

Shantideva's Bodhicaryâvatâra

བྱང་ཆུབ་སེམས་པའི་སྤོང་བ་ལ་འཇུག་པ།

Group Study with Venerable Lama Sangyay Tendzin
Chapter Five: Safeguarding alertness
Session 30 - September 11, 2021

Good morning, everyone.

Let us start now with the traditional prayers.

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

Before continuing, let us review the topics that have been presented so far in this chapter dedicated to sustaining Vigilance. To achieve such a state of stable awareness depends on the repeated examination of the mind and body in their various situations.

The first topic presented was about guarding the mind to implement the teachings.

The first sloka of this chapter consisted in a brief exposition of the topic. It basically stressed the need to rely on an authentic teacher to learn and train inner watchfulness of our conduct of body, speech and mind and the conscious implementation of the principle of adopting what is to be done and rejecting what is not to be done in all circumstances we come to experience.

A detailed explanation follows as Shantideva explains us this topic more thoroughly by analysing three aspects:

1. In the slokas 2 to 7, he shows us that all harms come from the mind.
2. In the slokas 8 to 17, he shows us that all virtues come also from the mind:

We saw last week that the practices of *generosity, ethical discipline, patience, and diligence* were issued from the mind. This is where we closed our last session with the sloka 15.

We are now pursuing the same topic, commenting on the nexts two aspects of Paramita, i.e., Concentration and Wisdom described in the slokas 16 &17.

Chapter Five - Stanza 16:

The Knower of Reality has said
That recitation and all physically difficult practices,
Even if done for a very long time, will be meaningless,
If done with a mind that's distracted elsewhere.

Generally speaking, concentration is also a matter of the mind.

It is true that one can for a long time undergo all kinds of physical austerities to bring about the birth of concentration in the mental stream. This is usually done through recitation or abstinence practices.

But if the mind is distracted by objects of desire, floating like a piece of paper caught in a tree, no matter what recitations or austerities are performed, the hoped-for goal will not be achieved.

This has been said by the Buddha himself; he who has a direct and immediate vision of the nature of all things. In the sutra titled Distillation of Concentration, the Buddha says:

"O monks, if your mind is distracted by desire,
none of your austerities and prayers will work.

The Prajnaparamita-sutra also states:

*"With a distracted mind, we do not achieve our own good, and even less that of others.
Therefore, therefore, never let your mind wander, even slightly."*

Chapter Five - Stanza 17:

And those who don't know the secret of the mind,
The paramount significance of Dharma,
Will wander about, pointlessly, and miserably,
Wishing to gain happiness and overcome suffering.

As for the last aspect of Paramita, *Wisdom*, the most important thing for everyone to understand is the nature of the mind, which is empty, devoid of self, and luminous.

Although everyone possesses it, not everyone knows or realizes it. That is why it is described as a secret.

All external phenomena arise in the mind like reflections in a mirror. They are mental fabrications. They are the mere display of the mind and do not extend beyond it. The principal task therefore is to understand the mind clearly, and to that end we must use reasoning.

We must examine the mind. We must look for its shape, its colour, and so on. We must search for the place where the mind arises, where it dwells, and where it ceases.

If we fail to understand that the mind is beyond every concept of origin, dwelling, and cessation; if we fail to penetrate this secret of the mind (its emptiness and lack of self), then however much we long to achieve the joy of nirvana and to uproot the sorrows of samsara, we will wander uselessly in misery.

Concerning this secret of the mind, the Shravakas and Pratyekabuddhas fully understand only self-emptiness; they do not understand the emptiness of phenomena, which remains hidden from them as a secret.

To sum up therefore in the words of the *Gandavyuha*:

"All Bodhisattva conduct is founded on the mind."

3. In the slokas 18 to 22, Shantideva stresses the third aspect of the topic: the need to keep watch over one's mind.

Chapter Five - Stanza 18:

This being so, I'll take hold of my mind
And safeguard it well.
If I've left out the taming behaviour of safeguarding the mind,
What use are the many other taming behaviours?

All the fears and all the sorrows, of this life and of the future lives, as well as all the virtues and all the merits, come from the mind.

We must therefore take possession of our mind, applying mindfulness, which allows us to keep in mind what to adopt and what to reject, and remain vigilant, repeatedly examining our behaviour of the body and of our minds. the mind.

All precepts are contained in such an effort. Because all the discipline of yogis and monks, should be a way to protect the mind while maintaining a sense of moral conscience, both towards oneself and towards others.

Otherwise, what is the use of their multitude of different and arduous disciplines, of putting on their yogi clothes or wearing the saffron robe? They are all unnecessary.

Chapter Five - Stanza 19:

Just as I'd take great pains and be careful about a wound
When standing amid an unstable, wild crowd,
So too, I shall safeguard, always, the wound of my mind,
Since I'm living amid difficult people.

When we find ourselves in wild and unruly crowds (of people who are without mindfulness and whose attention is scattered toward outer objects, people whose minds are not restrained by discipline), we would take the greatest care to shield whatever physical wounds we might have, for fear of further injuries.

The same is true when we are in bad company, with people who are rough and cruel and who rouse us to anger, or when we are with people who are sexually attractive and who might stimulate our desire—we should at all times guard the “wound” of our mind with extreme care, protecting it from the great suffering that will come from damaging the vows, which after all we wish to observe.

Just as adverse circumstances aggravate our physical injuries, when the mind falls into the power of things wished or unwished for, craving or anger arises. This is why we should avoid company liable to excite our desire or aversion.

Chapter Five - Stanza 20:

And if I'd be careful about a wound,
Even from fearing the wound's hurting a little,
Then why don't I safeguard the wound of my mind,
From fear of being smashed by the crushing mountains of a joyless realm?

We take special care to protect our injured bodies, in fear of the comparatively minor sufferings of this present life, which might occur owing to the worsening of our physical condition.

Shouldn't we also use mindfulness and introspection to protect our minds from becoming defiled with afflictions, for fear of the pain of being ground and bludgeoned later in the Hell of Crushing? It stands to reason that we should.

Chapter Five - Stanza 21:

If I can remain like this in my behaviour,
Then whether I'm situated amid difficult people
Or placed even amid nubile young women,
My stable restraint shall not fall apart.

If, by using mindfulness and vigilant introspection, we guard our mind ceaselessly, the result will be that, whether we find ourselves with difficult people liable to provoke aggressivity or with attractive people liable to entice desire, our firm commitment to the observance of the vows and precepts will not decline because of such circumstances.

This shows how good and useful mindfulness and vigilance are.

Chapter Five - Stanza 22:

Better that my wealth, the respect I receive,
My body and livelihood disappear!
Better even that my other virtues decline,
But I shall never let my mind degenerate!

To conclude, Shantideva reflects that it is fine for him to lose his property and everything that has been given to him.

It is fine for him to lose whatever esteem he may enjoy in terms of honour or respect. It is fine for him to lose even his body, the support of his life; and it is of no importance if his livelihood in terms of food and clothes just disappears.

In short, even if he dies and all other merits accruing from his body and speech perish—none of this is of significance whatsoever.

But he will never give up the practice of carefully and vigilantly guarding his mind so that he can continue to observe the precepts.

Shantideva will then develop the next topic of **using mindfulness and introspection to guard one's mind**. He starts with a brief explanation in the sloka 23.

Chapter Five - Stanza 23:

O you, who would wish to safeguard your minds,
With palms pressed together, I tell you,
Safeguard your mindfulness and alertness,
With all effort.

In this sloka, Shantideva addresses all his followers who wish to guard their minds. He begs them to preserve diligently and by every means—even at the cost of their lives—an attitude of mindfulness, never forgetting what is to be done and what is not to be done.

He begs them to maintain a state of vigilant introspection and to examine their conduct in thought, word, and deed constantly. And when Shantideva speaks with his hands joined in supplication, he is not making a gesture of respect toward his hearers; he is rather stressing the extreme importance of his message.

Through the next five slokas, Shantideva provides us with a thorough explanation showing us the drawbacks of having no introspection. This is done in the slokas 24 to 28 included.

We will stop here for today. Next topic will be dealing with how to practice mindfulness. I invite you to abide in mental peace before we dedicate the merit of this session for the benefit of all.

