

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 Bodhicitta Aim
Session 19 - May 29, 2021
Questions & Answers

Good morning,

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

Last week we completed our study of Chapter Three and the First Part of the Bodhicaryâvatâra. Today, I will answer to the best of my ability the questions you submitted.

Question:

The commentary of Chapter Three - Stanza 01, states: ...

« Chapter Three covers the following four sections » . The first of these, "Rejoice in virtue"; We are not sure to understand which are the other three sections?

Are they "The Virtue tending to happiness", "the Virtue tending to the Liberation of beings of average capacities" and "to the liberation beings of the Great Vehicle" and "the Prayer to the Buddhas to turn the Wheel of Dharma"?

Answer:

Really? There seems to be a little confusion here...Your misunderstanding lays in the fact that the commentary did not mention the words "Chapter Three covers" but by the words "starts by addressing the following four", and it indeed does so, i.e.: addressing each of the remaining four:

These are the branch of rejoicing (Stanza 2 & 3); the branch of praying the Buddhas to turn the Wheel of Dharma (Stanza 4); Praying for them to remain and not pass into nirvana (Stanza 5); and the branch of dedication (Stanza 6).

Question:

My question is about stanza 12 chapter 3: the commentary states that the roots of virtue (good karma) will be consumed during Bardo time. Does this mean that only negative karma is transferred to next life?

Answer:

Of course not. Things are not so dualistic. Both, positive and negative karma come up in the bardo experience. If we react with anger at the time of dying, we will destroy most of positive karma. Yet, if not so, our positive karma will bear fruit in providing us its full ripening effect. No matter what reincarnation we are moving into, the positive karma will endow us with good qualities and capacities.

The negative karma, just like the positive karma, exhaust in the same way. On one hand, determining what kind of rebirth we have in store, such as the lower realms or higher realms; on the other hand, how endowed this incarnation will be with abilities. The residual karma will accompany us after rebirth as "Bag-Chag" or karmic propensities.

Question:

This question is about the stanza 13 and 14. When Shantideva says « They can toy with my body so long as it doesn't cause harm to them » . If they "toy", for example criticize, I feel that they harm themselves because it is unvirtuous. May Lama clarify my misunderstanding?

Answer:

Your misunderstanding comes from your interpretation of Shantideva's statement. Shantideva did not state that they can toy with his body any way they like. Precisely, he states that as far as he is concerned, he would not impose any restriction except for his wish that it does not harm them.

The difference between good and bad karma is very hard to understand and depends on the result of one's action. This result depends itself upon the motivation of the action. This explains his wish so that his offering remains motivated by the wish to benefit.

Question:

In reference to stanza 16: When and how do we wish that all beings be liberated? Is it during aspirations prayers, to be regenerated during every morning practice? Or when the opportunity will arise? Or both?

Answer:

At all times for sure!!! Of course, for this to be a reality, we need to acquire the capacity to do so. We get so much distracted! This is why we train in all aspects of paramitas. It starts by remembering it every so often. Use your mobile phone to remind you! This will provide much merit to all people involved in conceiving and producing it in the first place!

Question: Can Lama explain more about the "Three Spheres"?

Answer:

It is referring to the notion of "emptiness" in the sense that things do not exist independently, but instead require the coming together of causes and conditions to manifest.

The Three Spheres are:

- The emptiness of the originator
- The emptiness of the recipient
- The emptiness of the object transmitted

In relation to generosity for example:

- The one who we may refer to as a "giver"
- The one who we may refer to as a "receiver"
- The thing we may refer to as a "gift"

All three are interdependent. In order for one to complete an act of giving, there must be one to receive. If there isn't one to receive, then one cannot give, thus the one we call a "giver" is dependent on having another there to "receive." If one does not give, then there cannot be a recipient. So, the recipient cannot exist on its own as a recipient, as to be a recipient, it requires something to be given. An object cannot exist on its own as a "gift" if it is not given. Without the exchange, then it is not a "gift." Thus, all three elements of the three spheres are ultimately "empty" as they cannot exist independently.

Question:

Could Lama explain us a little more about Yama?

Answer:

To put it briefly, Yama is the Lord of Death.

In tantra, however, Yama is not simply death itself, but rather there are three levels of Yama, which detail three levels of what is involved with death:

- Outer Yama is death itself,
- Inner Yama is the emotions and attitudes, which activate karmic actions. These propel us into a subsequent rebirth and perpetuate the birth and death cycle.
- Hidden or secret Yama is the three most subtle conceptual minds that make appearances of true existence. Based on unawareness, we believe that the appearances they make correspond to reality, and thus we have grasping for true existence and all the disturbing emotions and attitudes based on that unawareness and grasping.

Question:

Stanza 23: What are the eighteen root downfalls?

Answer:

Although I mentioned it during the teaching, perhaps we can take some time here to share a little more about it.

The Bodhisattva training comes through the willingness and commitment to improve one's conduct towards others. This way, we train not to harm others in the slightest way. Moreover, we learn also to benefit them to the most, through adopting a pure conduct.

Therefore, the Bodhisattva Vows are contained in two categories:

1. Eighteen root downfalls
2. Forty-six secondary precepts.

To explain these all cannot be done at this time but what we can do is to describe briefly the first group comprised of the eighteen Bodhisattva Root Downfalls:

1. Praising ourselves and/or belittling others

This downfall refers to speaking such words to someone in an inferior position. The motivation must contain either desire for profit, praise, love, respect, and so on from the person addressed, or jealousy of the person belittled. It makes no difference whether what we say is true or false. Professionals who advertise that they are Buddhists need to take care about committing this downfall.

2. Not sharing Dharma teachings or wealth

Here, the motivation must be specifically attachment and miserliness. This negative action includes not only being possessive of our notes or recordings, but also being stingy with our time and refusing to help if needed.

3. Not listening to others' apologies or striking others

The motivation for either of these must be anger. The first refers to an actual occasion when yelling at or beating someone and either that person pleads for forgiveness, or someone else begs us to stop and we refuse. The latter is simply hitting someone. Sometimes, it may be necessary to give disorderly children or pets a smack to stop them from running into the road if they will not listen, but it is never appropriate or helpful to discipline out of anger.

4. Discarding the Mahayana teachings and propounding made-up ones

This means to reject the correct teachings about some topic concerning bodhisattvas, such as their ethical behaviour, and to make up in their stead a plausible yet misleading instruction on the same subject, claim it to be authentic, and then teach it to others in order to gain their following. An example of this downfall is when teachers who are eager not to scare away prospective students condone liberal moral behaviour and explain that any type of action is acceptable so long as it does not harm others. We need not be a teacher to commit this downfall. We can commit it even in casual conversation with others.

5. Taking offerings intended for the Triple Gem

This downfall is to steal or appropriate, either personally or through deputing someone else, anything offered or belonging to the Buddhas, Dharma, or Sangha, and then to consider it as ours. The Sangha, in this context, refers to any group of four or more monastics. Examples include misappropriating funds donated for building a Buddhist monument, for printing Dharma books, or for feeding a group of monks or nuns.

6. Forsaking the holy Dharma.

Here the downfall is to repudiate or, by voicing our opinions, cause others to repudiate that the scriptural teachings of the Pratyekabuddhas, or bodhisattva vehicles are the Buddha's words.

- Shravakas are those who listen to a Buddha's teachings while they are still extant;
- Pratyekabuddhas are self-evolving practitioners who live primarily during dark ages when the Dharma is no longer directly available. To make spiritual progress, they rely on intuitive understanding gained from study and practice conducted during previous lives.
- The Mahayana vehicle emphasizes methods for attaining full enlightenment.

Denying that all or just certain scriptures of either vehicle derive from the Buddha is a root downfall. The great masters who compiled the Tibetan Buddhist canon certainly rejected texts they considered inauthentic. However, instead of basing their decisions on prejudice, they used the seventh-century Indian master Dharmakirti's criterion for assessing the validity of any material: the ability of its practice to bring about the Buddhist goals of better rebirth, liberation, or enlightenment.

7. Disrobing monastics or committing such acts as stealing their robes

This downfall refers specifically to doing something damaging to one, two, or three Buddhist monks or nuns, regardless of their moral status or level of study or practice. Such actions need to be motivated by ill will or malice, and include beating or verbally abusing them, confiscating their goods, or expelling them from their monasteries.

8. Committing any of the "tsham-med nga" - The five heinous crimes:

Killing your father. Killing your mother. Killing an arhat.

With bad intentions drawing blood from a Buddha.

Causing a split in the monastic community.

9. Holding a distorted, antagonistic outlook

This means to deny what is true and of value - such as the laws of behavioural cause and effect, a safe and positive direction in life, rebirth, and liberation from it - and to be antagonistic toward such ideas and those who hold 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.

