat, a ship, and a bridge
For those who would cross.

Shantideva concludes by praying to become the best of guardians for those who are pitiful because they are powerless, unprotected, and unimportant. He prays that he might be a supreme guide for travellers on the road, merchants, etc. For those who wish to cross the water, he prays that he might become a fine raft on rivers of medium size, a large ferry on great waterways, and a bridge across little streams.

Chapter Three- Stanza 18:

May I be an island for those seeking an island,
A lamp for those desiring a lamp,
A bed for everyone wishing a bed,
And a servant for every embodied being who would want a servant.

Shantideva prays that for those who, on long voyages, are weary of the sea and long for land, he might become an island, a place of dry earth where there are flowers and fruit-bearing trees. He prays that he might be a lamp for those who yearn for light, wishing to read at night and so forth, and for those who are in the darkness of not knowing what is to be done and what is not to be done.

He prays that, for those who need a resting place and a bed, he might himself become these things, and for those who are old and infirm, that he might become a servant attending to their needs.

Chapter Three- Stanza 19:

May I be a wish-granting gem, a vase of excellence,
Mantras of pure awareness, magnificent medicine,
Wish-granting trees, and cows of plenty
For embodied beings.

Shantideva aspires to be a supreme wish-fulfilling jewel, which can bring rain wherever it is desired in the four cosmic continents, and a vase of plenty that pours forth a great treasure of all that could be wanted.

When someone who has accomplished the vidya-mantras scatters substances blessed thereby, the beings that they touch become as fortunate as the gods of the desire realm, endowed with marvellous qualities. They have a life span longer than that of the sun and moon, become more radiant than lotuses, and grow stronger than elephants.

Therefore, Shantideva prays that he might accomplish the vidya-mantra (*)—which by simply being read gives rise to accomplishments—and thus be of benefit for others. May he also be the great panacea that soothes every disease and evil force; may he be the tree of miracles that gives every conceivable thing and satisfies every desire.

(*) རྟོག་ལྡན་མཁའ་ལྔ་འཇམ་གཏུག་ - *vidyā-mantra*, a *mantra* related to a deity, usually female, that through recitation gives the reciter the ability to alter or control phenomena and circumstances.

Chapter Three- Stanza 20:

And eternally, like earth and so on
The great elements – and space,
May I serve, in a plenitude of forms, as the basis for life
For fathomless numbers of limited beings.

The Tibetan term འདྲུང་བ། - 'jungwa' designates the five elements. It indicates that they give rise to all that manifests - in the sense of the phenomenal universe, but also in the sense of the beings that inhabit it. They are said to be "great" because everything depends on them, and they are all pervasive.

- Earth is the basis providing support.
- Water is the principle of cohesion producing fertility.
- Fire brings to ripeness.
- Wind averts decay by producing movement.
- Space is an all-pervasive openness in which, all phenomena can manifest.

With this in mind, Shantideva prays that he might always be the ground or cause of the sustenance of countless beings, supplying them with a support, cohesion, warmth, movement, and space, providing them with food, clothes, wealth, and every amenity.

Chapter Three- Stanza 21:

And till they pass to nirvana,
May I serve, as well, in all ways,
As the causes for life in the realms
Of limited beings till the ends of space.

For the infinite number of living beings extending to the limits of space itself, and for the time it takes for all of them without exception to attain Buddhahood, Shantideva prays to be able to provide whatever they need and wish. Such is the time frame of Shantideva's immense aspiration.

The training of the mind that has been introduced so far, acts as a preparation for the generation of Bodhichitta and constitutes a practice to be implemented after Bodhichitta has been generated. Thus, we must strive to widen our perspective and make prayers of aspiration on a grand scale.

It is the vastness of our mind in the present moment and in our prayers of aspiration that dictates the extent to which, our Buddha and Bodhisattva activities will unfold.

Mind-training is consequently of the highest importance. Next week, we will discuss the ways the Bodhisattva vows are taken in the two main transmission lineages of Nagarjuna and Asanga.

We will stop here 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.

