

# Shantideva's Bodhicaryâvatâra

བྱང་ཆུབ་སེམས་པའི་སྤྱོད་པ་ལ་འཇུག་པ།

Group Study with Venerable Lama Sangyay Tendzin

## Chapter Five: Safeguarding Alertness

### Questions & Answers

Session 40 - Saturday March 26, 2021

Good morning, everyone.

We have the good fortune to be able to continue our group study on the Bodhicaryâvatâra. I am most grateful for this. Let us start with the traditional prayers.

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

Today we will conclude our study of Chapter Five, that on Safeguarding Alertness, with a Q&A session.

#### **1. Question on Stanza 10:**

**The commentary states: "The term Paramita implies that the act of giving is performed in a manner free from the presumption of the real existence of the subject, the object of the action and the action itself. Therefore, generosity does not depend on the objective value of the gift. It depends on a generosity of attitude, freed from any type of attachment that would prevent giving of one's external goods or qualities and inner merits. It follows that generosity is in the spirit. "**

**Does this mean that it is enough to want sincerely? That the posture of the mind does more than the acts themselves?**

#### **Answer:**

The commentary of this stanza was a little more explicit than the question suggests:

The teachings explain that generosity is perfected by training oneself in the attitude of open-handedness, in the genuine intention, wholly without miserliness and cupidity, to give to all beings -high and low, rich, and poor- one's every possession: body and belongings, along with the merit of such a gift, without any expectation of reward whether in this or future lives.

Although such attitude of openness is essential, it does not mean that it is sufficient. To be effective and engender consequent result, the action needs a medium to convey the spiritual offering. A medium can be mentally created, however that calls for having previously developed a great capacity to visualize and to manifest an outstanding level of clarity. Such level comes from the realisation of emptiness more than from a brainstorming session.

The other aspects of Paramita, which must be present and practiced simultaneously, will make that we must give generously, yet in accordance with our capacity to give. If you possess little, give in accordance. If you possess much, give in accordance. In both cases, it must be wise and generous. Making stingy offerings leads to poverty if not to the pretah realm. Give limitlessly!

#### **2. Question on Stanza 22:**

**In relation to the distractions caused by the objects of the 6 Consciousnesses, may I request Lama to explain what are the 6 Consciousnesses.**

#### **Answer:**

They are the consciousnesses of the five senses faculties or the faculties of the five sense organs i.e., the eyes, the ears, the nose, the tongue, and the body. To it is added the mental consciousness.

The objects of these consciousnesses are respectively visual, auditive, olfactive, gustative, tactile, and mental. This topic has been taught quite extensively in a previous seminar on the subject of "Srid-pa'i Kham Sum" explaining the causes of being reborn in the three dhatus. I invite you to rely on the teaching notes published by Konchog Tsegpa Parkhang under the reference GT-018-E and GT-018-F in both English and French respectively.

### 3. Question: Can Lama explain what guardian deity is?

#### Answer:

A guardian deity, also called "Personal deity", is a "Yidam" (Tib.) or "iṣṭhadevatā" (Skt.).

The original Sanskrit term has two parts: *Devatā* means "the deity"; *iṣṭha* means something which is agreeable to oneself, cherished, beloved, and even revered. So, a guardian deity is the deity that one adheres to and which is special to oneself, which is regarded as dear.

The term was used in the Indian religious traditions of tantric practice to mean the particular deity given to a person by their guru as their main deity for practice.

The Tibetan term is explained in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition as meaning "that which དམ། - DAM - 'binds' the ཡིད། - YID - mind".

A further explanation of the meaning of that relates to the role of the personal deity in secret mantra practice. To put it briefly, the path of secret mantra includes the practice of a deity. The deity is regarded as the manifestation of the guru through which the practitioner gets attainment.

### 4. Question on Stanza 43:

*Having considered and begun to do something,  
I won't think about anything other than this.  
Then, with my intentions directed at that,  
I shall accomplish that very thing first.*

**Does this mean that we cannot work on several lessons or practices over the same period?**

#### Answer:

Of course, in the beginning, it takes time to get to know the yidam and let interact every aspect of ourselves. We also miss the depth of the yidam practice. So, in the meantime we train ourselves to discover these values progressively through doing different practices. We are also very much subject to distraction and need to have many toys, just like spiritual kids that we are. There is no problem with this, we learn specific skills with every practice. At the end, we are getting ready to engage into genuine yidam practice, a process of ultimate transformation with no "escape lane".

### 5. Question on Stanza 53:

**Can Lama expand and clarify this: "Showing devotion to the Lamas of your own tradition is, above all, a kind of attachment"**

#### Answer:

Well the correct reporting of this statement in the commentary on Stanza 53 is:

*"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 bias."*

Yes, showing devotion is a practice that is not easy and that can take you quite far on both ends:

- Far in getting realisation and,
- Far in developing attachment.

Devotion is transcended love, in the sense that all the ill-tendencies of an ordinary love relationship have been abandoned. In the Ngöndro, you can see the process of transformation/purification of your being that you must go through before you engage in any form of guru yoga practice.

If you tend to judge and evaluate dualistically your Guru, you will only succeed in developing a virtual relationship with a mentally created projection of your Guru. Your relationship has little if no depths and is based on your fixation on the personality that is your end of the lineage connecting you to the ultimate Guru: the Buddha.

Instead, remember the qualities of a Guru:

- A Guru is someone who can support a heavy weight. This does not mean that you become brainlessly acting and trust that the Guru will fix all the troublesome situation you might create.
- A Guru is defined by his lineage, and it is through this lineage that he carries the blessings of Lord Buddha. With this understanding, it is difficult to be sectarian.
- Finally, know that the motivation of the Guru is based on ceaseless compassion. So, your Guru is inseparable from all the teachers who taught you something until now. How could you read and write without having been taught?
- Even self-learning people, rely on their inner guru without knowing.

#### **6. Question on Stanza 81:**

**Can Lama say more about the Field of Excellence, the Field of Benefit and the Field of Suffering?**

**Answer:**

Yes, Shantideva insists here on the result of the practice of generosity:

Because of the emptiness/interdependence of the three fields, it is important to practice generosity to all three, yet with clarity of understanding the difference between these fields:

- The first, the Field of Excellence if the goal of our journey and the most meritorious field in relation to us. Giving to this first field is based mainly on the realisation of emptiness and usually is stained by ignorance at first.
- The second, the Field of Benefit, is like repaying the kindness of parents and relatives and as this field is also more familiar to us, it will be uneasy to practice without creating attachment and bondage. It is usually stained by lack of clarity at first.
- The third one, the Field of Suffering, is the generosity that is motivated by compassion; yet, usually biased compassion and attachment to oneself, it results in being stained by conceptual compassion at first.

#### **7. Question on Stanza 82:**

***“In all the actions of offering and giving, and so on, we should not depend on others...»***

**If we can do them ourselves, we should. But if we cannot do it, it is not at all appropriate to rely on others to do it for us.**

**Could Lama give an example of what kind of actions this relates to?**

**Answer:**

Any type of actions, anything within the paramitas. For example, Monlam practice. At first you may rely on a monastic who knows various Monlam. Yet, that should be limited to the recitation. Even then, all the burden of creating sadhanas with phonetics and translations, then through this we can recite them.

Yet, these are the examples of Monlam practiced by great Bodhisattvas. We at some point need to train to do compose them ourselves, thus coming to practice the generosity of Monlam.

#### **8. Question on Stanza 87:**

**Can Lama explain what is, concretely, to give his body, his head or his limbs?**

**What should we refrain from while our compassion is impure?**

**Answer:**

You can take it literally or mentally. Yet, if you are not realised, you might suffer much if you offer one limb.

Great Bodhisattvas have done so literally, eventually reaching enlightenment from it. Lord Buddha Sakyamuni for example did cut some of his limbs to feed the tigress unable to feed her four cubs on the site of Namobuddha in Nepal.

Even if you offer mentally, it might be difficult to do without a great non-dual compassion. It would mean that this body or head or limbs being offered will be not serving your purpose anymore. An example is of the kamikaze in Pearl Harbour. They served a patriotic ideology not necessarily based on pure compassion. That type of compassion was certainly dualistic for most of them. Remember that the body is the basis for your practice of Dharma. For you to realise emptiness. The first Bhumi is the first spiritual level in which your compassion is free from conflicting emotions.

This ends the list of questions that I was submitted after we completed the study of the fifth chapter of the Bodhicaryâvatâra, that on Safeguarding Alertness.

Next Saturday, we will engage the study of the sixth Chapter of this amazing teaching by Shantideva, that on the subject of Patience, an elaborate explanation unfolding in the next 134 stanzas of this text.

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

