

Shantideva's
Bodhicaryâvatâra

བྱང་ཆུབ་སེམས་པའི་སྤྱོད་པ་ལ་འཇུག་པ།

Group Study with Venerable Lama Sangyay Tendzin
Chapter Five: Safeguarding Alertness
Session 39 - Saturday November 27, 2021

Good morning, everyone. I am most happy and grateful as I witness your steady participation to this most essential activity undertaken more than a year ago, that of the study of the Bodhicaryâvatâra.

Let us start with the traditional prayers.

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

Today we will conclude our study of the Chapter Five, with 11 more stanzas to go, including a synopsis of this chapter composed by Shantideva.

Chapter Five - Stanza 99:

Whatever situation I may be dealing with,
On my own accord or under the influence of others,
I shall vigorously train in whatever is the training
That has been taught for such situation.

Therefore, in whatever they do, whether for their own good or for the good of others, and in whatever circumstances, Bodhisattvas must diligently and confidently practice the Buddha's teachings. These were indeed given so that Bodhisattvas might train themselves in whatever situation they encounter.

For example, when one walks, apply sloka 37; when sitting, apply sloka 93; when in the solitude of the mountains, apply sloka 85; when eating apply sloka 92; apply sloka 79, when speaking; sloka 80, when looking at others; or sloka 96 when readying to sleep.

Further instructions can be found in the Avatamsaka sutra, more precisely in its chapter on perfectly pure action.

Chapter Five - Stanza 100:

There isn't anything in which the spiritual offspring
Of the Triumphant don't train.
For those skilled in living in this way, nothing (they do)
Will escape becoming a positive force.

There is no field of knowledge with which Bodhisattvas should not familiarize themselves, be these the five great sciences (*) or the five lesser sciences. (**)

(*) Crafts, medicine, grammar, logic and, the inner science of Dharma.

(**) Poetics, Metrics, Lexicography, Drama and, Astrology.

For those who train in all fields of knowledge, who abide in mindfulness and vigilance, and who are skilled in the ways of the Bodhisattvas, there is no action (even the lifting and placing of their feet or the stretching and contraction of their arms) that is without merit.

Even "non-virtues" take on a virtuous complexion, to say nothing of actions that are morally neutral.

Chapter Five - Stanza 101:

Whether directly or indirectly, I shall not do anything
Other than what's for the benefit of limited beings,
And for solely limited beings' sake,
I shall dedicate it all to enlightenment.

All one does, whether directly or indirectly, must be for the sake of others: directly, through the gifts of Dharma or material things, or indirectly, as when one practices a sadhana in retreat, dedicating such activities for the benefit of others and making aspirations for their sake.

One should not do anything simply for oneself. And it is solely for others' sake that one dedicates all positive actions performed by oneself and anyone else in the past, present, and future to the gaining of enlightenment. Merits must be dedicated, and prayers of aspiration must be made.

Chapter Five - Stanza 102:

I shall never forsake, even at the cost of my life,
A spiritual mentor, who is skilled
In the points of the Vast Vehicle (Mahayana)
And superlative in keeping the bodhisattva taming behaviour.

At all times, from first generating Bodhichitta to the attainment of great enlightenment, one should take the support of a spiritual guide respectfully with one's body, speech, and mind. For it is by frequenting such a sublime master that one will come to possess every kind of excellent quality.

The three vehicles of Buddhism are categorised from three points of view:

1. Their adepts i.e., those who are transported in it.
2. The destination to which each vehicle brings them. And,
3. The actual means of conveyance.

Of the three aspects, the great vehicle or Mahayana refers to the third one and is described by the Sutralankara in the following terms:

"Its scope is great indeed and so is its twofold practice: wisdom and diligence. Superior also is its skill in means. Also is its great attainment, and the great enlightened deeds of Buddhahood. Great therefore in seven ways, The Mahayana is indeed termed great".

Spiritual masters, who are learned in, and set forth, the profound and vast aspects of the Mahayana, endowed as it is with such sevenfold greatness, and whose practice of the Bodhisattva discipline excels through their observance of all the vows—spiritual masters such as these should not be forsaken even at the cost of one's life.

Even if one's very life were at stake, one must never grieve them or go against their word. One must never stop relying on one's teacher.

Chapter Five - Stanza 103:

I shall learn the way to respectfully relate to a spiritual mentor
From Shri Sambhava's biography
This and other advice of the Buddha
Can be known from reading the sutras.

To learn the way in which such a master must be followed, read the Gandavyuha chapter of the Avatamsaka scriptures.

More accessible, the LamRim texts, -such as in the Ornament of Precious Liberation by Je Gampopa-, show clearly how a spiritual master should be served:

"O noble son, look upon yourself as an invalid and upon the spiritual teacher as a physician, upon the teaching as a medicine and upon the earnest practice as a cure."

All this must be taken to heart, and one must follow one's teacher accordingly. Read this chapter together with other sutras taught by the Buddha. Study and understand all the Bodhisattva trainings in respect of what is to be adopted and rejected in the service of a spiritual teacher.

It is also advisable to read again and again the fifty stanzas of guru devotion by Avagoshā.

Chapter Five - Stanza 104:

It is in the sutras that the trainings appear,
And so, I shall read the sutra texts.
I shall examine, as a start,
The Akashagarbha Sutra.

Since it is by the study of the sutras that a knowledge of the Bodhisattva precepts is gained, these scriptures must be read. Given that the Akashagarbha-sutra teaches clearly the eighteen root downfalls of a Bodhisattva and the way such faults can be repaired, it is said that this sutra must be studied first.

Chapter Five - Stanza 105:

I shall definitely examine
The Compendium of Trainings over and again,
Because, in it, what always is practiced
Is extensively shown,

Shantideva's own Shikshasamucchaya (*) sets forth clearly and in detail the conduct that Bodhisattvas should always embrace—such as how to give, protect, purify, and increase one's body, possessions, and virtue. One must therefore read this text, not once, but again and again.

Chapter Five - Stanza 106:

Or look, to the extent they're condensed in brief,
At The Compendium of Sutras,
And then, energetically examine as well
The second of such texts, compiled by Arya Nagarjuna.

Alternatively, one might also read the Sutrasamucchaya (*), which is a condensed description of the activities of the Bodhisattvas extracted by Shantideva from the sutras. And the two identically named works composed by Nagarjuna should also be diligently studied.

Chapter Five - Stanza 107:

I shall put into practice
Whatever is not prohibited in them,
And implement fully the trainings seen there
In order to safeguard my worldly mind.

All activities allowed and not forbidden in the sutras taught by the Buddha and in the two treatises Shikshasamucchaya (*) and Sutrasamucchaya should be properly embraced and undertaken by Bodhisattvas.

(*) *Compendium of Training* or *Compendium of Precepts*.

This text is the longest of the three texts written by Shantideva, the Sutrasamucchaya being the shorter one and the Bodhicharyavatara the middle length text.

(**) Nagarjuna's text called *Shikshasamucchaya* mentioned by Shantideva is no longer available.

In short, to protect the minds of worldly beings from a loss of confidence in the Bodhisattvas, and to be a source of joy for them, one must learn the precepts of the Bodhisattvas and strive to implement them perfectly, for the sole purpose of benefiting beings.

To conclude, Shantideva gives a concise synopsis of this chapter on Vigilance.

Chapter Five - Stanza 108:

The defining feature of safeguarding with alertness

Is but this in brief:

Examining, over and again,

The condition of my body and mind.

The practice of vigilant introspection can be briefly defined as the repeated examination made to discover whether one's actions in thought, word, and deed are positive, negative, or neutral; combined with the alert and enthusiastic implementation of the principle of adopting and rejecting.

Chapter Five - Stanza 109:

With my body, I shall put this all into practice.

What can be accomplished by mouthing it merely with words

After all, will a sick man be helped

By merely reciting the medical treatment?

All these trainings in body, speech, and mind should be earnestly put into practice as we have explained. Nothing can be gained by simply parroting the words of the text! Therefore, strive to implement their meaning.

Indeed, what invalid was ever helped merely by reading or listening to an explanation of the four medical tantras, without applying the remedy? Healing comes only from taking the medicine and following the proper cure.

This ends our current study of Chapter Five of the Bodhicaryâvatâra which included 109 stanzas.

On December 4, we will have a session entirely dedicated to the questions you might have on this chapter of the Bodhicaryâvatâra. Please remember to send me your questions ahead of time so that I can sort them out and prepare answering them to the best of my ability.

This session will be free of charge and there will be no need to register to access it. You will receive a link via our website.

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

