

Shantideva's
Bodhicaryâvatâra
བྱང་ཆུབ་སེམས་པའི་སྤྱོད་པ་ལ་འཇུག་པ།

Group Study with Venerable Lama Sangyay Tendzin
Chapter Five: Safeguarding Alertness
Session 36 - Saturday November 06, 2021

Good morning, everyone.

Let us start now with the traditional prayers.

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

From stanzas 59 to 67, Shantideva explained the necessity to abandon attachment to one's body, which is the cause for not training in the precepts.

For this, he went at length in analysing the constituents of the body, showing the unreasonable attachment we develop to this assemblage of decaying components.

He concludes that the only value in having such body is to put it at the service of accomplishing virtuous activities. We continue our study commenting stanza 68.

Chapter Five - Stanza 68:

If you wouldn't give clothing and the like
Even to a servant who's unwilling to stay on and work,
Then why exhaustingly take care of the flesh,
When this body goes elsewhere, even having spoon-fed it?

"When domestics are unable to do their job or accomplish them poorly, their householder does not supply them with food or lodging or anything else.

But, O mind, then, why do you burden so much with providing this body lavishly with food and clothing, since in the end the mind and body separate; they go their different ways.

Since therefore the body is of no benefit to you, O mind, why do you pamper it with food and clothes, serving it with such great effort and labour? It makes no sense at all."

Chapter Five - Stanza 69:

But having given it wages,
Now you must make it serve your own aims.
Don't give it everything it wants,
Without it's being of help.

So instead of clinging to the body as in the past, we shouldn't fall into the other extreme. Seeing him as a servant, we should provide him with food, clothing, and provide for his needs to satisfy him and protect him from inclement weather; just enough that we can use it to practice sacred Dharma properly.

For his own good, we should make him work in the same way as if we would pay someone for the work to be done, and make sure that he now focuses on listening, Dharma as well as reflection. leading to its understanding as well as meditation on it.

And if he does not practice the teachings that will help us in the life to come, we should not provide him with food, clothing, or anything else that we have. May our mind no longer be devoted solely to nourishing and clothing the body.

Chapter Five - Stanza 70:

Apply to the body the notion of a boat,
For it's merely the support of going and coming,
And transform it into a body that will go as you will,
To fulfil the wishes of limited beings.

Instead, let us regard this body as a simple support—a boat for making the journey to liberation and omniscience, and for coming to the rescue of beings. And just as we might look after a boat, without falling into extremes of neglect or extravagant care, we should sustain our bodies with food and clothing, avoiding all excess.

To accomplish well the benefit of all beings, let us, with the perfect attitude of Bodhichitta, train ourselves properly in the six paramitas, making of this body a wish-fulfilling gem i.e., the sovereign power that can bring benefit to anyone who sees, hears, remembers, or touches it. In other words, let us transform this human body into the body of a Victorious Buddha.

This point being understood, in the next stanzas, Shantideva exhorts us to become skilled in our ways of behaving.

Chapter Five - Stanza 71:

Thus, I shall have self-control
And always present a smiling face.
I'll stop frowning and grimacing in disapproval,
I'll be friendly with wandering beings and be honest.

Body and speech should be placed in the power of the mind, and the mind should itself be placed in the power of the remedial attitude. Whenever we look at someone, we should have a smiling expression and should completely avoid any angry frowns and sullen looks. We should be true and honest friends to everyone, helping them and speaking to them with sincerity and without deceit.

Chapter Five - Stanza 72:

I won't throw down seats and the like,
Recklessly, with noise.
I won't pound violently for doors to be opened.
Rather, I shall always delight in being quiet.

When picking up anything such as furniture, chairs and beds, pots, and pans, for instance, as well as putting them down, we must train not to do so carelessly and inconsiderately, throwing them around and creating a commotion.

Such a thing is displeasing in the eyes of others and will cause them to lose their respect. Neither should we violently throw open the door of the house and so on. Since this, interrupts the concentration of abbots and lamas, it should not be done.

We must constantly be mindful of our own shortcomings; we ought to behave in a subdued manner so that whatever we do will not be seen or heard by anyone. We should actually take pleasure in humility. Wherever we are living, be it monastery or mountain hermitage, we should take care to be neither seen nor heard.

Chapter Five - Stanza 73:

Storks, cats, and robbers
Accomplish their desired aims
By moving noiselessly and keeping low.
A disciplined bodhisattva always acts in that way.

Hérons, cats, and burglars, whom the world does not normally regard as peaceful creatures, go about their business very softly, moving stealthily with soundless limbs. This is how they get what they want: their food and all the rest.

They would not succeed if they acted in any other way. There is no need to say that when working for their own or others' sake, wise Bodhisattvas must act in the same way: quietly and with disciplined care.

Chapter Five - Stanza 74:

Respectfully, I shall take to the crown of my head
The words of those skilled in encouraging others
And who offer their help, without being asked.
I shall always become the student of everyone.

When we receive an admonition, for instance when someone who is skilled in beneficial counselling in spiritual and worldly affairs says to us such things as, "Stop behaving so badly. You really ought to take an interest in the teachings and study them", we should not react with pride and arrogant disdain.

Instead, we should at once accept the advice with humble respect, regardless of whether it can be implemented or not. We should follow any unsolicited advice that is in tune with the Dharma and leave aside whatever is not.

Chapter Five - Stanza 75:

I shall say, "Well spoken," to all
Who speak good advice,
And having seen someone acting constructively,
With praises, I'll let it bring me joy.

When people say things that are useful both in the immediate and long-term, we should heed them as though we were the speaker's disciples, and we should do what they say.

We should praise everyone who says something that is true and is of spiritual value; and instead of answering back in an untoward manner, we should be nice to them, telling them that they have spoken well.

Similarly, when we see people doing something virtuous, such as making offerings or giving alms, we should not be jealous and try to put them down. We should praise them openly instead, telling them that their actions are excellent and worthy; and we should encourage them in words of warm approval.

Chapter Five - Stanza 76:

I shall speak of others' good qualities when they're out of sight,
And when their good qualities are spoken of, agree.
When my own good qualities are mentioned,
I shall think of those qualities with appreciation.

To avoid flattering people, Shantideva says that we should extol their qualities discreetly by mentioning them to others. And when people mention the qualities of those whom we do not

like, we should not speak to the contrary, but should concur and give support to their words of approval.

On the other hand, when we find that people are praising our own qualities, we should not be proud but should instead appreciate their pure perception, which enables them to discover such qualities in us.

Chapter Five - Stanza 77:

All constructive undertakings are a cause for joy,
Which is rare, even if money could buy it.
Therefore, let me take pleasure with joy
In the good qualities that others have worked on.

The aim of every undertaking, whether by us or by others, is to achieve happiness. Yet genuine happiness is very rare; it is not something that can be bought even with great wealth.

This being so, we should take heartfelt and unjealous pleasure in the good qualities of others, whether on the worldly plane or on the spiritual level of study, reflection, and meditation on the teachings.

Chapter Five - Stanza 78:

Rejoicing won't bring me any loss in this life
And in future lives, my happiness will be great.
Finding fault will bring me unfriendliness and suffering
And in future lives, my suffering will be great.

Rejoicing, we will lose nothing in this life our own happiness and joy will not at all be lessened. Moreover, the result of such a perfect attitude, unstained by envy, will be that in our lives to come, we will have the great happiness of the higher realms.

By contrast, if on seeing the good qualities, wealth, and enjoyments of others, we have feelings of irritation and jealous rivalry, these will exhaust all the positive qualities of our present life and the weapon of such an evil state of mind will turn against us.

We ourselves will suffer and be unhappy, and once this life is over, the great misery of the lower realms will be the wages of such an attitude.

Chapter Five - Stanza 79:

When talking, I shall speak from my heart, coherently,
With the meaning clear, pleasingly,
Rid of greed and aggression,
Gently, and just enough.

When we speak, for example in answer to the questions of others, we should be vigilantly aware of our own inner motives, and we should reply agreeably, accommodating ourselves to the people addressed whether their inclinations are positive or negative.

We should inspire confidence by making sure that our words are consistent with what we have said on previous and subsequent occasions.

We should express ourselves clearly, so that our meaning is not in doubt, and we should speak pleasantly, so that our interlocutor is happy, avoiding all passionate expressions of attachment to our own position and repugnance toward that of others.

We should speak softly, gently, and with moderation.

Chapter Five - Stanza 80:

When my eyes behold limited beings,
I shall think, "Depending on them,
I shall attain Buddhahood,"
And look with a sincere and loving manner.

When we catch sight of others, regardless of whether they are great or unimportant, powerful or weak, we should recognize that it is through them that we are, in the first place, able to engender Bodhichitta.

It is through them that we are then able to practice the Bodhisattva activities related to the two accumulations as expressed in the six paramitas; and it is through them too that we will ultimately attain Buddhahood.

We should therefore acknowledge them as friends and helpers on the way of the Bodhisattva, and we should never look at them with angry eyes. We should gaze on them as a mother might look at her baby, with open, honest, and loving hearts.

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.

