

**Shantideva's**  
**Bodhicaryâvatâra**

བྱང་ཆུབ་སེམས་པའི་རྒྱུད་པ་ལ་འཇུག་པ།

Group Study with Venerable Lama Sangyay Tendzin

**Session 70 - Saturday September 9, 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. Continuing our group study of the Bodhicaryâvatâra, the first topic explained by Shantideva in its 8<sup>th</sup> Chapter is an explanation of the conditions conducive to meditative concentration.

After stressing in Stanza 2, the need to give up distraction and rely on solitude, Shantideva is engaging a detailed explanation of why the world should be abandoned. From stanza 5 to 16, he further explains the need to also give up attachment to beings.

We ended last session with Stanza 7 pointing us that attachment to friends not only casts a veil on the perfect truth, but also, fades our determination to abandon samsara, thus cutting the feet of meditation altogether by cancelling our "Zhen-log". The consequence of this is that it undermines our practice of Dharma and therefore the ability to reach enlightenment as stated next in Stanza 8:

**Stanza 8:**

**Because of thinking only of them,  
This life will pass without any meaning,  
And through noneternal friends and relations,  
I will come to lose the eternal Dharma.**

For our thoughts are all for them, our longed-for friends, and thus our lives pass by in vain. No virtue is accomplished, and our lives are spent in negativity and pain.

All our families and friends fade and pass; nevertheless, the attachment that we feel for them undermines all practice of the Dharma, the means whereby the unsurpassable state of immutability or indestructibility is attained. In the coming stanzas, Shantideva shows the consequences of binding with childish acquaintances.

**Stanza 9:**

**Having acted equal to the lot of infantile people,  
I'll surely go to a worse rebirth state.  
If I'm led to a lot that's not (even) equal,  
Then what have I gained by relying on those infantile folk?**

If we act childishly physically, verbally, and mentally like ordinary, foolish beings, it is certain that we shall fall. We shall be reborn in the lower realms. The Tibetan word used in this sloka is ཇེས་པ་ - "ji-pa" – It designates a person who is still immature, indicating an ordinary being as opposed to spiritually advanced beings i.e., beings who are foolish (because of lacking the spiritual insight of the âryas) as opposed to those who are wise.

Why hang out with childish people who act like kids, leading us to down paths of craving as well as discontentment and unhappiness with what we already have?

This kind of company makes us less interested in learning and improving ourselves, distancing us from the simple, mindful ways of the wise—those who are content with little and find joy in self-improvement.

By sticking with people who aren't focused on growth, we impair our present as well as our future selves.

**Stanza 10:**

**One moment, they're friends.**

**In an instant, they're enemies.**

**At a time for being delighted, they fall into a rage:**

**Ordinary beings are so difficult to please.**

People like that are often capricious, always chasing the next new thing. One minute they're your best friends, and the next, they're acting like your worst enemies. Try encouraging them to embrace virtues, the real key to happiness, and they get annoyed, brushing it off.

Even if you're rich in both spiritual wisdom and material things—things that should make friends happy for you—they tend to get envious and resentful. The truth is, it's tough to make everyone happy all the time.

**Stanza 11:**

**Told what's of benefit, they get enraged.**

**And cause me to turn from what's of benefit too.**

**But, if their words aren't listened to,**

**They fall into a rage and go, then, to a worse rebirth state.**

Although your advice is offered with genuine care for the well-being of others, aligning with the Buddhist principles of compassion and loving-kindness, it underscores the long-term benefits of Dharma practice, thus going beyond just immediate, material gains.

Nevertheless, some individuals may not only ignore the wisdom being offered but may even react in a way that is contrary to the principles of equanimity and patience. The excuses often given, generally indicate a lack of priority or understanding of the importance of Dharma practice.

Not only do they not take the path themselves, but they may also actively try to deter others, thereby accumulating negative karma. Acting in such a way, they ignore that negative reactions, such as anger, are not just momentary lapses but could have long-lasting spiritual repercussions, leading to lower realms in the future.

**Stanza 12:**

**They're envious of superiors, competitive with equals,**

**Arrogant toward inferiors, conceited when praised,**

**And hateful when told what they don't want to hear:**

**When is there benefit from infantile beings?**

This stanza presents a critical perspective on individuals who exhibit a range of problematic behaviors across different social dynamics. The traits described i.e., envy, competitiveness, arrogance, conceit, and a hateful attitude, point to an individual who is not at peace with themselves or others.

From a Tibetan Buddhist standpoint, such behaviors stem from ignorance and a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of self and reality.

If they are praised, they become conceited and pretentious. If they hear unpleasant references to their own defects, they reek with rage.

The rhetorical question "When is there benefit from infantile beings?" seems to point out the lack of spiritual and even worldly benefit from engaging with individuals who exhibit these traits. However, from a Buddhist perspective, one could argue that interactions with such individuals can serve as a mirror to recognize and

uproot our own negative qualities. The term "infantile beings" may denote emotional immaturity, but it also could be seen as a call to exercise compassion and wisdom, two key virtues in Buddhism, to understand the root of such behaviours and alleviate suffering for all beings involved.

**Stanza 13:**

**If I associate with infantile people,  
Then destructive behaviour inevitably arises among infantile folk,  
Such as praising myself and belittling others,  
And wittering about the pleasures of samsara.**

If we have not yet attained the level of spiritual awakening known as Arya, we remain ordinary beings, susceptible to various shortcomings. When we associate with others who are similarly unenlightened, we are likely to engage in unwholesome activities, either consciously or unconsciously. The focus tends to shift towards self-promotion and demeaning others. Conversations may revolve around worldly pleasures rather than spiritual growth.

In such states, we may find ourselves favouring those we are attracted to while undermining those we have aversions towards. We might immerse ourselves in worldly pursuits like business and agriculture, discussing material goods like livestock, supplies, and clothing. Even a simple, accidental encounter on the street could trigger behaviour lacking in virtue, manifesting as unfriendly glances or harsh words.

**Stanza 14:**

**From entrusting myself to others in this way,  
Nothing but loss comes about in the end,  
For they'll be, in fact, no-good for me.  
And I'll be, in fact, no-good for them.**

The lines suggest that placing one's trust, hope, or happiness entirely in the hands of others can lead to disappointment or even harm. From a Buddhist perspective, relying solely on external entities for our well-being may also hinder our own path toward enlightenment, as it distracts us from the inner work necessary for true liberation.

This highlights the importance of personal responsibility in our spiritual journey. While community, teachers, and friends can offer support, the ultimate work of understanding and embodying Dharma falls upon the individual.

Relationships with immature people bring us no benefit either now or in the future, and we in turn are incapable of doing any good to them.

This being understood, in the next stanza Shantideva pleads to end such relationships and consequently to turn towards solitude, without any hard feelings such as attachment or aversion.

**Stanza 15:**

**So, let me flee far away from infantile folk.  
But if encountered, I'll please them with pleasantries,  
And without becoming overly familiar,  
I'll conduct myself nicely, merely as an ordinary person would.**

There is a proverb that underscores this idea:

*"The affection we feel for our family members can be a celestial trap,  
Uniting with cherished friends may diminish our virtuous actions,  
Conversations can become the vault of negativity, opening doors to faults and setbacks."*

We should aim to distance ourselves from friends, relatives, and other close connections who exhibit immaturity, instead seek solitude and inner focus.

Should we encounter friends and relatives while retreating in the mountains, it is fitting to offer them a joyful greeting—expressed through kind words and welcoming gestures. This interaction, however, should be limited to that specific moment and not extend into long-lasting bonds of either affection or animosity.

**Stanza 16:**

**Obtaining only what's helpful for Dharma,  
Like a bumblebee honey from a flower,  
I'll live without having familiars,  
Like having never seen any of them before.**

When we go to attend our necessities or to share teachings and rituals, we should be like bees. Just as bees take nectar without harming the flower, we should take only what we need and leave without getting attached.

Carry only essential items that align with our spiritual teachings and maintain a polite distance with those who help us to avoid becoming overly familiar, which can lead to attachment or dislike.

As reminded by Kunzang Palden in his commentary, Longchenpa said:

*"In towns or monasteries, lonely places, forest groves,  
Wherever you may be, seek not for friends.  
Whoever you are with, keep to yourself.  
No attachment, no resentment:  
That's the counsel of my heart".*

That's good advice we should listen to. But often these days, lamas and their supporters act like they own each other. How can this help people or our spiritual teachings?

What we should focus on is letting go of material worries and actions driven by desire or anger. These things will harm us now and later. We should spend time alone, away from distractions. As Shantideva said, we should only take what helps us follow the Dharma. This also means truly understanding the essence teachings received from our teacher.

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

