

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

Group Study with Venerable Lama Sangyay Tendzin
Chapter Three: Gaining Hold of the Bodhicitta Aim
Session 20a – June 5, 2021
Questions & Answers (Part 2)

Good morning,
Let us start with the traditional recitations.

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

Tashi Deleg! Last week we went through a series of Q&A on the Chapter Three concluding the first part of the Bodhicaryâvatâra . We left the session in the middle of answering the 7th question focusing on the eighteen root downfalls for a Bodhisattva. Of these, we completed the first nine.

10. Destroying places such as towns

This downfall includes intentionally demolishing, bombing, or degrading the environment of a town, city, district, or countryside area, and rendering it unfit, harmful, or difficult for humans or animals to live in.

11. Teaching emptiness to those whose minds are untrained.

The primary objects of this downfall are persons with the Bodhicitta motivation who are not yet ready to understand emptiness. Such persons would become confused or frightened by this teaching and consequently abandon the Bodhisattva path for the path of personal liberation.

This can happen as a result of thinking that if all phenomena are devoid of inherent, findable existence, then no one exists, so why bother working to benefit anyone else? This action also includes teaching emptiness to anyone who would misunderstand it and therefore forsake the Dharma completely, for example by thinking that Buddhism teaches that nothing exists and is therefore sheer nonsense.

12. Turning others away from full enlightenment

The objects for this action are people who have already developed a Bodhicitta motivation and are striving toward enlightenment. The downfall is to tell them they are incapable of acting all the time with generosity, patience, and so on - to say that they cannot possibly become a Buddha and so it would be far better for them to strive merely for their own liberation. Unless they actually turn their aim away from enlightenment, however, this root downfall is incomplete.

13. Turning others away from their Pratimoksha Vows

"Pratimoksha" - the Vows of Individual Liberation, include those for laymen, laywomen, probationary nuns, novice monks, novice nuns, full monks, and full nuns. The objects here are persons who are keeping one of these sets of Pratimoksha vows. The downfall is to tell them as a Bodhisattva there is no use in keeping Pratimoksha, because for Bodhisattvas all actions are pure. For this downfall to be complete, they must actually give up their vows.

14. Belittling the Shravakas vehicle

The sixth root downfall is to deny that the texts of the Shravakas or Pratyekabuddhas vehicles are the authentic words of the Buddha. Denying the effectiveness of their teachings one maintains the impossibility to get rid of disturbing emotions by means of their instructions, for example those concerning vipassana (insight meditation). (*)

(*) meditation involving concentration on the body or its sensations, or the insight which this provides.

15. Proclaiming a false realization of emptiness

We commit this downfall if we have not fully realized emptiness yet teach or write about it pretending that we have, because of jealousy of the great masters. It makes no difference whether any students or readers are fooled by our pretence. Nonetheless, they must understand what we explain. If they do not comprehend our discussion, the downfall is incomplete.

Although this vow refers to proclaiming false realizations specifically of emptiness, it is clear that we need to avoid the same also when teaching Bodhicitta or other points of Dharma. There is no fault in teaching emptiness before fully realizing it, however, so long as we openly acknowledge this fact and that we are explaining merely from our present levels of provisional understanding.

16. Accepting what has been stolen from the Triple Gem

This downfall is to accept as a gift, offering, salary, reward, fine, or bribe anything someone else has stolen or embezzled, either personally or through deputing someone else, from the Buddhas, Dharma, or Sangha, including if it belonged only to one, two, or three monks or nuns.

17. Establishing unfair policies

This means to be biased against serious practitioners, because of anger or hostility toward them, and to favour those with lesser attainments, or none at all, because of attachment to them. An example of this downfall is to give most of our time as teachers to casual private students who can pay high fees and to neglect serious students who can pay us nothing.

18. Giving up Bodhicitta

This is abandoning the wish to attain enlightenment for the benefit of all. Of the two levels of Bodhicitta, aspiration and action, this refers specifically to discarding the former. In doing so, we give up the latter as well.

Having answered the pending questions on Chapter Three, we are now ready to abord the study of Chapter 4 just after taking a short break.

