

Shantideva's
Bodhicaryâvatâra
བྱང་ཆུབ་སེམས་པའི་སྤྱོད་པ་ལ་འཇུག་པ།
Group Study with Venerable Lama Sangyay Tendzin
Chapter Four: Developing Carefulness
Session 26 – July 24, 2021

Good morning everyone, today is a very special day as it marks the celebration of Lord Bodhisattva Sakyamuni descending from Tushita Heaven in the form of a six-tusked white elephant to enter the womb of his mother Mayadevi.

There is a short account written by Asvagosha in his "Buddha-Carita". Moreover, reading the sutras, one may come across numerous descriptions of this event, some of which are of astonishing beauty and most inspiring.

This being said, I wish you a most rewarding day full of enriching experiences. Let us start now with the traditional prayers before pursuing our study of the Bodhicaryâvatâra written by the great Shantideva.

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

Last week we ended up on Stanza 42 in which Shantideva states that although he had little understanding when making the pledge to develop Bodhicitta, he will never abandon fighting his conflicting emotions with the greatest diligence.

Chapter Four: Sloka 43

To do this shall be my obsession:
Holding a grudge, I shall meet them in battle!
Disturbing emotions, in forms such as these,
Are exclusively for destroying the disturbing emotions.

He therefore decides to defeat his enemies, the defilements, by means of remedies to which he has become accustomed. It will become his all-consuming passion!

The defilements have hurt him for a beginningless time. He is therefore filled with resentment against them, and he will wage a war in which antidotes will fight against the defilements. For the defilements must be abandoned.

It could be argued that passion and resentment are themselves types of attachment and aversion, and therefore should be rejected. But such defilements, namely passion for antidotes and resentment against defilements, are, in the early stages, means by which negative emotions are to be destroyed.

That is why, for now, they should not be seen as things to be rejected. They should not be despised. They still constitute cognitive obscurations and at some point, they too will have to be abandoned.

Chapter Four: Sloka 44

Better for me to be burned to death
Or have my head chopped off:
I shall never, in any circumstances,
Bow to the enemy, (my) disturbing emotions.

From the start, we should adopt Shantideva's attitude.

It would be better to perish in the fire, he said; it would be better if his head was cut off and fell to the ground, or some other terrible thing happened to him, than to ever surrender to his mortal enemies, to his stained emotions, and to serve and crawl before them.
This is the kind of promise we should make repeatedly.

Chapter Four: Sloka 45

Common enemies, when driven off from a country,
Will settle and occupy other lands,
And when they've recovered their strength, return once again.
But the way of the enemy, my disturbing emotions, is not similar in this regard.

When enemy forces, in the ordinary sense of the term, are forcibly driven out of the state, they withdraw and base themselves in other countries, where they regroup their forces, assembling numerous bands of bandits and thieves - for the better comeback and wreak havoc in retaliation.

But negative emotions are not like ordinary enemies. Once they have been driven out by achievements gained on the noble path, they can never return.

Chapter Four: Sloka 46

Pitiful disturbing emotions, when gotten rid of by wisdom's eye
And kicked out of my mind, where will you go?
Where will you live to come back to harm me?
Weak-minded, it's fallen to my making no effort.

How then to reject them? If examined, defilements such as desire are easily removed. For when scrutinized by the eyes of wisdom which understands their lack of inherent existence, these same defilements, scornfully referred to as "miserable" in reference to their baseness, are scattered like darkness at sunrise.

Where will they flee, wonders Shantideva now that they have been driven from his mind? They have nowhere to go. Where will they return from, their strength regained, to launch new attacks against him?

The point is that before, when his understanding was weak, he had made no effort to eradicate them. If only he had had the wisdom and persistence, the emotional taint would have been much easier to remove than the other enemies.

Chapter Four: Sloka 47

If disturbing emotions don't live in sensory objects, in sensory cells, in consciousnesses in between, nor somewhere other than that, then where can they live to harass all wandering beings?

They're like an illusion and, consequently, I shall get rid of the fear in my heart and devote myself resolutely to striving for wisdom.

Why have I been torturing myself, for no real reason, in joyless realms and the like?

This is how we should examine the nature of afflictions with the eyes of wisdom. When attachment or hatred arises in our mind, we should not let ourselves be dominated by it, but we should examine it in the following way:

The defilements of greed and aversion are not found in objects external to us, whether in our enemies or our friends. We know this because defilements still arise even when external objects are absent. Moreover, if they were based on such items, it would follow that when other people meet our enemies and friends, they would feel aversion and attraction the same as we do, but this is not the case.

Therefore, the dirt does not reside in the external objects. But neither do they subsist in the conjunction of the organs of sense and consciousness. Because even when the power of the senses and the

consciousness meet, defilements do not arise automatically. If defilements were intrinsic to such conjunctions, it would mean that whenever we see or hear something, attachment or aversion would be felt, when it does not happen.

Neither can defilements somehow exist in the gap between object and consciousness, for space is empty. Therefore, such defilements have no place to abide. And since they cannot dwell elsewhere, whether in beings or in the outer universe that contains them, one may well wonder where they are - these same defilements that have been our enemies since beginningless times!

How is it that they hurt us and other beings so much in this life and in future lives?

Analysis reveals that defilements appear and yet lack inherent reality. They are like inconsistent visions, mirages of things that do not exist.

Such illusions have three properties:

- they appear when certain conditions arise,
- they are perceived by the mind, and
- they are without being intrinsic.

The defilements arise thanks to the circumstantial causes furnished by the enemies and the friends; they appear to our mind, yet they lack inherent existence. We should take comfort in this fact and not be alarmed that we cannot get rid of it.

We should not follow sense objects like dogs chasing stones. Instead, we should be like lions. Whatever thoughts tainted with desire or aversion arise in the mind, we should recognize them for what they are, in their nakedness.

First, we should look for where they come from, then we should look for where they live in the present moment, and finally we should look for where they are going. If we do this, if we strive to see, by means of this technique, that the defilements are without inherent existence, it will be easy to reject them, for they are without being intrinsic.

It is said in the Ratnakuta:

In future times, O Kashyapa, there will be vain monks who will be like dogs chasing stones. Excited by the throwing of a stone, a dog will pursue her; it will not chase the person who threw it.

Likewise, O Kashyapa, some monks and practitioners will make a persistent distinction between shapes, sounds, smells, tastes and textures. They will understand that these are impermanent, deceptive, and subject to destruction, but they will not know where they came from.

Therefore, when they go to villages, towns and cities, provinces and royal palaces, they will be hurt by shapes, sounds, smells, tastes and textures. Even if they remain and die in solitude, since they obey precepts limited to the world (), they will be reborn in the higher destinies and will continue to be harmed by the objects of the five senses.*

*And when their spirits leave this state upon death, they will not find freedom from evil fates. And what are these evil fates? These are the hellish realms, the animal states, the world of the Lord of Death (**), and that of the asuras. This is how these monks are like dogs running after stones.*

(*) abandon the ten negative actions and practice the ten virtuous actions

(**) The Preta kingdom

In times to come, however, O Kashyapa, there will be other monk-yogis who will not be like dogs chasing stones. If you throw a stone at a lion, it will know where the stone came from. He will not chase the stone but the one who threw it, so that he will no longer be throwing stones!

Likewise, when the monks who practice yoga see the external objects of the senses, they know that these take their origin in the mind. And after examining the mind, they know that it doesn't really exist, and so they are free.

Chapter Four: Sloka 48

Having decisively thought like this,
I shall strive to actualize the training, just as explained.
Not listening to the doctor's instructions,
How can a patient in need of a cure be healed by his medicines?

In the spirit of what has been discussed above, Shantideva decides to give careful thought to the instructions on caution as stated in the scriptures and the commentaries. He decides to strive to apply them in the practice of the three higher trainings of the higher path: ethical discipline, concentration, and wisdom.

It is said metaphorically that the Buddha is to be viewed as a physician, and the sacred Dharma, in its aspects of study, reflection, and meditation, is to be viewed as medicine.

The main discipline training is to follow a special diet and behave appropriately in the event of illness. The negative emotions of attachment and aversion are like illnesses, while we ourselves are like invalids.

If we fail to observe discipline, if we do not implement what should be done and avoid what should be avoided, Dharma will do us no good. We are like people who ignore the advice of a learned doctor who tells us how to eat and act: do this and avoid that.

How can we expect to be cured of heat and cold illnesses and so on, even when we actually take the right medicine for such illnesses? It's impossible. On the other hand, if we correctly observe the doctor's advice and, in addition, take a suitable medicine, our disease will be cured.

Likewise, if we practice Dharma with effort, training in discipline, we will be free from all suffering and attain great bliss. Therefore, we must strive to train ourselves to be cautious.

As it is said in the *Suhrillekha*:

*Carefulness brings life, the Sage has said,
And carelessness is death.
Therefore, to increase your virtue,
With devotion always practice carefulness.*

This completes the short study and reflexion on this Four Chapter of the Bodhicaryāvatāra.

We will stop here for today. I am inviting you to submit me by email any questions you might have on this chapter so that they may be answered before we engage the study of Chapter Five composed of 109 stanzas dedicated to the topic of "Vigilance" or "Safeguarding alertness".

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

