

Shantideva's
Bodhicaryâvatâra
བྱང་ཆུབ་སེམས་པའི་སྤྱོད་པ་ལ་འཇུག་པ།

Group Study with Venerable Lama Sangyay Tendzin
Session 21 – June 12, 2021

Chapter Four: Developing Carefulness

Good morning everyone,

Last week we ended the session with a brief introductory note on Chapter Four, which we will now study just after reciting the preliminary prayers:

REFUGE | MANDALA | REQUEST for TEACHINGS
Lama's Invocation | Mental Quiescence

Chapter Four: Sloka 1

As a Triumphant Ones' offspring,
Having firmly gained hold of Bodhicitta like this,
I'll strive never to transgress its training,
Without ever wavering.

It is therefore thanks to carefulness that virtues are acquired. And having clearly understood this, the Bodhisattvas, the children of the Conqueror, who through the threefold complement of preparation, the vow itself, and conclusion, as previously explained) have firmly taken Bodhicitta into their hearts -never to forsake it even at the cost of their lives-, must never at any time diverge from it through laziness and procrastination.

They should think that they will strive by every means not to transgress or weaken the precepts regarding what is to be undertaken and what is to be rejected, such as the twenty root downfalls of the Bodhisattvas.

The commentary here is very strict, stating that Regarding the expression "children of the Conqueror," or Bodhisattvas, it is the actual occurrence of the supreme attitude that is most important, not the mere cultivation of it.

Those who have no more than loving-kindness in their minds do not become Bodhisattvas merely by the fact of being called so by others. Only those who have the vast attitude (which focuses on perfect enlightenment and is endowed with the twofold aspect or aim), who take the Bodhisattva vow according to an authentic ritual and observe it are entitled to the name "Bodhisattva." No one else.

The expression "firmly gained hold of" in the root text means that the Children of the Conqueror have assimilated the attitude of Bodhicitta perfectly and irreversibly. Similarly, from the moment that we have generated the mind of enlightenment, we too must uphold it firmly, with the fervent wish that, come what may, we will never abandon it. If we have such a concentrated intention, telling ourselves that Bodhicitta must be omnipresent even in our dreams, this will come about.

The commentary of Khenchen Kunkel goes on with a brief description of the 'twenty' root vows. To the eighteen vows explained at the end of Chapter Three, two more vows are added:

1. To abandon beings in one's inner intentions by embracing the Hinayana attitude, is the root downfall associated with Bodhicitta in intention.

The *Mahaguhya-Upayakaushalya Sutra* (*) states:

*"O son of my lineage! If a Bodhisattva aspires to the attainment
of the Shravakas or the Pratyekabuddhas,
That is the gravest of all downfalls for a Bodhisattva!"*

(*) This sutra praises the practice of skilful means, specifically in regard to the dedication of merit of virtuous deeds and making offerings. It also explains how otherwise non-virtuous acts can be considered virtuous when performed by a bodhisattva with good intentions.

2. The second downfall is described further in the *Ratnakuta*(*) and is about allowing one's training in active Bodhicitta to diminish. If one lapses from one's pledge to practice the six paramitas of generosity and so on -deciding consciously not do even what one is able to"- this is to abandon Bodhicitta in action.

(*) The 'Heap of Jewels Sutra', is a complete collection of 49 sutras included in the Sutra section of the Kangyur.

On the other hand, the simple failure to apply oneself to virtue out of laziness and so on, does not imply a complete abandonment.

In the next slokas, Shantideva implements how to prevent Bodhicitta to weaken by means of attentiveness.

Chapter Four: Sloka 2

For something undertaken all of a sudden
Or something I didn't examine well,
Even if I've given a promise about it,
It's proper to examine, "Do it or give it up?"

In normal circumstances, in the case of any action committed by oneself, or that one has begun, recklessly and without due attention -as with everything that has only been considered without a careful evaluation of its worth- it is right, even though a pledge has been given, to reflect on what should and should not be done and to decide whether to proceed or to draw back.

Chapter Four: Sloka 3

But how can I ever withdraw
From what the Buddhas and their spiritual offspring
Have examined with great discriminating awareness
And I, myself, have repeatedly examined as well?

For the Buddhas and their offspring Bodhisattvas, like Manjushri and Maitreya, who remain untouched by the slightest delusion, have well pondered in their great wisdom and have taught the precious thought of enlightenment to be of great benefit.

In the chapter on the benefits of Bodhicitta, Shantideva too, has weighed and examined it repeatedly. He came to see that the excellent qualities of Bodhicitta are measureless.

So, having taken Bodhicitta into his mind stream, how could he now procrastinate, telling himself that such a thing is beyond him? To the contrary, he knows the absolute need to train diligently in its precepts and that this must be done without delay.

Chapter Four: Sloka 4

If, having promised like this,
I don't carry it through with my actions,
Then, by deceiving every limited being,
What will become of my rebirth states?

As shown earlier, Shantideva has committed himself to deliver all beings from the sufferings of cyclic existence and of the drawbacks of nirvana. He also committed to place them in the state of Buddhahood.

If he knows that if he is not diligent and honour his pledge, he will fail the entire multitude of beings because he will not succeed to bring them to Buddhahood as he pledged it.

What destiny must lie in store for him, their betrayer?
Nothing but hell and the other states of misery.

Chapter Four: Sloka 5

If (Buddha) has said that once someone's made up his mind
To give away even some small and trivial thing,
And then doesn't (actually) give it away,
He'll turn into a clutching ghost.

The *Dharmasangiti-Sutra* (*) states that those who in their thoughts intend to give something away, even something as little as a handful of food, but then draw back will be reborn among the pretas.

Moreover, the *Saddharmasmrity Upasthana Sutra* (**) states that those who fail to give the little that they intended will be born as pretas. But those who do not give what they have promised will go to hell.

(*) A sutra included in the *Sikshasamuccaya* large collection of sutras.

(**) The Sutra of Stability in Contemplation of the True Law

Chapter Four: Sloka 6

Then, if I should deceive all wandering beings,
After having sincerely invited them
To unsurpassable bliss,
Will I go to a better rebirth state?

This being so, Shantideva says, if he invites all beings, by whom the whole of space is filled, summoning them to the highest bliss of unsurpassed Buddhahood, sincerely from his heart and not just with words, but then fails in his deeds and practice to bring them to such a state, he will have deceived and failed them all: the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, the gods and asuras, and all other sentient beings. How then could he, their betrayer, expect to attain a happy destiny?

Only failure must lie in store for him.

When those who, on losing their Bodhicitta, do not fall into the lower realms, but on the contrary attain liberation and even lead others to deliverance, this is due to the karma they have previously accumulated.

Chapter Four: Sloka 7

And how the karma works for someone
Who gives up Bodhicitta, yet attains liberation,
Is beyond all thought:
Only the Omniscient can understand.

Only the Omniscient can know the causes and effects of actions in all their subtle details; they are beyond the grasp of anyone else.

Even the attempt to understand it is said to accomplish nothing but the mind's exhaustion. What therefore is the point in trying? We are ignorant with regard to these matters.

Let us stop here. I wish everyone a pleasant weekend.

I invite you abide in mental peace before dedicating the merit of this session for the benefit of all.

