

# Shantideva's Bodhicaryâvatâra

བྱང་ཆུབ་སེམས་པའི་སློབ་པ་ལ་འཇུག་པ།

Group Study with Venerable Lama Sangyay Tendzin

Session 69 - Saturday September 2, 2023

## Chapter Eight: MEDITATIVE CONCENTRATION (Far-Reaching Mental Stability): 187 Slokas

### REFUGE | MANDALA | REQUEST for TEACHINGS

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

### Short practice of Mental Quiescence - Generation of Bodhicitta

Good morning, everyone. It is with great satisfaction that I meet you today with the prospect of continuing our group study of the Bodhicaryâvatâra.

After the extended interruption of this webinar due to external circumstances, let's briefly go through the outline of previous chapter, the Chapter Seven on the practice of Diligence or Joyful Effort.

Shantideva was explaining Joyful perseverance as the support of genuine spiritual practice elaborating the following points:

- **The need for Diligence**
- **Identifying Diligence and its opposing factors**
- **Removing the conditions inimical to diligence or how to rid oneself of**
  - the kind of laziness that is a yearning for indolence.
  - the kind of laziness that is an inclination to unwholesome actions.
  - the kind of laziness consisting in self-depreciation and defeatism.
- **Implementing the favourable conditions for diligence by summoning the four remedial forces**
  - The force of aspiration
  - The force of steadfastness
  - Cultivating a feeling of self-confidence regarding the task.
  - Cultivating a feeling of self-confidence regarding one's abilities.
  - Cultivating a sense of self-confidence regarding the afflictive emotions.
    - The force of joy
    - The force of relinquishment
- **Perfecting two applications**
  - The application of earnest practice
  - The application of controlling body, speech, and mind

The next chapter, Chapter Eight, is dedicated to increase meditative concentration with the purpose of acquiring Far-Reaching Mental Stability. This chapter is long as it contains 187 Slokas.

It is also arduous: calling for the practitioner to have achieved joyful perseverance, its topic is that of mental concentration, a quality that, unless progressively developed, remains nowadays our weakest point in a lifestyle constantly promoting distraction.

It is therefore advisable (as the first sloka reminds us) to build up the enthusiasm needed to obtain successful samadhi.

The XIVth Dalai Lama, His Holiness Tendzin Gyamtsho, wrote the following comment which might be most inspiring to remember:

*"If I have any understanding of compassion and the practice of the bodhisattva path, it is entirely on the basis of this text, The Way of the Bodhisattva, that I possess it."*

### **Stanza 1:**

**Having increased my zestful vigour like that,  
I shall set my mind in absorbed concentration.  
Since a person having a distracted mind  
Is set between the fangs of disturbing emotions.**

The chapter starts by a reminder of the fact that aborning it, implies to have successfully developed joyful perseverance. As stated in verse 74 of the previous chapter, succeeding in this entails relying on a spiritual teacher: to listen to the received instructions, to reflect, and then to meditate, on them.

In the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra*: (\*), Lord Maitreya, said that if it were unnecessary to hear and study the teachings, the Tripitaka and all the doctrines of the Conqueror would be pointless.

If there were no need to meditate upon the meaning of what one has heard, then the meditation of all the holy beings who appeared in the past would likewise be in vain. However, it is not so!

First, by listening to the teachings, we should make a strenuous effort to study and contemplate them to discover what we should practice or meditate upon. This is a needed preliminary step before engaging into practice.

Therefore, as stated earlier, we must cultivate diligence, eating with moderation and reducing the measure of our sleep. Then we should one-pointedly concentrate on the object of meditation, narrowly focusing our minds and not allowing ourselves to be distracted by other things.

What happens if we fail to concentrate? A person whose mind is carelessly left to drift towards the objects of the six consciousnesses is like scrap of food caught between the fangs of demons, i.e., the defilements of attachment and hatred.

It is certain that people who leave their minds to their own habitual patterns, will lose whatever spiritual qualities they may have acquired. The seeds of liberation will be destroyed, and suffering will be the only outcome.

(\*) The *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra*, composed by Asaṅga, is one of five treatises dictated to him by the Mahasattva Maitreya. It exposes systematically the key points of the Mahayana path, i.e., the nature of the bodhisattva path and the concept of Buddha nature.

### **Stanza 2:**

**Through isolating both my body and mind,  
There'll be no occurrence of any distraction.  
Therefore, I'll set aside worldly concerns  
And bring my rambling thought to a halt.**

Shantideva outlines the key conditions for achieving meditative focus.

To eliminate distractions, one must seek solitude and distance oneself from worldly activities and social interactions. Detachment from past, present, and future events is essential.

To overcome afflictions, solitude is crucial, requiring us to:

- Physically disengage from worldly matters.
- Mentally halt wandering thoughts and focus on sensory objects.

Being isolated is vital for cultivating concentration, promoting the practice of regular retreats. This is an essential reason justifying the existence of the TNG-Centre® as a place dedicated to regular practice of mindfulness.

### **Stanza 3:**

**Worldly concerns are not discarded  
Because of sticky attachments and thirst for material gain and the like.  
Therefore, to set these things aside,  
Someone with knowledge would discern like this:**

It is because of attachment to our loved ones and because of our desire for property, and so on, that we do not give up—that we cannot give up—the distracting activities of worldly life.

Therefore, someone who is wise, who has managed to relinquish attachment and desire, and who has received and reflected on the teachings on what to do and what to avoid, should be practicing as follows:

**Stanza 4:**

**“An exceptionally perceptive state of mind, joined onto a stilled and settled state,  
Completely destroys the disturbing emotions.”**

**Having understood this, first I shall seek a stilled and settled mind.**

**This is achieved through delight in detachment from worldly concerns.**

It is said in the *Dharma Sangit sutra* (\*):

*“When the mind is placed in meditative equipoise, one can see things perfectly, as they are.”*

Accordingly, when the states of movement and stillness in the mind have been brought under control, the mind remains one-pointedly in the state of perfect flexibility and inherent felicity. That is, it dwells in the “Valid preparatory stage” to the first samadhi (\*\*), the concentration of “Zhi-Nay” or Calm Abiding.

When this is combined with “Lhag-Tong” - Penetrative Insight i.e., the wisdom that understands the ultimate mode of being of phenomena, the afflictive states will be utterly dismissed, together with their seeds and their habitual tendencies.

To progress, first master Calm Abiding using various techniques. This state serves as the foundation for Penetrative Insight and is achievable only by those who detach from worldly concerns, embrace solitude, and practice focused concentration joyfully.

(\*) ཚེས་ཡང་དག་པར་སྤྱད་པའོ་མདོ་ - “chö yang-dag-par düd-pa'i do” - ‘Compendium of the Teachings Sutra’ is a Mahayana sutra.

(\*\*) རྟེན་བསྐྱོགས་མི་ལྷོགས་མེད་ - “nyer-dog mi-chog-med” - “Potent preparatory samadhi”, the preparatory samadhi leading to the first dhyana of the form realm. This samadhi prepares the practitioner for exit from the desire realm and entrance into the form realm, and so gives the capability to abandon འདོད་ཉོན་མོངས་ - “Död-Nyön-Mong”, ‘the afflictions of the desire realm’.

**Stanza 5:**

**After all, any impermanent person**

**Having sticky attachment to impermanent beings,**

**Won’t see those loved ones again after death**

**For many thousands of lives.**

No one is permanent and everlasting, people find themselves in a situation in which, being impermanent themselves, they are strongly attached to what is also ephemeral, namely, their relatives and friends.

The concept that is highlighted invites to reflect on impermanence and suffering. The notion that everything is ephemeral and subject to change is foundational. Attachment to these ever-changing elements (be it people, material possessions, or even self-identity) leads to suffering.

However, the understanding of impermanence and attachment is not a call to emotional detachment or a cold indifference toward the world and its inhabitants.

It serves as a reminder to appreciate the present moment, to live mindfully, and to cultivate unconditional, boundless, and free from the fear of loss, loving-kindness and compassion.

This form of love -known as “Metta” or loving-kindness- is not only liberating for us but also incredibly enriching for the others.

### **Stanza 6:**

**Not seeing them, he will be unhappy.  
And his mind won't settle in absorbed concentration.  
Even if he sees them, he will never be satisfied,  
And, as before, he will be tormented by longing.**

Even apart from our cherished companions for only brief moments, our minds find no peace. Consumed by concern for their circumstances, we struggle to maintain focus and emotional equilibrium.

And when reunited, our hearts remain unfulfilled. Our attachment and yearning continue to rob us of true happiness.

As the Lalitavishtara-Sutra (\*) says, enjoying your desires is like drinking salty water; it never truly satisfies you.

(\*) The Lalitavishtara Sutra is an ancient Mahayana Buddhist text that chronicles the life of Siddhartha Gautama, who later became known as the Buddha. The word "Lalitavistara" can be translated as "The Play in Full" or "An Elaborate Narration." The text serves as both a spiritual teaching and a form of literature, describing the life of the Buddha from his descent from the Tushita Heaven to his Enlightenment under the Bodhi tree and the first teaching at Sarnath.

Its main objective is to inspire and guide those on the path of Enlightenment by demonstrating the life and teachings of the Buddha as the perfect example of compassionate and wise living. Given its comprehensive nature and its role in illustrating the virtues and practices essential for spiritual development, the Lalitavishtara Sutra could serve as a valuable resource for your Dharma practice.

### **Stanza 7:**

**From being attached to limited beings,  
One is impeded from seeing things as they are.  
One loses any sense of disillusionment too.  
And, in the end, one is tormented by grief.**

When we long and crave for other beings such as friends and relatives, a veil is cast upon the ultimate truth and we fail to see it.

The wholesome sense of disappointment and sadness (\*) that we once possessed towards the sorrows of samsara melts away and does not return.

Consequently, when those who are dear to us abandon us or die, we are left with an agony of suffering.

(\*) ཞེན་ལོག་ས་ - "Zhen-log" - Revulsion", "to be nauseated by". o have the feeling of being ready to throw up at the sufferings of samsara.

We stop here for today. Let us practice mental quiescence for a short while, before dedicating our merit for the benefit of all.

