

Shantideva's Bodhicaryâvatâra

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Group Study with Venerable Lama Sangyay Tendzin

Session 75 - Saturday October 21, 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. After presenting a lengthy exposé by Shantideva on “Abandoning craving for a lover”, Shantideva now investigates the many injuries that result from attachment.

Stanza 71:

Further, that bag full of excrement like that

Isn't obtained without a price:

There's exhaustion in earning money for its sake

And torment later in joyless realms and the like.

Securing a life partner often comes with its own set of costs, whether material or emotional. High financial investments may be required in the form of precious metals, livestock, or other assets.

The effort extended to acquire these resources, along with the additional responsibilities such as organizing feasts and acquiring personal items, tends to yield an increase in challenges and stress. Such pursuits not only affect one's well-being in this lifetime but may also have repercussions in the form of future suffering."

Stanza 72:

It's not possible to build up wealth as a child,

So as a teenager, what is there to get pleasure with?

Spending adulthood accumulating wealth,

What can an old person do with sexual desires?

Young children lack the means to amass wealth, thereby missing out on the joys stemming from possession. As they mature into young adults, the pursuit of a life partner becomes equally challenging.

Their days are predominantly spent earning, accumulating, and safeguarding their resources, whether through agriculture or trade. Upon reaching old age, the capacity to derive pleasure from their desires diminishes. In each phase, time, or ability acts as a constraint.

Stanza 73:

Some people, though having gross desires,

Exhaust themselves with work all day long

And, coming home at night, their bodies spent,

Drop down asleep like the dead.

Indeed, there are individuals burdened by relentless desires, who devote their days entirely to laborious pursuits. From dawn, they till the soil, harvest the crops, and tend to their livestock. By nightfall, they return home, physically and emotionally drained, succumbing to a sleep that resembles a state of lifelessness. Upon awakening, they resume their ceaseless toil. Their existence is characterized by perpetual struggle and hardship.

Stanza 74:

**Some must go abroad on army expeditions
And, with disturbing emotions, have the suffering of being far away.
Longing for their children and wives, they don't see
Their children and wives, though the years roll by.**

Many individuals venture overseas for extended periods for business or less virtuous pursuits, facing considerable challenges along their journey. These travellers are estranged from their homelands and find themselves physically and emotionally drained. Yearning for their families and companions, they are often unable to reunite with them for prolonged durations. It goes without saying that their desires remain unfulfilled.

The passage highlights the sacrifices and emotional toll that come with prolonged journeys for occupational or other reasons. The sense of isolation and emotional weariness serves as a poignant reminder that human connection is invaluable and often missed in the pursuit of material or extrinsic goals. This could serve as a cautionary tale advocating for a balanced approach to life's endeavours.

Stanza 75:

**Confused by desires for what would be of self-benefit,
They even sell themselves for the sake of that
Which they never obtain, and so toil pointlessly,
Driven by the winds of others' karmic whims.**

This verse offers a cautionary perspective that may serve as a prompt for self-examination and mindfulness, reminding us to carefully consider the consequences of our actions, both for ourselves and for others, in this life and in future lives. The implication is that for genuine well-being, one must cultivate not just external conditions but also internal virtues and wisdom.

Stanza 76:

**And the wives of some of those who have sold their own bodies
And must follow others' orders, powerlessly,
Have to give birth to their children, with them plopping out
At the feet of trees or in desolate places.**

Individuals, motivated by the desire to support their daughters, may unknowingly place them in unfortunate situations due to a lack of awareness regarding alternative means of support. Although well-intentioned, these parents inadvertently set their daughters on a path devoid of the happiness and contentment they initially sought for them.

In unfamiliar households, these young women are often burdened with unfulfilling tasks that offer neither daytime leisure nor nocturnal rest. Driven by the force of negative karma, like the push of the wind, they engage in detrimental behaviours and harmful discourse that leads to suffering, undermining their well-being in this life and beyond. Consequently, they find themselves pregnant and forced to give birth isolated from their families, relegated to solitude in hostile places.

Stanza 77:

**Some foolish people, deceived by desires,
Wishing to make a livelihood, thinking, "I'll earn a living,"
Enter war, thus risking their lives,
Or go into servitude for the sake of self-gain.**

Men, misguided by sensory allurements and driven by the desire for material affluence and comforts, engage in occupations such as robbery, theft, and soldiering. Despite apprehensions concerning their own safety, they opt to seek their fortunes through warfare.

To gain the upper hand over their adversaries, they align themselves with harsh and malevolent leaders, offering tribute for protection. Living in a state of perpetual apprehension, they ultimately become subservient to these figures.

Stanza 78:

**Some, having greed, are even bodily mutilated
And some get impaled on spikes.
Some are seen being stabbed with daggers
And some even burned alive.**

Due to their cravings for sensory pleasures, some individuals face dire consequences, ranging from bodily harm to death, in this life and the next.

For instance, a butterfly is consumed by fire due to its attraction to light, a deer falls prey to a fatal arrow captivated by sound, a bee is ensnared within a flower drawn by its fragrance, a fish is hooked because of its fondness for taste, and an elephant becomes mired in mud due to its affinity for certain tactile experiences.

Such examples serve as cautionary tales, urging us to contemplate the pitfalls associated with sensory desires and thereby liberate ourselves from such attachments. In the next 6 slokas, Shantideva advises “Giving up attachment to wealth and possessions”.

Stanza 79:

**With the torments involved in amassing, protecting, and losing it,
Know that material advantage is a disadvantage without an end:
For those distracted by obsession with wealth
Haven't the time to free themselves from the sufferings of compulsive existence.**

This sloka emphasizes the pitfalls of material possession. Acquiring, maintaining, and ultimately losing property entail considerable challenges and suffering. These activities demand constant vigilance, taking a toll on both physical well-being and mental peace. Importantly, the fixation on material wealth detracts from one's ability to engage in meaningful spiritual practices, such as the three trainings of the path.

The comment warns that preoccupation with possessions not only causes immediate hardship but can also obstruct spiritual growth, thus affecting both this life and future existences. It suggests that true freedom from suffering lies in detaching from material goods and focusing on spiritual practice.

In his commentary, Kunzang Palden quotes the following verse from the *Suhrillekha* (*)

*We suffer in proportion to the property we own: those with little wants have little pains.
The headaches that afflict the naga kings are equal to the heads possessed by them.*

(*) Letter to a Friend by Nagarjuna.

Stanza 80:

**Thus, for those with desire, drawbacks like these and more are abundant
And any tastes of pleasure are paltry,
Like the snatches of a few mouthfuls of grass
Won by an ox while pulling a cart.**

Individuals burdened by numerous desires endure substantial suffering for fleeting moments of happiness. The apex of their joy is limited to the brief instance when their awareness encounters the object of their craving.

These individuals can be likened to oxen hauling a cart full of hay: they savour a brief bite of grass only to find themselves jarred by the cart's sudden movements, leading to discomfort and hardship.

Stanza 81:

**For the sake of that paltry taste of pleasure,
Not hard to find for even an ox,
This hard-to-find splendour of respites and endowments
Is destroyed by those who waste their (good) karma.**

This sloka encapsulates the essence of the preciousness of human life. The cost of chasing material comforts at the expense of spiritual growth is indeed a profound concern, as it jeopardizes the rare opportunity for enlightenment that human birth affords us.

Kunzang Palden commentary quotes the Shishyalekha, a text where Chandragomin elaborates on the unique position that humans have for engaging with the Dharma, an opportunity not available even to celestial beings:

Engaging with the Tripitaka, embracing the three trainings (ethical conduct, mental discipline, and wisdom), practicing sadhana are all invaluable practices for making the most of our human existence. Ignoring these teachings and practices is like squandering a precious gift”.

Stanza 82:

**Whatever hardships there are in exhausting yourself
All the time for the sake of the puny desires of the body
That will definitely perish and consequently
Fall to joyless realms and worse,**

The joy derived from material or sensory pleasures is fleeting and unreliable. Everything that comes into being is impermanent: what is born will eventually die; relationships formed will eventually dissolve; resources acquired will be depleted; and even the most elevated status can be reduced.

Despite knowing this, we prioritize those we favor and act against those we dislike; we participate in various economic activities, and we rely on material offerings. These actions often result in accumulating negative karma, leading to unfortunate rebirths in lower realms.

Such endeavors offer little benefit either in this life or in future existences. The ceaseless efforts we invest in the cycle of samsara ultimately result in distress and hardship, rather than lasting contentment.

Stanza 83:

**With one millionth of the hardship, there would be Buddhahood;
Whereas those with desires have suffering
Greater than those engaged in bodhisattva behaviour,
And yet they have no enlightenment.**

Should we choose to follow the path of the Bodhisattvas, attaining enlightenment would require only a fraction of the pointless struggles and exertions we typically experience.

Indeed, the efforts expended by those chasing after worldly desires are often more intense and sustained than those required on the Bodhisattva journey, yet they do not bring one closer to true awakening.

Stanza 84:

**Neither weapons, poison, fire,
Precipices, nor foes
Compare with desires when I think
Of the tortures of joyless realms and the like.**

If we consider our well-being, it's worth contemplating the severe challenges found in states of suffering, such as hellish realms or the conditions faced by hungry ghosts and animals.

These states are the ultimate consequence of excessive attachment to worldly desires.

Whether physical harm or other challenges, the difficulties we may encounter today, , are minor in comparison. They may lead to the end of this life, but don't cause us to be reborn in these harsher realms.

We will stop here today. Next week, we will study the following topic, a reflection on the excellence of solitude.

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

