

Shantideva's  
**Bodhicaryâvatâra**

བྱང་ཆུབ་སེམས་པའི་སྤོད་བ་ལ་འཇུག་པ།

Group Study with Venerable Lama Sangyay Tendzin  
Chapter Five: Safeguarding Alertness  
Session 35 - October 30, 2021

Good morning, everyone.

Let us start now with the traditional prayers.

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

Having presented the 27 sources of mistaken conduct, Shantideva introduced us the 9 factors productive of virtue. Of these, we went through the first six points, ending last week at the stanza 55.

Chapter Five - Stanza 56:

Never disheartened by the inconsistent whims of infantile people,  
And, realizing that they arise in their minds  
Because of their developing disturbing emotions,  
Having a feeling of kindness toward them,

Like children, ordinary people fight with each other for their tastes and desires. They rarely agree. What can fascinate one, exasperates the other. Therefore, as we practice the Bodhisattva way, some people will be delighted and praise us, while others will be unhappy and critical.

7. We must not be discouraged by such things as it would hamper our Bodhichitta in the manner told in the story of Shariputra's accession to the state of arhat.

Not only should we not be disappointed, but we should be aware that such circumstances arise from desire, anger and other defilements, which are the result of the various desires of childish beings.

Overwhelmed by filth, the resentment they feel towards the activity of a Bodhisattva makes their practice overwhelming. For this reason, Bodhisattvas should treat these difficult individuals even more tenderly.

Chapter Five - Stanza 57:

And, influenced by thoughts of myself and these limited beings,  
Engaging in things that are never disgraceful,  
I shall always keep hold of this mind,  
Without self-pride, like a magic emanation.

We should be beyond blame in the things we do, both for our own good (such as feeding ourselves or listening to the Dharma teachings) and for the benefit of others (teaching the Dharma or giving alms etc.)

8. When we do these things, we should think that all that we have done, all that we are doing, and all that we will do has the nature of a magical apparition. We should be without clinging to "I" and "mine," generating thus a very humble attitude and always keep such attitude.

Chapter Five - Stanza 58:

By thinking over and again that it's after a long time  
That I've gained a respite, supreme,  
I shall hold my mind in that way,  
utterly immovable as the King of Mountains.

Shantideva remind us here that we have waited so long to attain a precious human existence, which is so hard to find. Now that we have obtained it, we must strive to make it meaningful.

9. Pondering over this again and again, by reflecting on the difficulty to obtain all the freedoms and advantages of such a condition, our minds will become determined and as unshakeable as Meru, the king of mountains. It is essential to keep our minds firmly set, not allowing them to be distracted by the influence of degrading company and the like.

This completes the presentation of the discipline avoiding negativity.

I did invite you to memorize these as doing so is most beneficial and helpful. Not only will we recognize our personal tendencies leading to potential wrong doings but also, it will gradually neutralize these ill tendencies and permit us to maintain bodhicitta effortlessly. So please do so.

Shantideva continues explaining why it is necessary to abandon attachment to one's body, which is the cause for not training in the precepts.

Chapter Five - Stanza 59:

If, O mind, you're not made unhappy  
When this body is completely torn apart and dragged here and there  
By vultures greedy for flesh,  
Why are you pampering it now?

The mind cherishes the body. When the latter is hungry, it provides it with food; when it is thirsty, it gives it something to drink. When people discuss its defects, even those of its eyes and nose, the mind springs to its defence.

This attitude of protecting the body is a state of mind that is to be abandoned. It should be earnestly challenged by counteractive thoughts that cut through such attachment.

Addressing his mind, Shantideva observes that, when the vultures and jackals, with their love of flesh, will be tugging at his body, pulling out its intestines and other organs here, there, and everywhere, and devouring it, his mind will not be unhappy on that account.

Why then is it so obsessed with the body now, bestowing such care on it, nurturing it with food and clothing, and protecting it from injury? It does not make any sense.

Chapter Five - Stanza 60:

Holding onto this body as "mine,"  
Why, O mind, do you safeguard it (so)  
Since you and it are two separate things,  
What can it do for you by itself?

Shantideva pursues the following reflection, questioning his own mind: "Why, O mind, do you think of this body as yourself or as your property and protect it with food, clothing, and the rest?"

This is illogical, for you are a completely different entity from the material body, the essence of which is the semen and ovum of its parents. Of what possible use, therefore, can this body be to you? You have no need of it.

Chapter Five - Stanza 61:

Bewildered mind, why don't you take possession  
Of a clean, wooden sculpture (instead)?  
What's the point of safeguarding this putrid device,  
Assembled from unclean things?

"If you say that you need it as your dwelling place, then you are a fool and do not know what you should and should not do. If you need a support in which to dwell, why not take as your body a clean human form carved in wood? For that indeed would be reasonable.

By contrast, your present body is a machine composed of bones joined together by tendons that can stretch and contract; it is essentially an accumulated mass of thirty-six impure substances like meat and blood. Nothing but filthy substances issue from its nine orifices.

How can it be reasonable to protect such a thing, repugnant as it is, unclean and decaying?" The body is said to be decaying because, whereas the wholesome and essential derivative of the food that one consumes becomes flesh and fat, its putrid residue remains in the greater and smaller intestines, where, according to the Nanda Garbhavakranti Sutra, the eighty thousand bacteria dwell and are responsible for the foul stench of excrement and urine.

Chapter Five - Stanza 62:

First, with your intellect,  
Peel off and separate the layer of skin,  
And then, with the scalpel of discriminating awareness,  
Slice off, to the side, the meat from the skeletal frame.

"And if, O mind, you think that, although the body is an object of decay as just described, you will nevertheless protect it on account of its wholesome core, then you should, with your sharp, bladelike discernment, separate the covering of skin from the flesh and look!

All that you will find is something frightful, filthy, and foul-smelling. There is nothing else. Again, with the blade of intelligence, strip the flesh from its bony frame and examine it.

Chapter Five - Stanza 63:

And having split open even the bones,  
Look inside, down to the marrow,  
And examine for yourself,  
"What essence is there?"

"And when you have separated the bones, pulling them apart at the joints and so on, examine carefully right down to the bone marrow. Ask yourself, where is the pleasant and desirable essence of the body to be found? Is it inside the body or outside?

This is something that you yourself should investigate with your own intelligence, examining each and every detail.

Chapter Five - Stanza 64:

If, even searching with effort like this,  
You're unable to see any essence in it,  
Then why are you safeguarding this body still,  
With such attachment?

"If, persisting in the search, you find nothing that is pleasant or desirable, why, O mind, do you persist in clinging to this body? Why do you protect this impure, decaying, foul-smelling form? It does not make sense.

Chapter Five - Stanza 65:

If, being unclean, it's unfit to be eaten by you,  
And even the blood is not fit to be drunk,  
And even the intestines not fit to be sucked,  
What use is the body to you?

"You may think that you need the body and that therefore you should of course protect it. But what is it that you need? You cannot consume this impure body; you cannot drink its blood and pus. You cannot suck its stomach or intestines. What, O mind, are you going to do with this body? You have not the slightest need of it!

Chapter Five - Stanza 66:

Just secondarily, safeguarding it is proper  
For the sake of feed for the jackals and vultures.  
This body of human beings is no more  
Than something to be put to good use.

"From one point of view, there is no reason for you to protect this body. But from another point of view, it would be quite reasonable and appropriate for you to save and keep it as food for the vultures, foxes, and other animals that are without any concepts of clean and unclean!"

Of course, these are Shantideva's words of scornful irony. It is true that when this body is examined outside and in, it is found to have no essential core of any kind. And yet an essential benefit is to be extracted from it nevertheless. How so?

The mind is like a king omnipotent. The body is his servant both in good or ill.

As it is said, if one is able to use one's body as a servant in the performance of good works, then of all the physical forms to be found among the six classes of beings, this human form is the best for the practice of the Dharma.

Therefore, -and this applies to everyone: lamas, monastics, laypeople high or low, strong, or weak-, the human body must only be used in accord with its true nature, as a servant in the performance of virtuous deeds. Apart from that, there is nothing else to be done with it.

Chapter Five - Stanza 67:

And if even, when you've safeguarded it like that,  
The merciless Lord of Death will still steal it  
And give it to the birds and the dogs,  
What will there be that you can do then?

Again, addressing his own mind, Shantideva points out that it strives to protect his body—just like people who are strongly attached to their bodies and indulge them with whatever they want, whatever pleases them: food for their mouths, clothes for their backs, ornaments, and so on.

"But what," he asks, "will you do when the Lord of Death, who knows neither love nor compassion, takes it from you, helpless as you are, and throws it as food to the vultures and dogs? What, O mind, will you do then? You will be powerless to do anything."

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.

