

Shantideva's
Bodhicaryâvatâra

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Group Study with Venerable Lama Sangyay Tendzin
Chapter Five: Safeguarding alertness
Session 28 - August 28, 2021

Good morning, everyone.

Let us start now with the traditional prayers.

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

We are now proceeding through the fifth chapter dedicated to "Safeguarding alertness". This chapter is quite extensive as it counts 109 stanzas.

The first topic of this chapter deals with guarding the mind to implement the trainings. Many declare themselves watchful, yet they ignore what is to be watched.

Khenchen Kunpel sadly observed centuries ago:

*"Nowadays, there are many monastics as well as those who claim to be tantric practitioners,
enjoying a good reputation in the estimation of other people,
yet they ignore what most of the defeats, residual faults, and root downfalls are."*

This is a shameful situation. How can we remedy it? This the very topic of this chapter.

The Shikshasamucchaya states:

*"Who will know the contents of my mind
Better than myself, my own preceptor?"*

Since others are unaware of our negative states of mind, how can they really help us? With little understanding of our physical and verbal misdeeds, they can only succeed in irritating us.

It is for each one of us to take control and bring our own thoughts, words, and deeds onto the path, we will not be irritated when we make mistakes, and we will be able to return to the path again.

Chapter Five - Stanza 1:

With the wish to safeguard my training,
I need to work hard and safeguard my mind.
If I'm unable to safeguard my mind,
I'll also be unable to safeguard my training.

People who wish to implement the three precious trainings of the excellent path correctly, should not fall into the power of distraction but should strive one-pointedly to guard their minds from every fault.

After seeking instructions from a qualified teacher, they must gain mastery over their conduct through mindfulness and vigilant introspection.

Mindfulness consists of keeping in mind the actions that are to be instigated and those that are to be avoided. This is our goal.

Vigilant introspection is the tool for us to achieve this goal. What is "vigilant introspection"? It is the repeated examination of our behaviour in all circumstances: both physical, verbal, and mental.

Its purpose is the conscious application of the principle of adopting what is to be done and rejecting what is not to be done. This is to be practised whether we are alone or in others' company.

If we do not preserve our minds from defiled emotion through the practice of mindfulness and introspection, we will be unable to prevent our training from regressing.

Indeed, if we neglect to keep a guard on our minds and manage for a time to control our body and speech merely out of fear of authority, the vows and precepts will become a burden and we will get nowhere. It is therefore essential to keep watch over our minds.

Chapter Five - Stanza 2:

Left to run loose, the elephant of my mind can ravage me
With a joyless realm of unrelenting pain.
Untamed, rutting elephants in this world
Can't cause me such harm.

In India, wild elephants were used for military purposes. They were maddened with alcohol and unleashed against the enemy, destroying completely their towns. Even so, they were powerless to inflict on human beings any harm comparable to the Hell of Unrelenting Pain.

The mind, says Shantideva, is like a wild elephant. Addicted to the habits of the past, eagerly expecting future thoughts, it gets caught up the circumstances of the present moment.

This way, it gets lost and is dispersed in whatever arises. Left running wild to its own tricks, it leads to accumulate bad karma, which inevitably end in the suffering of Unrelenting Pain or any other hells.

Therefore, every effort must be made to control the mind.

Chapter Five - Stanza 3:

But, if the elephant of my mind is firmly bound
By the rope of mindfulness on every side,
All fears will vanish and everything constructive
Will come into my hands.

If the mind, which can be driven wild by desire, is tied with the rope of mindfulness, it remains aware of the principle of adopting and rejecting explained previously, and in this way, maintains correct mental behaviour.

Prevented from following past habits, inviting future thoughts, and drifting to the present objects of distraction in the here and now, then all fears and dangers will be brought to nothing. All altruistic virtues will be gained without difficulty. They will drop into our hands like gifts.

Chapter Five - Stanza 4:

Tigers, lions, elephants, bears
Snakes and all enemies,
The beings who are the guards in the joyless realms,
Witches and likewise cannibals –

What are the fears and dangers of this and future existences?

In our present lives, they are whatever is hostile: tigers, lions, elephants, bears, snakes, and dangerous humans like thieves, robbers, and so on.

The terrors of the life to come are the dreadful henchmen of the Lord of Death, the guards of hell, and so forth.

The fears that threaten us both in our present and future existences are the evil forces and demons summoned and sent by the magical power of others, as well as all devilish influences that rob beings of vitality and shorten their lives.

Chapter Five - Stanza 5:

They'll all be bound, by having bound
This mind alone.
They'll all be tamed, by having tamed
This mind alone.

But, says Shantideva, if he manages to do no more than just tie up his own mind, it is as if all such evil doers have been secured. They will be powerless to injure him.

Moreover, people who are mindful and vigilant are accompanied by spirits that take pleasure in goodness, such as tutelary deities, as a result of which they do not encounter such beasts. And even if they do, if they pray to Guru Rinpoche, they will come to no harm.

If just the mind is tamed with loving-kindness, compassion, and Bodhichitta, all such dangers are subdued and rendered harmless. It is just as with great Kadampa master, Ngulchu Thogme Zangpo, in whose presence sheep and wolves would friendly play together

As we just received the transmission of the three instructions on the nature of mind revealed by Karma Pakshi to Tertön Mingyur Dorje, we should not have the idea that tying the mind is something forceful that you are incapable of doing.

Garab Dorje instructed Mañjuśrīmitra with these words:

"The nature of your own mind-essence is, from the very beginning, none other than buddha. This mind in itself, is birthless and deathless. It is simply like the sky.

If the intrinsic truth of the nonduality of all phenomena is understood in its totality, and if this view is merely sustained in faith, without making any kind of effort, then that is how one should practice meditation."

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

