

# Shantideva's Bodhicaryâvatâra

བྱང་ཆུབ་སེམས་པའི་སྤྱོད་པ་ལ་འཇུག་པ།

Group Study with Venerable Lama Sangyay Tendzin

Session 42 - Saturday May 14, 2022

## Chapter SIX: Showing Patience (Continued)

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 resume the study of the 6<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Bodhicaryâvatâra composed by the Dharma Lord Shantideva. Currently we are at the beginning of this elaborate exposé on "Showing Patience".

As we saw during our previous session, the first 10 slokas of this chapter stress the need to eliminate anger, the antithesis to Bodhichitta.

In Sloka 11, with the intent of engaging the study of cultivating patience, Shantideva taught us how to identify the object of patience. We were pointed out twenty-four objects to which patience is to be applied. This subject ended the last session of this group study.

Shantideva then engages the main topic of cultivating patience, to be contemplated regarding two topics:

- Cultivating patience with regards to what we do not want.
- Cultivating patience with regards to what brings us suffering.

The cultivation of patience addressing what brings us suffering will be explained in detail over the Slokas 12 to 21.

#### **Stanza 12:**

**The causes for happiness rarely occur,**

**While the causes for sufferings are overly abundant.**

**But, without any suffering, there wouldn't be the determination to be free.**

**Therefore, mind, you must think to be firm.**

In this world of suffering, the causes of happiness (wealth, honour, and so on) are few and appear only occasionally. On the other hand, the causes of our various unwanted sorrows are countless, and we are incapable to stop them from happening. This is what defines samsara.

For as long as we wander in this cyclic existence, no matter how much we may try to rebuke the causes of suffering, we have no choice but to submit and suffer them. For those who understand this, however, there is a positive aspect to pain.

Which one? How is it possible? It is so because without suffering, we will never come to generate "Zhen-Log" - renunciation, the determination to free ourselves from the torments of samsara. To the contrary, enduring suffering leads to a longing for definitive freedom.

Therefore, addressing his own mind, Shantideva tells himself to stand firm and accept his sufferings patiently. Seeing suffering as an incentive urging him to get out of samsara, Shantideva sees in suffering an exhortation to virtue and a broom to sweep away his sins.

#### **Stanza 13:**

**If devotees of Durga and people of Karnata**

**Pointlessly endure the torments of burning**

**And cutting themselves, and the like,**

**Then why am I such a coward for the sake of liberation?**

The devotees of Durga (a manifestation of the goddess Parvati) practice austerities such as impaling themselves on tridents or burning themselves as an offering in the fire ritual.

Likewise, certain of the non-Buddhist practitioners of Karnata (\*), to attain the realm of Brahma, have their heads cut off at the eclipses of the sun and moon. If they are prepared to undergo such great pain, which is so hard to bear and so futile means to achieve their purpose, why, Shantideva asks himself, is he so hesitant when it comes to working for the supreme Good: the state of liberation beyond all suffering?

(\*) Karnata was a southern kingdom, mentioned in the great epic Mahabharata, This kingdom gave the name to the South Indian state Karnataka.

#### **Stanza 14:**

**There isn't anything that doesn't become easier  
Once you've become accustomed to it.  
And so, by growing accustomed to minor pains,  
Greater pains will likely become bearable.**

There is nothing that familiarity and force of habit do not make easy to accomplish. It is thus that even adversity can be tolerated. Therefore, Shantideva tells himself that by accepting minor discomforts now, will enable him to bear great hardships in the future.

#### **Stanza 15:**

**Don't you see this with problems, borne without a great purpose,  
From snakes and mosquitoes,  
Discomforts such as hunger and thirst,  
As well as rashes and the like?**

After all, he asks, does he not already have to put up with the pointless irritations of life: the bites and stings of snakes and flies, the sensations of hunger and thirst, painful infections on his skin and other disorders?

How can he not see that he has no choice but to endure such meaningless discomforts? Looked at from this point of view, it is easy to see that it is perfectly reasonable to endure hardships in the interests of the greatest of goals, that of attaining enlightenment.

#### **Stanza 16:**

**So, I shall not be soft  
Regarding such things as heat and cold, rain and wind,  
Also, sickness, captivity, beatings, and the like.  
For if I've acted like that, the injury is worse.**

The fact here is that the more we become self-concerned and build "comfort-zones", the weaker we get.

Looking at the heat of summer and the winter's cold, the wind and the rain, as well as various illnesses and such hardships as beatings and imprisonment, Shantideva declares that he will not allow himself to be so non-resilient on their account. For, to the extent that he fusses about them, his troubles will be aggravated, and his discomforts will only increase until they become unbearable.

#### **Stanza 17:**

**There are some who, seeing their own blood,  
Develop exceptional courage and resolve.  
And there are some who, seeing the blood of others,  
Collapse and faint.**

Moreover, it is from habit that one acquires the strength to bear with all adversity. For example, there are some whose courage increases when in the thick of battle, they are wounded, and they see their own blood flow.

Others, by contrast, faint even when they see other people bleeding, let alone themselves.

**Stanza 18:**

**That comes from their states of mind being  
Either of a resolute or a cowardly type.  
Therefore, I must be dismissive of pains  
And must not be thrown off by suffering.**

All this is the result of how the mind is set, oriented whether to heroic bravery or to the timidity that is its opposite. Yet everything is made easy through habit.

Therefore, Shantideva tells himself that when striving for the great goal, he will make light of every injury great or small, never allowing himself to be overwhelmed or to stumble in resentment.

**Stanza 19:**

**Even when he's in agony, someone skilled  
Will never let the composure of his mind be stirred.  
And in a war, that's waged against disturbing emotions,  
Bruises abound, when fighting the battle.**

When sharp sufferings and injuries inflicted by others ensue, wise Bodhisattvas should keep their minds serene, joyful, and untroubled by grief. The understanding of the Dharma should act as a remedy for the afflictions. Every effort should be made to combat anger and the other defilements using the antidote of patience.

It is just like fighting a war. When defilement and antidotes clash on the battlefield, that is, when the Dharma strikes at the vital point and evil karma from the past surges to retaliate, the only result will be a great deal of discomfort and plenty of hurts.

**Stanza 20:**

**Those who, having been dismissive of suffering,  
Destroy the enemies, anger and so on,  
They are the heroes who have gained the victory.  
The rest (merely) slay corpses.**

Those who endure every discomfort for the sake of accomplishing the supreme goal, those who vanquish their enemies, namely, their anger and other defilements—they are the ones who are the best and strongest, the truly victorious heroes. But those who vanquish only external enemies, massacring men, horses and so forth, do no more than wound and kill what is lifeless already. Heroism in such situations is no more than an empty boast.

**Stanza 21:**

**Furthermore, there are advantages to suffering:  
With agony, arrogance disappears.  
Compassion grows for those in recurring samsara.  
Negative conduct is shunned; and joy is taken in being constructive.**

In any case, suffering has its good and useful side. For when we suffer, we will have feelings of renunciation: experiencing weariness of the worldly activities, arrogance will be driven from our minds. Thanks to our own suffering, we may experience unbounded compassion, wishing to free others who are also bound in samsara.

Similarly, we will reject and shun the negativity by which suffering is caused, and we will be enthusiastic in the pursuit of goodness, the cause of happiness, thus becoming scrupulous regarding the law of karma cause and effect.

In the next stanzas, stanza 22 to stanza 33, Lord Shantideva addresses a then next specific topic: that of, “Patience that consists in certainty with regard to the ultimate reality of things”.

**Stanza 22:**

**As I don't get enraged  
With great sources of suffering, for instance with bile,  
Then why get enraged with those having limited minds?  
All of them, as well, are provoked by conditions.**

We may think that, whereas we do indeed put up with our sufferings, we are nevertheless indignant at the people who make us suffer. But if we are not angry at our humours, the wind, bile, and phlegm and other important sources of disease and pain, why should we be angry at the animate beings who cause us injury?

Illness arises from four causes: conditions related to time, evil influences, food, and personal behaviour. Since a disease is not an independent force, what use is there in being angry with it?

Similarly, why should we not resent those who throw stones at us, thinking they do it on purpose? Those aggressors themselves are not autonomous either.

The enemies who harm us are themselves under the power of anger and other afflictions; just as the occurrence of illness is depending on several factors such as age, nutrition, personal behaviour, and evil influences.

None of these agents exists as independent factor. Both are acting under the influence of something else that is controlling them, Moreover, because each of them arises dependently, they are empty of real existence by themselves. We should understand that there is neither a real injury nor a real injurer to be resented. This is how we should deflect our anger.

**Stanza 23:**

**For example, without being wished for,  
Their sicknesses arise.**

**And likewise, without being wished for,  
Their disturbing emotions also strongly arise.**

For it is just as with different diseases, that do arise through the power of causes and conditions, basically through a temporary imbalance of the humours of wind, bile, phlegm, and so forth. They do not do so intentionally, for they are not autonomous agents.

The same applies to the enemies that torment us. They too are without autonomy. They do not fall victim to the experience of the five conflicting emotions willingly, but through the power of unhappy mental states. Diseases and enemies are on the same level in that neither functions an independent cause creating our suffering.

**Stanza 24:**

**Without thinking, "I shall get enraged,"  
People just become enraged.**

**And without thinking, "It shall arise,"  
Likewise, rage arises.**

One may claim that diseases have no intention to harm us, whereas enemies do. To this Shantideva replies that when people get angry, they just do so based on ordinary circumstances. No one premeditates rage, saying, "Now I will get angry with this person."

Although these same circumstances never decide and plan to cause anger in a person, it is nevertheless based on them that anger arises. It is just like a reflection appearing in a mirror: the mirror has no plan of producing the reflection on its surface.

Nevertheless, a reflection appears through the simultaneous presence of different factors. And although a form does not intend to produce a reflection on the mirror, the reflection just appears owing to certain conditions. It is similar, both in the case of a disease or that of an enemy.

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

