

Shantideva's
Bodhicaryâvatâra

བྱང་ཆུབ་སེམས་པའི་སྤོང་བ་ལ་འཇུག་པ།

Group Study with Venerable Lama Sangyay Tendzin
Chapter Three: Gaining Hold of the Bodhichitta Aim
Session 18– May 22, 2021
Stanzas 22 to 33

Good morning,

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

Last week we completed stanza 21 of chapter three which deals with the Adoption of the Awakened Mind, we have now gained motivation from it, which constitutes the correct causal relationship, and are ready to adopt the Mind of Enlightenment by taking the Bodhichitta Vows. This will be done as we recite the following two stanzas:

Chapter Three- Stanza 22:

Just as the Blissfully Gone of the past
Have generated a Bodhichitta aim
And lived by the stages
Of bodhisattva training.

Chapter Three- Stanza 23:

So too, do I generate a Bodhichitta aim
To help those who wander.
I shall train in the stages
Of bodhisattva training.

As you most likely know, there are three ways of generating Bodhichitta:

- In the manner of a king,
- In the manner of a boatman, and,
- In the manner of a shepherd.

These are specific to the types of individuals and are all of the same value, being by no means a subject of competitiveness.

Whichever is adopted, the vow is pronounced and taken according to one of the two main traditions transmitted respectively by Nagarjuna and by Asanga:

- In the tradition of Nagarjuna, the vows of Bodhichitta in Intention and Bodhichitta in Action are taken together.
- In the tradition of Asanga, they are taken separately.

To take the vow from a fully qualified teacher is the best way to adopt within oneself an ethical awareness and a sense of responsibility concerning the observance of the vow. One then just follow the master and generate the correct attitude and motivation.

However, if one is unable to do so and nevertheless pronounces the vow in front of the representations of the Three Jewels or of a visualized Mahayana Field of Refuge, one does also receive the vow. Doing so, one generates the thought that the Buddhas are invoked and stimulated from the ultimate expanse.

As for the ritual:

- First, invoke the presence of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas by calling on them thrice.
- One then lays the foundation of the vow by taking refuge thrice.
- Taking the two vows together in the Tradition of Nagarjuna,
 - Proclaim thrice (Stanza 22 & 23, L1-L2) that likewise, for the benefit of beings as infinite as the sky is vast, you too will adopt this attitude of Bodhichitta in intention, wishing to assist beings to attain unsurpassable enlightenment.
 - Continue saying that (Stanza 23, L3-L4) from that day onward, you will train in the six paramitas and the other Bodhisattva precepts, step-by-step and according to your capacity. This is how Bodhichitta in Action is engendered.
- Taking the vows (separately) in the tradition of Asanga,
 - Recite thrice Stanza 22, L1-L2 and Stanza 23, L1-L2, to take the Vow of Bodhichitta in Intention.
 - After having trained in this vow, at a second opportunity, reciting thrice Stanza 22, L1-L2 and Stanza 23, L3-L4 to take the vow of Bodhichitta in Action.

The actual moment when the vow is received is at the third repetition of these formulae. And at that time, one should have the conviction that the vows of Bodhichitta in Intention and/or Action are obtained within one's mind.

If one trains in the precepts of the Bodhisattvas step-by-step and according to one's capacity, one's ability to observe the precepts will be gradually enhanced.

The expression "step-by-step" relates to the discipline of avoiding negative actions as practiced by the Bodhisattvas of the highest, medium, and basic capacity.

- Those of highest capacity must avoid the eighteen root downfalls.
- The Bodhisattvas of medium scope must keep themselves from the four root downfalls, such as the refusal to donate wealth or the gift of Dharma through a failure in generosity.
- For Bodhisattvas of basic capacity, it is enough to preserve and not give up their Bodhichitta in intention.

It is also explained as referring to the training in the three kinds of discipline:

- The principal training of the Bodhisattvas is, on the path of accumulation, the discipline of avoiding negativity.
- On the path of joining, it consists mainly in the accomplishment of positive deeds.
- On the noble paths of seeing and meditation, it is mainly a question of benefiting others.

Chapter Three- Stanza 24:

Purely gaining hold, like this,
Of Bodhichitta with sound state of mind,
Afterwards, as well, to enhance it further,
Celebrate that mind in this way:

When wise people possessing a clear mind have, animated with bright and lucid joy, engendered Bodhichitta through the preparatory practice and the ritual of the vow described previously, it is excellent for them to lift up their spirits in acts of rejoicing. By doing so, their Bodhichitta will intensify and increase easily.

Chapter Three- Stanza 25:

Now my life has become fruitful,
For having wonderfully attained a human existence,
Today I've awakened my Buddha-nature
And now have become a Buddha's spiritual child.

Shantideva exclaims that on the day that he generated Bodhichitta, his life has given fruit. It has become meaningful. He says, his human birth has now been well-assumed, now that he has taken birth in the perfect lineage of the Buddhas and has become the dear son and heir of all of them. As it is said:

"If our ways are good, this body is a boat that carries us to freedom.

If our ways are bad, it is a stone that pulls us down into the depths of the ocean of samsara."

Chapter Three- Stanza 26:

Now, in whatever way possible,
I shall undertake actions that accord with its traits,
And never defile this impeccable nature
That lacks any fault.

In whatever situation he finds himself, he will perform only what is beneficial for others and is in harmony with the lineage of the Mahayana. Moreover, from the Lord Buddha himself and the Bodhisattvas like Manjughosha down to himself, none of the teachers of the lineage has been stained by the root downfall of selfishness and the like.

Therefore, this lineage is noble and unstained; on account of which, Shantideva proclaims, he will persevere in the precepts of the Bodhisattva, like a son imitating his father. He will act in such a way that he will never pollute or compromise with faults and downfalls his high and faultless pedigree. These are matters on which we too must reflect again and again.

Chapter Three- Stanza 27:

Just like a blind man
Finding a gem in a pile of trash,
Likewise, it's come about by some force
That within me has developed a Bodhichitta aim.

The fact that Bodhichitta is difficult to find is illustrated by the example of a blind man, who is by nature not able to find anything, but who discovers a wish-fulfilling jewel in a place where a heap of refuse has been swept and piled. It would be thought of as something highly extraordinary and a matter of great rejoicing.

As it is said, *"Writing formed by gnawing insects occurs by accident; it is not intentional."*

In the same way, Shantideva says, as if by some mere chance configuration of karmic merit, amid the refuse of the defilements that characterize an ordinary being like himself, the precious Bodhichitta—the very thing that dissipates the drawbacks of both samsaric existence and peace—has arisen in his mind. This is something completely amazing, and he is exhilarated with joy.

Chapter Three- Stanza 28:

It's the supreme nectar, indeed, for defeating
The Lord of Death of wandering beings.
It's the inexhaustible treasure as well
For dispelling the poverty of those who roam.

The Bodhisattvas set forth the Dharma in accordance with the aspirations of beings. By so doing, they crush Yama, who is the bringer of death for every being without exception.

Not only their Bodhichitta is the draft of immortality that places beings in the deathless enlightenment, but in the immediate term, Bodhichitta is an elixir of immortality that drives away untimely death.

Furthermore, on the eighth ground of realization, Bodhisattvas have power over material things. In this way they are able to dispel the poverty of beings.

They can materialize any kind and any number of objects. It is as if space were filled with whatever may be needed. This is what is called རྣམ་མཁའ་མཛོད། - the "sky-treasure" of everlasting riches.

Chapter Three- Stanza 29:

It is the best medicine, too, that brings to full rest
The diseases of those who are passing through.
It's the tree that shelters all wandering beings,
Roaming and exhausted on the roads of their compulsive lives.

To the beings of higher and medium capacities, in response to the malaise of afflictive emotions caused by craving, aversion, and ignorance and the malaise of suffering that is affecting wind-energy, bile, and phlegm, the Bodhisattvas expound their teachings on the dreadful attachment to the body, on loving-kindness, and on dependent arising and the absence of self.

In this way, they remove all the illnesses of these beings without exception, in both their aspects of cause and result. Therefore, of all the excellent medicines that exist, Bodhichitta is supreme.

Chapter Three- Stanza 30:

It is the public bridge for freeing
All wandering beings from the worse rebirth states.
It is the risen mind-moon for dispelling the fever
Of the disturbing emotions of those who roam.

Having brought beings of lower capacities, to the higher realms, to liberation according to the Hinayana, the Bodhisattvas have the final intention to establish these beings in the Mahayana lineage, the great vehicle itself.

Thus, they set forth the Dharma of the Mahayana. They teach Bodhichitta, the supreme attitude of enlightenment, which cools the heat of desire and soothes the torments of other emotional defilements that are the principal obstacles to the liberation of limitless beings.

Speaking of the emotional obscuration, the Protector Maitreya said:

All thoughts of avarice and the like are said to be emotional veils.

Thus, all major factors running against the six paramitas are emotional obscuration.

Chapter Three- Stanza 31:

It's the magnificent sun for clearing away
The mist of not knowing of wandering beings.
It's the fresh froth of butter that rises to the top
From the churning of the milk of the sacred Dharma.

Within the mind streams of beings, the principal obstacle to omniscience, the awareness of all things, is the gloom of ignorance concerning the nature of phenomena. This is what is meant by the cognitive obscuration. Bodhichitta utterly removes them. It is like a great sun that dispels completely and at once the darkness of the three-thousandfold universe.

As Maitreya said:

"The thoughts referring to the three conceptual spheres are described as veils upon the knowable."

If one cognizes something while believing in the real existence of the three spheres of subject, object, and action, one is obscured and limited thereby. It is what prevents one from seeing all other objects of knowledge together and at once. This is what cognitive obscuration means.

Bodhichitta is the quintessential sap of the three turnings of the Wheel of Dharma. It is like the creamy butter, rich and full, that comes from churning the abundant milk of the Dharma, its refined essence.

Chapter Three- Stanza 32:

For wandering beings roaming, as guests, on the roads of compulsive existence,
Wishing to enjoy a share of bliss,
This is the best for setting (them) with bliss,
Satisfying the entirety of beings (who'll come) as guests.

The numberless beings that live in the six realms are like wanderers on the paths of existence, from the Peak of Existence down to the Hell of Unrelenting Pain. To help those who wish to enjoy the pleasure of a temporary and ultimate respite from the sorrows that they suffer, the Bodhisattvas are reborn in samsara through the power of their Bodhichitta.

They remain with beings, staying close to them, in order to bring them to the undying state of supreme enlightenment. They are like people who pitch refreshment tents for pilgrims traveling around Mt Kailash. Bodhisattvas bring to beings whatever happiness they desire. Thus they satisfy these ceaseless wanderers who are constantly moving toward their deaths without a moment's respite, never finding a place of permanent rest.

Chapter Three- Stanza 33:

Today, before the eyes of all sources of direction,
I've summoned as guests all wandering beings
For bliss up to the state of a Blissfully Gone.
Gods, anti-gods, and so on, take joy!

In accordance with what was said previously, in the presence of all the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas taken as his witnesses, Shantideva summons on this very day all limitless beings filling the space. He invites them to the highest bliss of ultimate buddhahood, and in the meantime, to a perfect feast of temporary happiness in the higher realms of gods and human beings.

The reason for taking the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas as witnesses of the vow of Bodhichitta is that one will have a sense of appropriateness with regard to them and a feeling of moral conscience with regard to oneself.

We so complete our study of Chapter Three and the First Part of the Bodhicaryāvatāra.
Please do review your notes and send questions you might have.
Next session will be dedicated to answering them. I wish everyone a pleasant weekend.

Let us abide in mental peace before dedicating the merit of this session for the benefit of all.

