

Shantideva's
Bodhicaryâvatâra

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Group Study with Venerable Lama Sangyay Tendzin
Chapter Four: Developing Carefulness
Session 25 – July 17, 2021

Good morning everyone, let us start the session by reciting the preliminary prayers.

REFUGE | MANDALA | REQUEST for TEACHINGS
Lama's Invocation | Mental Quiescence

Last week we ended up on Stanza 32 in which Shantideva made the statement that not only our conflicting emotions are our worst enemy, but that moreover, they are our oldest and long-lasting rivals.

Chapter Four: Sloka 33

Becoming close with other enemies and serving them nicely
Bring benefit and happiness.
But being close with my disturbing emotions
Only harms me with even more pain.

Reflecting on the difficulties that ensue from relying on such foes that are our disturbing emotions, Shantideva says that if he were to appease ordinary enemies by giving them the material goods that they want, they will always act favourably to him and give him their assistance.

To the contrary, however much he serves his enemies the afflictions, -his craving, hatred, ignorance, and the others, no matter how much he bears to their demands, not only will they not show him any favour or give him any help, but they will drag him down to grief both in this life and the next.

They are the very source of addiction to conflict and misery. He must therefore repudiate them instead of aiding and reinforcing them.

Chapter Four: Sloka 34

These long-time, continuing enemies like this
Are the sole causes for masses of harm to increase ever more.
How can I be joyful and not terrified in samsara,
If I set a secure place for them in my heart?

For a very long time, indeed for endless and beginningless time, our afflictions are, without the slightest interruption, our unprovoked and natural enemies—just as fire is naturally hot. And it is from them alone that the various sorrows of this and future lives evolve.

Moreover, they make their abode in the very temples of our hearts. If we serve them perfectly, it is sure that they will harm us perfectly. If we serve them moderately, they will harm us moderately. If we serve them little, they will do us little damage. And if we serve them not at all, they will leave us completely alone.

The basic reason for all these ills, which dwell in our hearts, is the fact that we do not fear samsara though it is like a ditch of fire or a nest of venomous snakes and is a threatening cause of suffering by its very nature. On the contrary, we take pleasure in it. There lies the blame. How can we enjoy and be attached to samsaric things? It is completely senseless.

Although they have no desire for the sufferings of samsara, Bodhisattvas take birth there and strive for the welfare of beings. This is because they are moved by compassion. It is not that they take pleasure in samsara, for if they did, they would want beings to stay there and not be liberated.

But this is not the case. It is said that the Bodhisattvas themselves cannot stand the unbearable sorrows of beings in samsara. They therefore ignore or play down their own suffering and remain in samsara for the sake of others.

Chapter Four: Sloka 35

Where can I have happiness
If, in a web of attachments within my mind,
They lurk as guards of my samsara-prison,
Becoming my murderers and butchers in joyless realms and the like?

Our negative emotions are like jailers that imprison us in the three worlds of samsara. It is they that allow us no escape. It is they that appear to us in the form of the killers who slay us in the hell of Reviving and the other infernal states.

And they lurk within our minds, -in the web of our very cravings-, without our even wanting to repudiate them. If we get caught in them, like birds tangled in a fowler's net, what chance do we have of joy in this and future lives? These are the enemies that we must strive to overcome!

From Stanza 28 until the last one Shantideva explained at length the defects of our conflicting emotions. In the next slokas, he commits putting up with the hardships involved in abandoning them.

Chapter Four: Sloka 36

Therefore, I shall never give up my efforts in this
Until, directly myself, I definitely smash these enemies.
Having become enraged at someone who caused them even minor, occasional harm,
Those with full-blown pride won't sleep till they've smashed that enemy.

It is not enough to recognize distressing emotions and identify their flaws. They must be rejected. Therefore, Shantideva says that until he annihilates his enemies, the afflictions, instead of simply pretend to have cast them aside, he will cultivate their antidotes in his mind and apply them relentlessly.

To this end, he will go to great lengths and never allow his diligence to weaken, even at the cost of his life. This is the meaning of his promise. Shantideva then gives the example of a person lightly struck by an ordinary enemy, for example by theft of his horse or some other owned good.

The fury of the victim's pride will be strongly incited. And until he gets the better of his opponent, he will not be able to sleep, tormented by his plans for revenge.

What then of the multiple efforts that must also be made to overcome negative emotions, which are so hostile and cause us so much harm.

Chapter Four: Sloka 37

And if, while lined up in the height of battle against those with disturbing emotions,
Who will come to suffer their natural deaths anyway,
Those obsessed with vindictively smashing them will disregard the pain of being struck
by the weapons of arrows or spears
And, till accomplishing their aims, will never run off in the opposite direction.

But even if you don't put much effort into defeating your ordinary enemies, the point is, they will die anyway. It is in the nature of things that they perish before long.

These ordinary enemies are themselves the victims of suffering, which is why they are unflatteringly referred to as "wretched or miserable". They are themselves weak and are objects of compassion.

When we fight against enemies in the hope of victory, we ignore all the horrible suffering that we know to be in store: the wounds of arrows, swords, and spears, etc. And as long as we have not achieved our goal, that is to say the destruction of our adversary, we must stand firm and refuse to give in.

This initial statement is the first argument introducing the conclusion set forth in the next few stanzas, in which Shantideva clearly declares the depth and strength of his determination to subdue the enemies of afflictions.

Chapter Four: Sloka 38

Is there needed to mention that I mustn't lose heart and procrastinate,
Even if I'm caused hundreds of sufferings
When now, I strive to overcome my natural enemies,
Which are the continual sources of all my sufferings?

However, Shantideva tells himself that he too must fight and overcome his conflicting emotions, those enemies who are eager to hurt him in this life and in future lives - they who remain unchallenged no matter how painful they are. they inflict such for the fire to be burning.

They are the natural enemies of all of us, high or low. Whenever they appear, they are aiming for our destruction, and it is essential to make the greatest effort to defeat them.

Thus, Shantideva declares that from this moment, anxious to apply the antidotes, whatever the adversities which will arise (poverty, lack of food), all sources of a hundred annoyances, he will not let himself be defeated and will not lose courage.

He will not allow himself to think that he has never succeeded in eliminating the emotional taint despite the use of antidotes and that he will fail again. He will not allow himself to adopt such a defeatist attitude.

Instead, he will enjoy applying the antidotes. He will remain determined until his enemies, his tainted emotions, are all defeated. He will not listen to the voices of depression and idleness.

Chapter Four: Sloka 39

If wounds, without even some purpose, inflicted by enemies,
Are held up like ornaments on the body,
Then why are sufferings troublesome to me,
Who impeccably strive to fulfil the Great Purpose?

Soldiers display as trophies the scars and wounds to the head and limbs from swords and other weapons - wounds their enemies have inflicted in wars fought without noble purpose. They present them as badges of heroism.

If so, why should he, Shantideva, regard as harmful and injurious the trials and difficulties which arise while he perseveres in the practice of remedies as he strives in Bodhisattva trainings for the great goal of Awakening both for himself and for all other beings?

Not only is there nothing harmful in them, but these remedies are also extremely beneficial. For it is through them that his defilements can be purified!

Chapter Four: Sloka 40

If fishermen, outcastes, peasants, and the like,
Even with the thought of merely their livelihoods,
Endure such sufferings as heat and cold,
Why aren't the likes of me patient for the sake of the happiness of wandering beings?

Fishermen, butchers, and farmers, to earn a living, must work tirelessly throughout the day; at night they sleep very little.

The stones are stained with their bloody feet, the trees with the blood of their hands. They must patiently ignore all the inconveniences of cold and heat, wind and rain.

However, said Shantideva, why should he shrink from the difficulties encountered on the path, in his desire to bring sentient beings to immediate happiness and then to the ultimate great bliss of Buddhahood?

It is obvious that he must accept and endure all these trials.

Chapter Four: Sloka 41

When I promised to liberate from their disturbing emotions
Wandering beings in the ten directions
As far as the ends of space,
I myself was not freed yet from disturbing emotions,

When he previously engendered Bodhichitta, Shantideva says that he made a promise involving all beings in the ten directions to the ends of space. He thus pledged:

- to take to the other shore those who have not yet crossed
- to free those who have not yet awakened and,
- to establish in the state beyond suffering those who have not yet reached it.

In other words, he made the promise to free them from all their obscurations: karma and afflictions.

When he made this promise, Shantideva says that he himself was not free from negative emotions, not even to a lesser extent.

Chapter Four: Sloka 42

And didn't even realize the extent of my being under their control;
Wasn't it crazy to have spoken like that?
But, as this is so, I shall never withdraw
From destroying my disturbing emotions.

He was beyond the measure of his own abilities and to make such a reckless promise was, for sure, an act of madness. Because it was as if he had promised to save someone when he himself was bound and drowned in water. But the commitments are to be honoured despite everything!

From then on, Shantideva told himself that he should never back down from his task but must apply the antidotes until he succeeds in defeating his enemies, his defilements. Now that he has promised it, he must fight with the greatest diligence.

We will stop here for today. Next time we will complete the next 6 stanzas with a little lengthy explanation on how emotional defilement is to be abandoned

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

