

Shantideva's
Bodhicaryâvatâra

བྱང་ཆུབ་སེམས་པའི་སྤོད་པ་ལ་འཇུག་པ།

Group Study with Venerable Lama Sangyay Tendzin
Chapter Five: Safeguarding Alertness
Session 34 - October 23, 2021

Good morning, everyone.

Let us start now with the traditional prayers.

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

If the twenty-seven sources of mistaken conduct—even the most subtle ones—are truly absent from the mind, the faults and downfalls related to the Individual Liberation, Bodhisattva, and Secret Mantra vows will not occur.

After studying these 27 occurrences, we will be able to recognize them in our daily behaviour and remind ourselves that the right conduct in these situations is to stand still like a log of wood.

At the end of session 33 held on October 2, we approached the presentation of these 27 sources of erroneous behaviour, the first nine of which, were presented.

These points were clearly elucidated by Kenchen Kunzang Palden's commentary based on the teachings of Patrul Rinpoche.

We now continue our study by addressing the following points with stanza 50.

Chapter Five - Stanza 50:

When it would readily brag about me,
Or would criticize others,
And become insulting and quarrelsome,
I shall remain, at those times, like a block of wood.

10. Feeling the desire to speak highly of our own good qualities or those of the group to which we belong.
11. Wanting to criticize and put down those whom we do not like.
12. Find ourselves using insults, wounding others with our words.
13. Picking a quarrel between others and ourselves or creating divisions.

At all such times, we must refrain from every act of body, speech, and mind.
We should remain just like a log of wood.

Chapter Five - Stanza 51:

When my mind would desire material gain, displays of respect, and fame.
Or desire the care of attendants and followers,
Or would wish to be served,
I shall remain, at those times, like a block of wood.

14. Finding that we have a desire for things such as food, clothes etc.
15. Feeling the wish to be looked up to such as to be given a good seat and to be respected by others.
16. Having the concern that others know how good we are.

17. Wanting to be surrounded by efficient people who would serve and wait on us, fetching water, attending to the fire, and so on.
18. Wishing to be served immediately: to have our beds prepared and to be tucked into the blankets.

In any of such situations, we must not allow our body, speech, or mind to follow such occurrences. Instead, we should remain like a log of wood.

Chapter Five - Stanza 52:

When my mind would toss away the aims of others
 And, wishing to care for my own aims (alone),
 Would wish to say something,
 I shall remain, at those times, like a block of wood.

19. When we feel like neglecting even some small action that would be of benefit to others which we are nevertheless perfectly able to do, such as helping someone who is sick,
20. When we want to get the best for ourselves even something trivial like a good place in the temple, we should conduct ourselves like Geshe Ben (*), subjecting all our self-interested efforts to mindfulness and vigilant introspection.
21. And since the mouth—with all its talk full of attachment or anger, and all its futile and meaningless chatter—is a treasury of non-virtue, the very gateway of faults and downfalls, when we have the urge to speak, we should instead stay like logs of wood.

(*) Geshe Kungyal Ben was a Kadampa practitioner, follower of Atisha.

He was initially a thief before he renounced his life of crime and took ordination. He later became renowned for his goodness and integrity.

Once, while begging for alms, a family of devout Buddhists invited him to their home to be fed. He was so hungry that he found it difficult to wait while his hosts were elsewhere preparing the meal. To his complete shock he found himself stealing food from a jar when no-one was looking.

Geshe Ben suddenly burst into loud cries of "Thief! Thief! I've caught you red-handed." His hosts rushed into the room to find him scolding himself heavily and threatening his hand with being cut off if he ever behaved like that again.'

Chapter Five - Stanza 53:

When my mind is impatient, lazy, and cowardly,
 Or likewise, overly confident, and noisy with nonsense,
 Or is stubbornly attached to what's on my side,
 I shall remain, at those times, like a block of wood.

22. When we are full of intolerance, the antithesis of patience.
23. When we are sunk in laziness, the reverse of diligence.
24. When we feel fainthearted and put-off when we hear about the teachings on emptiness and practices that are difficult to do.
25. When we are boastful, that is, arrogantly pretentious.
26. When given to various kinds of light and ill-considered chatter, without care and reflection.
27. When we have attachment to our own groups such as our institutions, our traditions, and so forth; thinking that they are the best in both a worldly and a religious sense; when all such attitudes arise, we should remain like logs of wood.

To put on a show of devotion to the lamas of one's own tradition is mostly a species of attachment. It has consequently been said that there should be no confusion between genuine devotion and sectarian favouritism.

Chapter Five - Stanza 54:

Having examined my mind in this way
For fully disturbing emotions and pointless endeavours,
Being courageous, I shall hold it firmly
With opponent forces, at those times.

It is important to examine whether our mind is caught up in attachment and anger or any of the twenty-seven sources of negative behaviour, to investigate whether one has strayed into meaningless actions. such as digging in the soil, cutting grass, tracing patterns in the dust, and so on.

On discovering that to have fallen into such a state, a courageous Bodhisattva must rely upon the appropriate antidote, for it is thus that their minds, will remain undistracted and will keep from straying into things that are either meaningless or productive of emotional defilement. Bodhisattvas must get a grip on their minds and must not allow themselves, either in word or deed, to indulge in bad thoughts.

Chapter Five - Stanza 55:

Resolute and happily convinced,
Stable, respectful, and polite,
Having moral self-dignity as well as dread,
Quieted down, and striving to bring happiness to others,

Whatever Dharma practice we do physically, verbally, and mentally, -staying in retreat and so on-, we should not act simply in imitation of others. Instead, our practice should be marked by nine factors that are productive of virtue. These are as follows:

1. Whatever practice we perform, we must have great certainty about it, understanding its preparatory, principal, and concluding stages and have no hesitation about them.
2. We must rely on the practice and have complete trust in it.
3. We must be firmly resolved to perform it, not allowing ourselves to be influenced by adverse circumstances, such as illness or lack of food.
4. We must approach the practice with joy and with feelings of respectful devotion, honouring both physically and verbally all who are worthy of praise: abbots, masters, and teachers.
5. Regarding ourselves, we must have a sense of moral conscience: the ability to feel ashamed of ourselves. About others, namely, our teachers and the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, we should feel a certain awe and apprehension.
6. We should in general be quiet and peaceful. That is, we should place restraints on our five senses, in particular, those of the eyes, ears, and mind. For if we fail to keep them under control, attachment and aversion will arise.

We may be in the habit of belittling ourselves, thinking that we are incapable of keeping our senses under control because our attachment, anger, and our mental wandering are too great.

It's a mistake to be so defeatist, becoming thus the cause of our own ruin. No one ever received the prophecy that they would gain control of their senses and become superior beings, who was free from desire and anger from the very beginning. Take for example the ignorant Chudapanthaka (*) or the lustful Nanda (**).

(*) Chudapanthaka was an exceedingly dull and stupid disciple of the Buddha. He could not apply his mind or commit to memory even one stanza of doctrine. The Buddha gave him the words "Get rid of the dust, get rid of the impurities" and told him to sweep the floor as his practice. Eventually he started to think about the meaning of the words, and thereby attained realization. The Buddha appointed him to teach the nuns, some of whom were deeply insulted, but he soon led them to great realization through his teaching and miraculous displays.

(**) Nanda is an Arhat declared by the Buddha to be foremost among his monk disciples in self-control.

Nanda was the son of Śuddhodana and Mahāprajāpatī and half-brother of the Buddha. He was extremely handsome and was said to have been vain about his looks.

During his sojourn at Kapilavastu after his enlightenment, the Buddha's visited Nanda on the day that he was to be married to a beautiful maiden named Janapadakalyāṇī. About to depart from this visit, the Buddha handed him his alms bowl to carry back to the monastery. Once Nanda arrived at the monastery with the alms bowl, the Buddha asked Nanda to join the order, which he agreed only reluctantly, out of deference to the Buddha.

But he longed for his fiancée and soon fell ill from his loneliness and depression, drawing pictures of her on rocks. Knowing his mind, the Buddha then flew with him to the Trāyastriṃśa heaven. On the way, he pointed out an injured female monkey and asked him whether Janapadakalyāṇī was more beautiful than the monkey; Nanda said it was so. When they arrived in the heaven, the Buddha showed Nanda the celestial maidens attending the gods. Nanda was entranced with their loveliness, which far exceeded the beauty of Janapadakalyāṇī, saying that, compared to the celestial maidens, the beauty of his bride-to-be was like that of the monkey.

The Buddha promised him one of these maidens as his consort in his next lifetime if he would only practice the religious life earnestly. Nanda enthusiastically agreed. Upon returning to the human world at Jetavana grove, Nanda was criticized by Ānanda for his base motivation for remaining a monk. Feeling great shame at his lust, he resolved to overcome this weakness, practiced assiduously, and in due course became an Arhat.

Instead, we should be diligent and try our best. Our conduct must be disciplined and calm. We must work quietly for the happiness of others. Because we are Bodhisattvas and Bodhisattvas, who are "perilous" beings, it is important to protect others from losing faith in us. (***)

(***) Bodhisattvas are described as "perilous" because evil actions done in their regard are particularly significant, while good things done to them are very meritorious. It is our responsibility to act in such a way that others will respond positively toward us and not take offence.

In this session, we completed the presentation of the 27 sources of misconduct; we then were reminded of 6 of the 9 factors productive of virtue, which will serve as the basis of the next topic, that of the discipline of gathering virtue.

I am inviting you to make the effort to memorize these as it will be very beneficial and helpful to implement them so that none can influence our behaviour to the extent of seriously damaging our Bodhicitta.

We will stop here for today. Let's practice mental quiescence for a short while, before dedicating the merit of this session for the benefit of all.

