

Shantideva's Bodhicaryâvatâra

བྱང་ཆུབ་སེམས་པའི་སྤྱོད་པ་ལ་འཇུག་པ།

Group Study with Venerable Lama Sangyay Tendzin

Chapter Five: Safeguarding alertness

Session 31 - September 18, 2021

Good morning, everyone.

Let us start now with the traditional prayers.

REFUGE | MANDALA | REQUEST for TEACHINGS

Lama's Invocation | Mental Quiescence

We are currently studying the Chapter Five of the Bodhicaryâvatâra.

Before resuming, let's summarize what we studied so far from this chapter:

- Stanza 1 introduces the topic of guarding the mind to implement the teachings. Shantideva details three aspects of this topic:
 1. Stanzas 2 to 7 show us that all harms come from the mind.
 2. Stanzas 8 to 17 show us that all virtues come also from the mind.
 3. Stanzas 18 to 22 stress therefore the need to keep watch over our mind.
- Stanza 23 introduces how to achieve this in the next topic: using mindfulness and introspection to guard one's mind. It started with a brief incitement to do so.

In this sloka, Shantideva addresses all his followers who wish to guard their minds, speaking with his hands joined in supplication. Let us be clear about this: he is not making a gesture of respect toward his audience; he is rather stressing the extreme importance of his message.

- Stanzas 24 to 28 are showing us in detail the drawbacks of having no introspection.

Chapter Five - Stanza 24:

People who are disturbed by sickness

Are powerless over all their actions.

Those whose minds are disturbed by bewilderment

Are likewise powerless over all their actions.

Even though they may be very clever and prospering with success, when people suffer imbalances of the humours of the three "nyepas", -wind, bile, and phlegm-, they are afflicted by disease and become suddenly unable to walk, sit, or speak.

In just the same way, people may be very intelligent and lucid, but if they lack mindfulness and introspection, their minds are disoriented and dispersed. In the ignorance of what behaviour to adopt or avoid, their minds experiences confusion.

The result is that regardless to the virtuous actions they accomplish, such as studying the Dharma or avoiding evil, they are unable to bring them to fruition and produce their beneficial outcome.

Chapter Five - Stanza 25:

Whatever has been heard, pondered, and meditated upon

By those whose minds are lacking alertness,

Will not be retained in their memories,

Just like water in a leaking vase.

Wisdom is nothing where vigilant introspection is lacking.

The wisdom that comes from receiving the teachings from a spiritual master, the wisdom that results from reflecting on them by steady examination and analysis, and indeed the wisdom that comes from meditating one-pointedly upon their meaning—all these will be ephemeral in those whose minds are without vigilant introspection and therefore bound to distraction.

When water is poured into a pierced vessel, it gradually leaks out and drains away. Similarly, the three kinds of wisdom will not remain long in people who have only mindfulness. They will be forgotten. For when there is no vigilant introspection, mindfulness alone is powerless to retain them.

Chapter Five - Stanza 26:

Many learned people,
Even when having conviction and extraordinary effort,
Become fouled with a downfall,
Due to the mistake of lacking alertness.

Discipline likewise is brought to nothing. Many people who are perfectly knowledgeable about their precepts and the principle of adopting and rejecting, who have confident faith in the karmic principle of cause and effect, and who are joyful and diligent in discerning what they should and should not do are occasionally stained by downfalls, and their discipline gets loose, through a failure in vigilant introspection.

Chapter Five - Stanza 27:

The thieves that come in from their lack of alertness
Go on, after plundering their mindfulness,
To take, as well, the positive force they've built up,
So that they go to a worse rebirth state, as if robbed by thieves.

Whenever one is at fault through lack of vigilant introspection, the bandits of desire and hatred and the thieves of pride and jealousy come in pursuit; and they gain an entry whenever the guard of mindfulness i.e., the remembrance of what is to be adopted and rejected, is allowed to lapse.

Similarly, all the merit gathered in the past, -the riches of one's virtue-, will be stolen, severing the life force of the happy destinies, and sending beings down to the lower realms in the same way that thieves and robbers take the belongings of their victims and even murder them.

Chapter Five - Stanza 28:

This pack of thieves, the disturbing emotions,
Searches for a chance to break in.
And, having found the chance, steals what's constructive,
Destroying the life of a better rebirth state.

Greed and aversion as well as all other defilements, such thieves, and robbers first spy on their victims to check their vulnerability. If they are vulnerable, then they watch for the right moment to intervene, whether at night or in broad daylight.

Functioning alike, the defilements of desire and hate are always on the lookout for an opportunity to harm us. Whenever possible, they wrest the wealth of virtue from us and destroy its effects -happy destinies- with the result that we fail to get their benefit.

The next topic discusses the need to practice mindfulness:

- Stanza 29: gives a summary statement.
- Stanzas 30 to 34: provide a detailed explanation.

Chapter Five - Stanza 29:

Therefore, I shall never let mindfulness
Be taken away from the gateway of my mind.
Should it be gone, I'll recall the sufferings
Of the worse rebirth states and closely reset it.

For the reasons just given, mindfulness—the state of mind in which the principle of adopting and rejecting is not forgotten—must be placed at the gateway of your mind, that is, the door through which the mind engages in improper objects.

So positioned, as a protection against the thieves that are the defiled emotions, it must never be allowed to stray outside or wander anywhere else. That is to say that we must use mindfulness to protect our minds from being distracted by the objects of the six consciousnesses.

If this reliance on mindfulness is forgotten, and if the mind strays and scatters toward sense objects, we must immediately recall that it is by neglecting to maintain mindfulness that the mind falls into the power of defilement. This being so, will bring about the experience of injury and suffering in the lower realms. So, let's repeat this: it is most necessary to establish firmly a state of close mindfulness.

Chapter Five - Stanza 30:

Through the instructions of the learned and dread,
Gained from living together with spiritual mentors,
Fortunate people, who would show them respect,
Will easily develop their mindfulness.

For beginners, who are unable to maintain such a state, the way to cultivate and induce mindfulness is to rely on or remain in the entourage of a fully qualified master or spiritual friends who possess both mindfulness and vigilant introspection. It is therefore said in all the teaching systems of the Buddhist tradition that one should never separate from one's master.

Lamas and abbots should properly teach their disciples the principle of adoption and rejection; and for their part, the disciples are to put into practice the teachings they receive.

Disciples who faithfully observe and practice the precepts while fearing the blame of the master as well as the flaws that result when the precepts and practices are transgressed, these fortunate beings, will easily generate mindfulness and have no difficulty in doing so.

We will stop here for today. Having thus acquired an understanding of the need to train the mind, the subject covered in the following stanzas will deal with how to carry out this training through mindfulness and alertness. In other words, we'll be taught how to do it!

I invite you to remain a few moments in physical and mental peace before dedicating the merit of this session for the benefit of all.

