

Shantideva's  
**Bodhicaryâvatâra**

བྱང་ཆུབ་སེམས་པའི་སྤྱོད་པ་ལ་འཇུག་པ།

Group Study with Venerable Lama Sangyay Tendzin  
Chapter Four: Developing Carefulness  
Session 24 – July 10, 2021

Good morning everyone, I wish that everyone attending this meeting be healthy and endowed with a positive mental setup oriented to the study of the sacred Dharma. To improve our motivation and mindset, let us start the session by reciting the preliminary prayers.

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

Last week we ended up on Stanza 22 in which Shantideva did remind us how phenomena may be assessed whether they are manifested, hidden and extremely hidden, such as the Law of Karma Cause and Effect.

It was stated that:

- Manifest phenomena may be assessed by means of valid perception.
- Hidden phenomena are known through valid inference.
- Extremely hidden phenomena, such as the karmic principle of cause and effect, are known on the authority of the Buddha's teaching.

It is nevertheless reminded that it is possible for the karmic principle to be logically (\*) established through the fourth of the principles of reasoning, that of logical coherence.

I brought up this subject as it is in the commentary as we need to realise that the karmic principle cannot be apprehended and understood through basic dualistic reasoning and even less by emotional interaction based on appearances. This would classify it in the manifest phenomena category, which it does not belong to.

Chapter Four: Sloka 23

So, if having found a respite such as this,  
I don't make being constructive a habit,  
There's nothing more self-deceptive than this.  
There's nothing more stupid than this.

About the practice of the sublime Dharma, it is difficult to find oneself in a situation in which one has an aptitude for its accomplishment. Having found such a thing—the freedoms of this precious human existence and the facts of discovering the Dharma and meeting a perfect teacher,

- In the best of cases, one will achieve its ultimate goal in this very lifetime.
- In the next best case, one will be able to secure the human condition in one's next life and to awaken therein to the lineage of the Bodhisattvas.
- In the least of cases, one will have no regrets at the moment of death.

Yet, Shantideva says, if one fails to school himself in virtue and accomplishes nothing good, and if, under the influence of the eight worldly concerns, consumes his entire life in distractions, one is deceiving himself. There is indeed no greater delusion than this.

It is also very stupid, and there is no greater clumsiness than the failure to distinguish between what is to be done and what is not to be done. One should not follow the objects of sense since they are so misleading.

Our awareness being so unstable, we should not let it be enslaved by confusion. Instead, we must cultivate carefulness and practice Dharma purely.

#### Chapter Four: Sloka 24

If, having understood this,  
I procrastinate stupidly still in the future,  
Then, when the hour for (my) dying will come,  
Enormous anguish will swell.

In this sloka, Shantideva remarks that if, having found the freedoms and advantages of a precious human body, he fails to accomplish virtue, he is being extremely foolish and is greatly deluding himself. While being fully aware of his situation, he is like an animal led astray by a mirage of water; he thirsts for the objects of the senses and tries to secure wealth, respect, and a good reputation.

Tricked and lured by being silly, he tells himself that the likes of him are unable to practice Dharma, whether now or in the future, and he allows himself to sink into depression and idleness. This is how people put an end to their fortunate opportunity in spiritual matters.

They put themselves down, thinking that they are stupid and unable to study, telling themselves that they have too much anger, that they are without compassion, that they are distracted and incapable of diligence, and so on. If this is the case, Shantideva tells himself, wasting his life away, he will bring ruin on himself, and at the time of death, will feel great regret.

#### Chapter Four: Sloka 25

Then, if my body will burn for so long  
In the unbearable fires of a joyless realm,  
There can be no doubt that my mind will be tortured  
By the searing flames of unendurable regret.

It is said that the fires of hell are seven times fiercer than the fires at the end of time, which are themselves seven times hotter than the ordinary fire of burning sandalwood. The experience of hellfire is therefore said to be unbearable and protracted.

And when, Shantideva says, his body, which will then be much more sensitive to pain than it is now, experiences the agony of being burned, there is no doubt that his mind too will also be tormented, scorched in the flames of unbearable regret.

Either the thought will come to him that it is because of his failure to practice the Dharma that he must now undergo such experiences, or else the guards of hell will tell him that his pains are the result of this or that deed.

#### Chapter Four: Sloka 26

Having found, somehow, a beneficial  
Rebirth, so hard to find,  
If (now), while able to discriminate,  
I drag myself down once more to a joyless realm,

Whether in terms of causes, examples, or numerical comparisons, a human life endowed with freedoms and advantages is extremely difficult to achieve. It is the foundation for all positive works, rendering the practice of Dharma possible; something, Shantideva reflects, that he has not attained in a very long time.

It is by some accidental merit that he has gained it now and it is vital that he should not again fall victim to the same senseless conduct. Instead, he should have a clear discernment of what is beneficial and what is harmful.

How do we know that we have come from the hells into this life? As he was about to enter his parinirvana, the Buddha, like a father who, before embarking on a sea voyage leaves his will and testament for his young son in the safe keeping of his relatives, said to the supremely noble Avalokita and Manjughosha and others, "When

beings now in hell who have some slight connection with me are freed from their sufferings and gain a human form, give them this treasury of knowledge that I have accumulated for three countless kalpas.”

#### Chapter Four: Sloka 27

It amounts to not having had a mind while here,  
Like having been stupefied by a mantra spell.  
If I don't know what's causing me to be so stupid,  
Well, what is it there inside my (head)?

Therefore, Shantideva reflects that if, in view of all this, he falls yet again into the situation of allowing himself to be destroyed, it is as though he has been bewildered by sorcery, he is like a mindless person unable to tell the difference between help and harm.

The omniscient Longchenpa said:

*“We do not grasp things when explained.  
We do not understand when things are shown to us.  
Great balls of iron are our hearts, great lumps of granite.  
We're mindless—there's honestly the truth!”*

Are we truly as mindless as the verse says? Obviously, our hearts are neither iron balls nor pieces of stone, yet how is it, Shantideva asks, that we do not recognize our stupidity and confusion?

Though we think that we will practice the Dharma, that we will keep the discipline, that we will study and reflect upon the teachings, the fact is that we don't. We are helplessly out of control.

What is it that is making us so stupid? For sure, there must be something that we have failed to recognize. We should ask ourselves again and again: What is it about? Really what is it?

In the next few stanzas, Shantideva engage in a reflection on the conflicting emotions to be discarded to instil carefulness in one's behaviour.

#### Chapter Four: Sloka 28

Although enemies, such as anger and craving,  
Have neither legs nor arms,  
Are neither brave nor wise,  
How is it that they've made me like their slave?

What is it, we may ask, that renders us so stupid? Aversion and craving are indeed the parents of samsaric existence. Together with ignorance and the other afflictions, they are our own inner enemies.

But these enemies are not like soldiers with physical bodies, heads, and limbs, armed with chain mail and every kind of weapon, and equipped with helmets decked with ensigns. They are not by any means courageous heroes.

On the contrary, they are lazy. Moreover, they are not clever or skilled in deceiving. In fact, they are quite stupid. How is it then, asks Shantideva, that these afflictions have reduced him and everyone else—teachers, lords, high or low, strong, or weak—to this abject condition of slavery and suffering, deprived of every freedom?

How is it that, in the pursuit of honour and fame, wealth and enjoyment, we neither rest by day nor sleep by night?

We are slaves to our desire; we are slaves to our aversion—to the point where we do not even shrink from actions that will cost us our lives. Powerless, we are the slaves of our emotions, which torment us endlessly.

#### Chapter Four: Sloka 29

For while squatting in my mind,  
At their pleasure, they gleefully cause me harm.  
To be patient and not become angry with them  
Is an inappropriate, pathetic place for patience.

All these emotions have no dwelling place other than the temple of our own minds. It is *here* that we entertain our emotions of attachment and hatred as though they were our guests. We are their slaves and lackeys.

Whatever they want, we enthusiastically accomplish, even though, by way of recompense, they harm us without restraint at their pleasure in this and future lives. Yet we bear it all.

Worst even, we accommodate with these afflictions, our enemies, without the slightest resentment.

This is the sort of patience we have, completely abject and idiotic. This inertia is an object of disrespect for all the Buddhas and their children.

#### Chapter Four: Sloka 30

Even if all the gods and anti-gods  
Were to rise up against me as enemies,  
They couldn't drag and feed me into the fires  
(Of a joyless realm) of unrelenting pain.

Shantideva reflects about the terrible damage that his enemies, the emotional afflictions, can wreak.

Even if the kings of the gods and lords of the asuras were to come against him with all their retinues, renowned as the most powerful forces in the world, they could certainly do no more than harm his body and belongings. They would be unable to throw him into the blazing fiery Hell of Unrelenting Pain.

#### Chapter Four: Sloka 31

But those strong mighty enemies, my disturbing emotions,  
Can, in a moment, hurl me into them, which,  
When met, will cause not even the ashes  
Of the King of Mountains to remain.

By contrast, the emotional afflictions, such as attachment and hatred, his most powerful enemies, are able in a single instant, -such as a moment of malice toward a Bodhisattva-, to cast him down into the fires of Unrelenting Pain.

In this hell, it is said that Mt Meru, the king of mountains, eighty thousand leagues (\*) in height, would be instantly reduced to ash—to say nothing of anything else. It is therefore essential to overcome such enemies.

(\*) A league is an ancient unit of length. It was common in Europe and Latin America, derived from an ancient Celtic unit, it was adopted by the Romans, becoming a common unit of measurement throughout western Europe. Representing roughly, the distance a person could walk in an hour. Although several values were attributed to it, the most common was of 5.5km. So, in this case, Mt Meru is roughly evaluated to be 440.000 km in height.

#### Chapter Four: Sloka 32

My disturbing emotions are long-standing enemies,  
With no beginning or end.  
No other enemy can be like that,  
For such a long time.

Turning now to the long duration of the damage inflicted, Shantideva reflects that these enemies of his, namely, his negative emotions, have long harmed him—indeed from beginningless samsara until the present.

And if he does not manage to vanquish them now, they will continue to harm him for a long time in this and future lives, indeed, for as long as samsara continues. No other enemies—such as the thieves of his possessions—can cause him injury over such an extended period. It is therefore essential for him to apply the necessary countermeasures.

We will stop here for today.

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

