

Shantideva's Bodhicaryâvatâra

བྱང་ཆུབ་སེམས་པའི་རྒྱུད་པ་ལ་འཇུག་པ།

Group Study with Venerable Lama Sangyay Tendzin

Session 71 - Saturday September 16, 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. Last week we completed the first topic brought up by Shantideva in his exposé on the 8th Chapter of the Bodhicaryâvatâra explaining the conditions conducive to meditative concentration.

To remind you most briefly the main points studied last week in stanzas 8 to 16, we were invited to stay away from worldly activities and to refrain from engaging with the childish. Next, from stanzas 17 to 24, Shantideva gives further admonishments as he cautions us to give up attachment to worldly gain, be it in the form of material profit or earning praises and honours.

Stanza 17:

**"But as I get a lot of material gain and honour,
And own many things: What a dream!"
If I hold on to acting conceitedly like that,
Terrifying things will arise after death.**

One might feel proud, thinking, "I'm wealthy and respected with many followers and gifts." However, if you misuse these resources—taking offerings and fees for ceremonies—your future lives could be filled with suffering.

The Buddha's guidelines for using monastic property are as follows:

- Enlightened beings can treat it as their own.
- Seekers on the path should see it as a gift.
- Knowledgeable yet ordinary beings can use it as a granted privilege.
- Those lacking wisdom but observing monastic rules accumulate karmic debt.
- For those neglecting their discipline, it's like swallowing burning iron.

Stanza 18:

**Thus, no matter what my bewildered mind
Becomes attached to.
In conjunction with each of them,
Thousandfold problems arise and stay around.**

Shantideva criticizes his own mind for being consumed by ego and sensory desires. He warns that cravings, whether for meat, alcohol, or material wealth, are detrimental.

He emphasizes that indulging in such desires now will result in severe consequences in future lives. Even small actions, like drinking a bowl of tea or beer, will magnify into intense suffering later; just like swallowing molten bronze.

Thus, every action has a significant impact, highlighting the profound principle of cause and effect.

Stanza 19:

**Hence, the wise have no attachments,
Because, from attachments, terrifying things arise.
As these objects of attachment will naturally be discarded at death,
Be firm and consider this well:**

Given this reality, an enlightened individual, discerning what should be pursued and what should be forsaken, neither yearns for material goods nor seeks social standing. Such desires are the breeding ground for fear and sorrow in both this existence and future ones.

Moreover, all things that people aspire to -be it wealth or prestige- will inevitably wither away to insignificance. This is an undeniable truth. We must firmly etch this understanding into our consciousness: Nothing is permanent and unchanging.

Thus, Shantideva explores the idea that desiring possessions or social status leads to suffering, both in this life and future ones. This echoes some fundamental Buddhist principles, such as the Four Noble Truths, which start with the acknowledgment that suffering exists, and is often caused by craving or attachment.

Stanza 20:

**There've been many people with material wealth.
And there've been many with fame and reputation.
But it's never been known that they've passed on to some place
Where their amassed wealth and fame have come with.**

The statement emphasizes the impermanence and limitations of material wealth and fame. Shantideva's words suggest that while many have accumulated these worldly possessions, they ultimately offer no lasting value beyond this life.

Stressing the importance of non-attachment and the cultivation of virtues like wisdom and compassion, Shantideva reminds us that these inner qualities, unlike material wealth and fame, have the potential to support one's spiritual journey both in this life and beyond.

Stanza 21:

**If there are others who belittle me,
What pleasure is there when I'm being praised?
And if there are others who praise me,
What displeasure is there when I'm being belittled?**

Why should we let criticism overshadow the joy we feel from compliments? After all, for every person who may not think highly of us, there's someone else who appreciates us. Doesn't the warmth from those appreciative moments lighten the weight of negative comments?

On the flip side, if we're fortunate enough to receive positive feedback, why should we let the occasional critique bring us down? The kindness and validation from others surely lift our spirits and balance out the naysayers.

Stanza 22:

**If limited beings, with varied dispositions,
Couldn't be pleased by even the Triumphant,
What need to mention by the poor likes of me?
Therefore, let me give up my preoccupation with worldly people.**

It could perhaps be argued that we ought to try to please everyone and make them happy: Acting as such, absolutely no one would blame us; and many would praise us instead.

But such a thought reflects the ignorance that beings have accumulated various karmas, and consequently have various aspirations and interests.

While it's tempting to aim for universal approval, even the Buddha himself, flawless and wise, couldn't please everyone. As reported by KunPal in his commentary, the Buddha failed to satisfy the six non-Buddhist teachers (*), as well as Devadatta (**) and Sunakshatra (***)).

(*) Six teachers from the Vedic tradition whose views were not accepted by the Buddha for their teachings did not conform with the Four Noble Truths.

(**) Known cousin of the Buddha and brother-in-law, brother of Ananda. Devadatta was rivalling the Buddha and later plotted to kill him. He repented too late and was led to hell realm.

(***) Sunakshatra known as རེག་པ་འདི་སྐྱེ་བ་ - *legpa'i karma* in Tibetan, was another cousin of the Buddha, who followed him for many years and learned a great many teachings by heart, but still developed wrong views towards him and was later reborn as a preta.

This being so, it is unrealistic to think that pitiable creatures like us may succeed. We are for sure powerless to please everyone. Rather than chasing universal praise and getting caught in the eight worldly concerns, we're better off embracing solitude and letting go of the need for external validation.

Stanza 23:

**They belittle limited beings lacking material gain,
And, regarding those with material gain, they say bad things;
How can any pleasure arise with those
Whose company is, by nature, so difficult?**

The less fortunate among us are often dismissed and looked down upon, considered unworthy and incapable of even tedious work. Surprisingly, these same individuals who criticize the poor don't heap praise on the wealthy either. They question the rich, often sarcastically asking if their wealth can accompany them to the afterlife or serve as a bribe to the Lord of Death.

Rather than celebrating the resilience of the poor, they scorn them. Spending time with such individuals, i.e., those who are critical of both the poor and the wealthy, brings no joy. They are difficult to please and their viewpoints are hard to understand.

Stanza 24:

**The Thusly Gone (Buddha) has said,
"An infantile person isn't anyone's friend,"
That's because the friendliness of an infantile person,
Doesn't arise except through its serving his own self-aims.**

Why should we avoid spending time with self-centred people? Such individuals are only happy when things go their way. They are not willing to share even basic things like food and drink unless it benefits them.

Shantideva advises us to steer clear of people who are only looking out for themselves. This aligns with the teachings of the Buddha, as mentioned in the text "*Engaging in the Objects of All the Sugatas*," which states that being around such people will not bring happiness.

Similarly, the Samadhi raja-sutra suggests that no matter how much you try to please self-centred individuals, they will not reciprocate your friendship and may even resent you. Understanding the nature of such people, the wise choose to keep their distance.

Stanza 25:

**In forests, however, wild creatures, birds, and trees
Never say bad things about you
And are happy when befriended.
When shall I come to live with them?**

As seekers on the path, our goal should be to reside in secluded spaces far removed from the clamour of human interaction, whether it be in mountainous retreats or in tranquil forests (the sanctuaries of many wise and realized beings). In these shelters, our sole neighbours would be the fauna and birds of the wild.

The aspiration is to make our home among the trees, in an environment devoid of discord, empty praise, criticism, or derision. In such peaceful settings, the duration of our stay is inconsequential, as we share the space with harmonious and untroublesome fellow beings.

As Shantideva so beautifully expresses his aspiration:

"When will the day come for me to reside in such delightful company?"

Stanza 26:

**No joy will come to you
From company with savage beasts.
Likewise, in the company of childish beings,
No happiness will come to you.**

When will the time come for us to find solace in uninhabited regions, secluded caves, or vacant temples owned by none, or beneath the welcoming shade of trees—locales that truly resonate with our hearts? When will we reach a state where we are unburdened by regrets of the past and concerns for the future?

When will we attain the freedom to live without constantly looking ahead, crafting plans that span no longer than a single day, a month, or at most, a year, while remaining unattached to our places of residence, our physical forms, and our worldly belongings?

Stanza 27:

**Oh, when shall I become detached,
Living in caves, an empty shrine,
Or at the foot of a tree,
And never look back?**

When can we find ourselves dwelling in secluded landscapes, untouched and unclaimed by anyone, amidst the expansive and joyful embrace of nature?

In such places, we could roam and reside freely, liberated from all dependencies and attachments that come with ownership.

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

