

Shantideva's  
**Bodhicaryâvatâra**

བྱང་ཆུབ་སེམས་པའི་སྤོང་བ་ལ་འཇུག་པ།

Group Study with Venerable Lama Sangyay Tendzin  
Session 22 – June 19, 2021

Chapter Four: Developing Carefulness

Good morning everyone,

Last week we went through study of Stanzas 1 to 7.

We will now move on with stanza 8 just after reciting the preliminary prayers:

REFUGE | MANDALA | REQUEST for TEACHINGS

Lama's Invocation | Mental Quiescence

Chapter Four: Sloka 8

**For a bodhisattva, (however,) this is the heaviest  
From among (all) the downfalls.  
Because, if something should happen like that,  
It impairs the welfare of all limited beings.**

To abandon bodhichitta is the gravest and most negative of all the downfalls of a Bodhisattva. As it is said in the *Prajnaparamitasanchaya-sutra*:

“If, after practicing the tenfold path of virtue for a million kalpas,  
One wishes to become an Arhat or Pratyekabuddha,  
Then discipline is faulty and has been perverted.  
Such an attitude is graver than a root defeat.”

The reason for this is that if such a downfall comes to pass, it casts down a Bodhisattva's capacity to accomplish the good of all beings.

For if the downfall of abandoning beings occurs, then even if one attains liberation as described in the Hinayana and one works for beings until achieving nirvana without remainder, it will be impossible to benefit beings who are present wherever space exists. The welfare of beings is consequently thrown down.

If, on the other hand, buddhahood is achieved, the benefit of beings who fill the whole of space is accomplished on a vast scale.

Chapter Four: Sloka 9

And should anyone else cause an obstruction,  
For even an instant, to his positive acts,  
There'll be no end to his worse rebirth states,  
From impairing the welfare of limited beings.

Furthermore, those who, even for a single moment, let alone a protracted period, hinder the virtue and merit of a Bodhisattva, will be reborn endlessly in the lower realms because, by such actions, they bring low the welfare of all beings.

It is said in the *Prashantavinishchaya- pratiharya-sutra* that when someone hinders the virtue of a Bodhisattva, even to the slightest extent (like interfering in the act of giving a handful of food to an

animal), such a negative deed is far worse than killing or robbing the entire population of the earth. Such a person generates an unbounded sin, for he or she impedes a positive action that will give rise to a Buddha.

The words "hinder the virtues" in the root text refer to creating an obstacle to Bodhichitta. Anyone who does this commits the root downfall of hindering the Bodhisattva's attainment of perfect enlightenment and of causing the Hinayana motivation to arise instead. Given that the Bodhisattva who is the object of such an action forsakes Bodhichitta in intention, this is a further explanation of the words in the previous stanza to the effect that "the welfare of all beings is reduced."

#### Chapter Four: Sloka 10

For if one's state of rebirth will worsen  
By destroying the joy of even a single, limited being,  
What need to mention destroying the bliss  
Of embodied beings as vast as all space?

The reason for saying this is that the sutras declare that if one destroys the happiness of the higher realms for even one living being (let alone many), one will certainly accomplish the ruin of oneself in the lower realms.

What need is there to add that if, by creating an obstacle to the virtue of a Bodhisattva, one destroys the cause of the great happiness of all beings who are numberless as the infinitude of space, one will sink from the states of bliss and will be born countless times in the lower realms?

For if the generation of Bodhichitta is not hindered, Buddhahood will be achieved. And once this is done, rays of light will emanate from the Buddha's body and, entering the lower realms, will instantly establish all beings in a state of well-being and gradually bring them to great enlightenment, the bliss of Buddhahood.

#### Chapter Four: Sloka 11

Therefore, someone with the force from a downfall  
And the force from developing Bodhichitta (again)  
Keeps bouncing down and up in samsara,  
For a long time obstructed in reaching any Arya level of mind.

It could be argued that even if a bodhisattva downfall occurs, this cannot be compared with the destruction of the vows of individual liberation. For if one confesses such a downfall, applies the antidotes, and generates Bodhichitta again, all is restored.

But as we have explained above, those who at one moment commit a heavy downfall of abandoning bodhicitta and at another moment vigorously embrace it, alternating back and forth, will long be prevented from attaining the Bodhisattva grounds, let alone great and ultimate enlightenment.

For even if the downfall is purified through the force of confession so that they are saved from birth in the lower realms, a blockage is created nonetheless for the further appearance of good qualities in the mind stream, and this will delay the attainment of the grounds of realization and the other qualities.

Take for example the story of Tilopa who is said to have been capable of achieving supreme accomplishment in seven days. But because he secretly took a handful of sesame seeds, he had to wait seven months.

#### Chapter Four: Sloka 12

Therefore, with highest regard, I shall carry it through,  
Just as I've promised, because  
If, from now on, I don't make an effort,  
I'll wander from lower to ever-lower states.

Therefore, Shantideva declares that he will implement the precepts with devotion and care according to the promise he made when he conceived the attitude of Bodhichitta.

Henceforth, Shantideva continues, if he is not diligent in the practice of the precepts concerning what is to be done and not to be done, he will, because of his downfalls, sink progressively from the human condition to that of an animal, and lower and lower from one state of misery to another. Suffering will be his lot.

We may well tell ourselves that even if we don't make any effort at all, the Buddhas, the Bodhisattvas, and our teachers will surely not send us to the lower realms. Surely, they will lead us on to more elevated states and to liberation.

#### Chapter Four: Sloka 13

Countless Buddhas, who have helped  
All limited beings, have already passed.  
Yet, I wasn't an object of their healing,  
Because of my mistakes.

But the fact of the matter is that countless Bhagavan Buddhas appeared in the past. They were devoid of every self-centred aim and had the sole intention of securing the benefit and happiness of beings. And this they did before passing away.

But, says Shantideva, because of his sins, he was like an incurable invalid beyond the doctor's power to save, and he failed to come within the sphere of those many enlightened beings and their healing works. They were unable to help or guide him.

It is worth remembering that Devadatta, close as he was to the Buddha our master, the Teacher of the three worlds possessed of every excellence and free from every fault, could not be guided by him and, in his very presence, sank down into hell.

#### Chapter Four: Sloka 14

And if I still were to act like this,  
It would be the same, over and again:  
Worse rebirth states, sickness, death,  
Being dismembered and torn apart.

So, Shantideva reflects, if he continues as before, acting in such an abject manner, immersed in evil and accomplishing nothing good, it will be his destiny, not just once, but time and time again, to sink lower and lower and take birth in the realms of sorrow.

And even when he gains some respite in the higher states, his residual karma will cause him the suffering of many illnesses, imprisonment in chains, and the pain of being cut by swords and dismembered by axes.

#### Chapter Four: Sloka 15

If the advent of a Thusly Gone (Buddha),  
And gaining embodiment as a human (with) belief in what's fact  
And the properly constructive instincts are so rare,  
When shall I attain them (again) like this?

The root text mentions three things: the coming of a Tathagata to the world (an event as rare as the appearance of an udumbara flower), the possession of faith in his teachings, and the gaining of a precious human body with freedoms and advantages.

These factors refer respectively to the circumstantial advantages, the individual advantages, and the freedom to practice the Dharma (consisting in the absence of eight conditions in which there is no leisure to implement the teachings).

It is indeed extremely rare to find oneself in a situation in which all favourable circumstances are gathered and from which all adverse conditions are absent—a situation, in other words, in which it is possible to practice virtue. Since these conditions will not be found again, it is essential to make the most of what we have, rendering our opportunity meaningful and fruitful.

#### Chapter Four: Sloka 16

Although on a day like today, I'm not sick,  
Have food, and haven't any injuries,  
Life is but for a moment and will let me down:  
The body is like something on loan for an instant.

On such a day as this, Shantideva reflects, he is free from illness and other adversity. He is blessed with favourable circumstances, in the sense of having food, clothing and so forth, and he is untroubled by the harms afflicted by hostile influences and other sources of danger.

Yet this life cannot be taken for granted even for an instant. It is fraught with uncertainty. Moment by moment it is draining away. This body does not last for very long. It is like something borrowed, something on loan that cannot be kept forever. And there is no saying when the Lord of Death, will take it back, as though he were its owner.

We will stop here for today. This afternoon will be a Q&A session from 3:00pm to 4:00pm. You are most welcome to attend. Tomorrow as we have started the Drolkar retreat, we will be pursuing with a first sadhana practice at 6:00am.

I invite you abide in mental peace before dedicating the merit of this session for the benefit of all.

