

Shantideva's
Bodhicaryâvatâra

བྱང་ཆུབ་སེམས་པའི་སྡོད་པ་ལ་འཇུག་པ།

Group Study with Venerable Lama Sangyay Tendzin

Session 60 - Saturday January 7, 2023

Chapter SEVEN: Joyful Perseverance - The Support of the Practice

REFUGE | MANDALA | REQUEST for TEACHINGS

Lama's Invocation of the Buddhas and assembly of lineage holders.

Short practice of Mental Quiescence - Generation of Bodhicitta

Tashi Deleg! 2023 started well with the celebration of Guru Rinpoche at TNG-SUISSE through the Rigdzin Drildrub Ganachakra. One week later, we have the great pleasure of meeting again resuming our study of the Bodhicaryâvatâra and specially that of its chapter 7 dedicated to the practice of Joyful Effort.

This chapter initiates the third part of the text dealing with developing and intensifying Bodhicitta.

Before engaging this new chapter, let us put things in perspective, by reviewing the outline of what we studied so far:

PART ONE: The Generation of Bodhichitta Where It Has Not Previously Existed

Chapter 1. The Excellence and Benefits of Bodhichitta

Chapter 2. The Confession of Negativity

Chapter 3. Taking Hold of Bodhichitta

PART TWO: How to Prevent Bodhichitta from Weakening Once It Has Been Generated

Chapter 4. Carefulness

Chapter 5. Vigilant Introspection

Chapter 6. Patience

Part Three: How Bodhichitta Is to Be Developed and Intensified

Chapter 7. Joyful Effort

The Chapter Seven on Joyful Perseverance: counts 76 Stanzas starting with explaining the need for diligence i.e., the joyful effort to persevere in practice once patience has been cultivated.

Stanza 1:

Patient like that, I need to embrace joyful perseverance,

Since based on perseverance, enlightenment takes place.

After all, without joyful perseverance, there's no arising of positive force,

Just as, without wind, there's no motion.

As we learn in the teachings on the various aspects of Paramita, they are all interdependent in a way that each of its various aspects, depends on the others. Therefore, the six paramitas are prescribed in such a way that each paramita has a relation of cause and effect with the next.

Generosity allows to renounce attachment to belongings and outstanding greed, making it possible to engage in the practice of ethical discipline. When discipline is acquired, so too is the ability to cultivate patience; and once

patience has been achieved one will be able to overcome great difficulties. Then onward, one can steadily apply enthusiastic diligence.

Why is this 'Joyful effort' paramita so necessary? It is so because manifesting it calls for the positive energy that is needed to move us further on the Path to Enlightenment. Only throughout this enthusiastic energy will we succeed in developing the skills of samadhi and wisdom.

When there is no circulation of wind (*), nothing either inside or outside the body can move. This has many more implications that we can imagine.

(*) "Wind" (ऋ - lung - prana) is the principle of motion, both in the external world i.e., the displacement of air or wind in the usual sense and in the body, where it is the principle of physical movement and the other anatomical processes.

On the more subtle level of Vajrayana, it refers to the movement of the prana in the nadis.

"Lung" is regarded as a kind of bridge between mind and body and is the means whereby the mind functions within its bodily support. The movement of wind thus accounts not only for our physical condition but also for our mental state.

In the same way, without diligence, nothing positive relating to the two accumulations can occur. To the contrary, where diligence is present, supreme enlightenment is quickly obtained through the nourishing power of the two accumulations.

Usually, I label this aspect of Paramita as "*Joyful effort*". The reason for this is that once patience is being mastered, one is ready to make real progress through complete engagement. The target of this engagement is enlightenment, which means a state of stable happiness or felicity.

The right aim to attain this target is joy which ensures that we "progress". It is this constant positive or enthusiastic outlook that helps to overcome any situation, any difficulty that one may encounter on the Path.

Having achieved patience, we are by now practicing without expectation, it needs perseverance until the fruit of our practice is obtained. Striving with joy counters the tendency to drawback and fall into depression caused by indolence. This would be the result of depressive outlook.

Stanza 2:

What's joyful perseverance?

It's enthusiastic drive for being constructive.

Its opposing factors are explained as lethargy, clinging to what's negative or petty, And, from being discouraged, disparaging oneself.

Diligence or Joyful Effort is defined as a state of mind that takes joy in virtue.

Here, the mention of virtue indicates that diligence implicitly dismisses all states of no virtue and indifference.

The mention of joy on the other end, addresses the mind as the source of diligence seeing its nature as a mental disposition and not simply linked to the beneficial actions of body and speech.

Positive physical and verbal actions are regarded as diligence, only because they are referred to with the name of what causes them. Undeniably, it is the positive mind turned towards joyful effort that induces them both.

Having defined "Joyful perseverance", Shantideva identifies the contrary of diligence and then explain how it can be removed.

The reverse of diligence is laziness or lethargy, of which there are three kinds:

1. The laziness of indolence
2. The laziness that consists in an inclination to unwholesome actions and,
3. The laziness of low self-esteem and victimisation.

Stanza 3:

Lethargy arises

**From apathy about the problems of recurring samsara,
Which comes through relishing a taste of pleasure from idleness
And through craving sleep as a haven.**

As we find in detailed commentaries on the Bodhicaryâvatâra:

*“Because they have no sorrow at the sufferings of samsara,
people indulge in indolent pleasures and yearn for sleep.”*

Laziness or indolence, whereby the mind takes no joy in virtue, is caused by three things:

- The failure to strive in goodness, accompanied by an interest in idle enjoyment or distraction
- An indulgence in lassitude and an increasing desire to lie in bed upon one’s pillow
- The failure to be distraught by the sufferings of samsara.

But although we enjoy the pleasures of distraction, and so on, and take delight in sleep, when all coarser cogitation is suspended, although one might experience some blissfulness, such bliss transforms eventually into suffering.

In this way, yearning after such sensations and feeling no sorrow at the shortcomings of samsara, cause us to engage in the activities of this life, taking advantage of our opponents and protecting our friends.

No matter how much we exert in such activities, there is no end to them; yet we do not grow weary of them but find ourselves complacent with all we accomplish.

Instead, would we let go of our arrogance and cultivate modesty, we could easily recognize such ill-patterns and gain the ability to correct our conduct. How to achieve this?

The answer is given in the next 28 stanzas. From Stanza 4 to 31, Shantideva provides a detailed explanation of **how to rid oneself of these three kinds of laziness.**

1. Cultivating an antidote to the kind of laziness that is a yearning for idleness (verses 4–14)

Stanza 4:

**Sniffed out by the trapper, the disturbing emotions,
And fallen into the trap of rebirth,
How do you still not realize
That you’ve landed in the mouth of the lord of death?**

When we notice that we grow lazy, we should immediately meditate on impermanence and drive away our laziness with the whip of diligence. We should meditate on impermanence by reflecting on the image of a trapper and his trap or else of a fisherman and his net:

Our defiled emotions—attachment, anger, and the rest—are like trappers and fishermen who go in search of fish, ensnaring them and killing them in their nets.

They enmesh and catch us in the drudgeries of rebirth in the three worlds of samsara, which are pervaded by death, the inescapable destiny of us all.

This is how we fall into the mouth of Yama, the merciless Lord of Death. It is certain that we must die. How is it possible that we can still ignore this fact? We must confront it and immediately strive in the practice of virtue.

Stanza 5:

**Don't you even see that he's slaughtering
The members of your herd, each in turn?
Yet despite being like a buffalo at the butcher,
You even go to sleep!**

We should also meditate on impermanence using the simile of a buffalo and its butcher. Death comes for all humanity: our friends, our companions in the Dharma, those who are older, those who are younger, and those who are of the same age.

The Lord of Death spares none. He takes us all one by one. Can we still not see this?

If we do see it but continue to indulge in our lazy addiction to drowsiness and distraction, if we fail to make effort in virtue, we are indeed incredibly stupid—just like buffaloes that, without the slightest qualm, sleep next to their own butchers, who kill them one after the other.

Stanza 6:

**With the road blocked everywhere
And eyeballed by the lord of death,
How can eating bring you joy?
How can sleeping? How can making love?**

We must also meditate on impermanence, using the example of a trapped wanderer. Like highway robbers who kill travellers, blocking all paths of escape and watching and lying-in wait ahead along the road, the merciless Lord of Death seals off all the ways that we might flee from him.

He leaves open only the high road that leads to death itself. And there he waits for us. He has us already in his sights. How can we continue to delight in food and drink day after day and in sleep night after night?

How can we indulge in such meek satisfaction when our days and nights are racing by?
Instead, we must diligently persevere in virtuous action.

Stanza 7:

**So, stock up on a bountiful store of positive force while you can,
For death will come all too soon.
Even by throwing off lethargy then,
What can you accomplish when out of time?**

It is also essential to remember that death will come soon. In these degenerate times, our lives are not long even if we manage to survive a great number of years. Ever more damaging, the hostile circumstances of disease and negative influence are plentiful these days. We cannot even be certain that we will not die tonight.

Therefore, let us apply joyful effort into the practice of virtue, gathering the two accumulations of merit and wisdom before that time occurs. If we give up being lazy only when the moment of death arrives, there will be no time to accumulate merit even would we suddenly feel persuaded to do so.

What will be the point of abandoning laziness then?

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

