

Shantideva's Bodhicaryâvatâra

བྱང་ཆུབ་སེམས་པའི་སྤྱོད་པ་ལ་འཇུག་པ།

Group Study with Venerable Lama Sangyay Tendzin

Chapter Four: Q&A (Part 1)

Session 27 – July 31, 2021

Good morning everyone, I wish to tell you that I am happy about the interest you show in the current study of the Bodhicaryâvatâra. Although the fashion and eagerness of most students nowadays call for higher topics such as Shunyata, Mahamudra, Dzogchen, Annutara Tantra and so on, this very text is the ground or foundation for such teachings.

Without having firmly established such ground, all undertakings by Dharma students to access higher trainings have little meaning and as they lack the ability to comprehend them accurately.

It is a little bit like giving the key to a bulldozer to a child who will be able at his best to achieve nothing constructive or helpful. The initial training is indeed necessary, it is helpless to try to bypass it.

Let us start now with the traditional prayers.

REFUGE | MANDALA | REQUEST for TEACHINGS

Lama's Invocation | Mental Quiescence

Last week we completed the study of the Chapter Four. As announced, we will now go through a session of Q&A on this Chapter. For the sake of simplicity and to avoid redundancy, I have grouped the various question that I received in relation to their topics.

Question 1:

Why is the realm of pretas also called realm of the death in the commentary?

Answer:

There is much to know about Yama the Lord of Death. Although portrayed in the Hell Realms, he resides in the Realm of Ghosts and is the King of the Pretas. He lives in the Preta city of Kapila 500 miles below the classical North Indian city of Rajgir and is accompanied by 36 attendants. His association with the Hell Realms is in the capacity of a judge of karma.

You might have seen him appearing holding the wheel of life, the large red figure of a personified Samsara, wrathful, with one face and two hands, a crown of skulls and flaming orange hair is holding the circular wheel of existence pressed up against the mouth ready to be swallowed at any moment. This is representing the immediacy of impermanence.

I see that this association with the pretas comes from the fact that attachment is the refusal of the law of impermanence under the illusion that one may keep the object of attachment as long one wishes for it. But it is not so and a heavy lesson to take did you not learn to deal with it ahead of the time of dying. It was integrated in the Buddhist deities as a practice to prevent this.

Question 2:

This question relates to a unnoticed google translation of the term "Buddhahood" which has been translated in French by the words "Capuchon de Bouddha" which in English means "Buddha's cap". The question is about the meaning of this expression in this context.

Answer:

Looking at it, I found that the original mistake was not from Google but that in the English, the word Buddhahood had been written Buddha Hood. This indeed translate as "Buddha's cap". So the French correct expression for "Buddhahood" is "Bouddhéité".

Question 3:

In Sloka 22 of chapter 4, it is said that it is possible that the karmic principle be logically established through the fourth of the principles of reasoning.

Could you enlighten us on these 4 principles of reasoning?

1. the principle of causal efficiency
2. the principle of dependency
3. the principle of nature
4. the principle of logical coherence

Answer:

This is a great question! Perhaps a little bit of “trying-to-dive-into-the-depth of the ocean”. So, don’t get lost, ok?

It is a serious philosophical question involving metaphysics on a level likely beyond our competence. The same question has been asked four times, so I will try my best to elaborate just a little bit on this.

Concerning the four principles of reasoning mentioned by Khenchen Kunzang Palden in his commentary, he does not provide explanations and the reason is that it involves a complete branch of knowledge. As vast as the Bodhicaryāvatāra itself.

To talk briefly about it, formal reasoning is associated with the acts of cognition and thinking. It entails using one's intellect to produce logically valid arguments.

“The Sutra of Unravelling the Intent” - དཔོན་ས་པ་རེས་འགྲེལ།(*) defines the four principles of reasoning ruling their logic validity.

(*) One of the ten Sutras of the third turn of the Wheel by Buddha Sakyamuni on the subject of “Buddha Nature”.

The most renown Buddhist authors on logic are the Indian Masters Dinaga and Dharmakirti. More recent and more accessible, we can refer to the translation of “The Gate of Knowledge” by Jo Mipham Rinpoche. This text is more accessible, yet it contains great knowledge on the subject.

Here is some basic explanation of the four principles:

1. The observation and analyse of all functions of a certain cause producing a certain effect are called the reasoning of function. The basic function of the law of karma cause & effect dictates the first principle of reasoning, the *principle of causal efficiency*. It is ineluctable. Everything happens for a reason.
2. The fact that everything that is an effect, such as the sprout, is dependent upon its own causes is called the second principle of reasoning or *the principle of dependence*.
3. Since the efficiency of phenomena and its dependence on causes are their intrinsic characteristics, these two principles of reasoning related to them are themselves contained within the wider *principle of their nature*.

This is where it gets a bit tricky for some people:

Conventional and ultimate reasonings are both referred to as reasoning based on the nature or evidence of phenomena. When one reaches this point, no other valid proofs are necessary—just as there is no need to explain the reason for a fire's heat.

The relative nature or existential mode of fire is that it throws out heat; the ultimate nature or essence of fire is that it lacks intrinsic existence.

Thus, a phenomenon's mode of being is established without mistake by both valid cognitions, - conventional and ultimate- together, and not by only one of them alone.

4. How is this proof being established? It is established by means of

- a. the validity of *direct perception* which is to perceive the conventional meaning of whatever appears and the ultimate meaning of how it is and,
- b. the validity of *inference*, which is to infer unmistakably something other, from the perception of a sign that has the capacity for estimating something that is hidden.

These two types of validity establish *the principle of coherence*.

Question 4:

In stanza 34 of chapter 4, Lama spoke of the essence of the water element as the dakini Mamaki. Could you enlighten us on the energy of this element as well as on the energy of the 4 other elements in order to help us to fight the conflicting emotions.

Answer:

Jump in a swimming pool and say hello Mamaki!

The practice sadhanas provide the practitioner timely with the knowledge needed by them for their spiritual progress. For example, the practices of the Annutara Tantra such as Vajra Yogini, Khorlo Demchog or Gyalwa Gyamtsho familiarises you with the realisation you seek. In a direct way, not intellectually. Many sadhanas do this in a most progressive manner.

Moreover, you do not have to fight the conflicting emotions. That would be one more conflict! Just relax and watch your mind instead of responding to its fantasies. The coming seminar on Karma Pakshi is essential in enabling this.

Question 5:

Our negative emotions are like jailers imprisoning us in the three worlds of samsara. Despite the explanation of my Dharma sisters, would it be possible, Precious Lama, to give us more explanation on these three worlds?

Answer:

All of us have in common to want happiness. Yet, we all have a different view on how to get there.

By arrogance, we want to exist independently and solidify all we need to justify and try to fulfil that existence. This is the jail that we create for ourselves. This jail is unique to everyone. According to our intelligence and subsequent degree of subtlety that we manifest in our lives, we will experience a different type of jail.

Basically, the Buddha taught there are three realms of existence:

1. The Karmadhatu comprises six realms of beings enslaved by desire for the objects of the senses.
 - We experience desire for the objects perceived by our consciousnesses such as forms, sounds, scents, flavours, feelings, and thoughts.
 - This desire generates positively, negatively or in a neutral way, leading us towards attachment, aversion, and ignorance.
 - These three main poisons induce in our mind conflicting emotions and karmic actions. Both have the outcome of developing habitual patterns leading to a rebirth in one of the six types of existence in the karmadhatu (hells, pretas, animals, humans, asuras, gods).
 - The way to exit this dependency on desire is through meditation. This is the privilege of the human realm and some of the gods.
2. The Rupadhatu. The beings there have no more desire. Having no craving for the sensual objects, they have no more flesh bodies. They still experience tainted emotions being attached to the concept of form, and this is what distinguishes them. The Rupadhatu counts 17 types of gods abiding on the four levels of concentration (dhyana).

3. The Arupyadhātu. In the realm of formlessness, beings are suspended in a state of indeterminate absorption of blank neutrality. This the highest of the three worlds of existence. There is no real benefit to be there and is the result of attachment to meditative absorption.

To provide further explanation on this subject is not feasible today. I advise you to study the teaching notes published under the reference KTP | GT 018. This has been edited in English and in French.

Question 6:

It is said in this chapter of Bodhicaryāvatāra that we must do the job to eradicate the conflicting emotions that keep us in Samsara since so many lives times. We are own executioner, and we have the solution to stop them by not indulging into them.

I find it a little difficult not to see there a contradiction with the fact that we take Refuge and ask for blessings to the Guru so that we can master our mind.

I suppose that it my dualistic mind that find contradiction, but it is something that I often feel. Why do we take Refuge if we need to work by ourselves? Do we need to work on the relative world and Guru blessings come into the absolute truth?

Answer:

Let's say that perhaps, we are our own manager. Yes... of course! Each of us has built his/her own jail. "Manager", ...I think that it feels better than "executioner". We are talking of the path to Buddhahood, not the ladder to the guillotine!

We are free to manage ourselves and the method for doing so is the sacred dharma.

The Guru is there to convey this live dharma. That is, not just the teaching of methods but the Buddha's blessings carried through the Lineage. In this way we may succeed managing ourselves. We have a filial link. The Lama is like the mother... to assist us to speak, walk etc. Yet, the action, the job is ours. It is *our* life.

Trust yourself. Your feeling comes from fear of not meeting expectations. You must abandon the fear to quit samsara...its vain and futile pleasures. They are so because they do not take you very far!

The Guru is working on both, relative and absolute level. He stands by your side. This is relative. He is also the absolute aspect and supports you, always, in his bodhicitta, in his prayers and the blessings he transmits.

Question 7:

As I read verses 9, 10, 11 of chapter 4, it comes to my mind not only the responsibility not to hinder the happiness of one being, but also not to let a single being hinder my own happiness, my own motivation under penalty of causing his suffering too. Is this correct? Can interdependence show up here that way?

Answer:

This seems a bit twisted. The three verses you mentioned are about to show you the importance of not hurting or disparaging a Bodhisattva. Of course, we do need to avoid hurting any sentient being, but the point here is that a Bodhisattva has realised the interdependence with all beings. He is inseparable from them. So, hurting takes a big scale.

Now in relation to our second statement, which is not mentioned in the text, I have difficulties to relate to this kind of dualistic projection. Interdependence? Own happiness? Think about it! Ok?

Question 8:

***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.***

This stanza upsets me! I don't feel like I've ever felt such motivation! How could I understand it better?

Answer:

Don't worry, be happy! Yet, understand that by these extreme examples, Shantideva shows us in a most direct way, the importance to abandon our conflicting emotions. This is a 'sine-qua-non' condition to progress on the path to enlightenment.

We will stop here for today. As there are a few more questions to be answered, this will be done next Saturday. The study of the Bodhicaryâvatâra will then resume after the coming webinar on the sadhana of "Karma Pakshi Lama'i Naljor" that will be held from August 13 to 21, a teaching bound by samaya.

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

