

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

བྱང་ཆུབ་སེམས་པའི་སློབ་པ་ལ་འཇུག་པ།

Group Study with Venerable Lama Sangyay Tendzin

Session 62 - Saturday January 28, 2023

**Chapter SEVEN: Joyful Perseverance - The Support of the Practice**

**REFUGE | MANDALA | REQUEST for TEACHINGS**

**Lama's Invocation of the Buddhas and assembly of lineage holders.**

**Short practice of Mental Quiescence - Generation of Bodhicitta**

Tashi Deleg! Two weeks ago, we left our group study of the Chapter Seven of the Bodhicaryâvatâra at stanza 14, closing the analysis of the antidote to the first type of laziness, that of yearning for idleness. Over the next two stanzas, Shantideva examine the antidote to the kind of laziness, which consists in an inclination to commit unwholesome actions.

**Stanza 15:**

**Letting go of the joy of the hallowed Dharma**

**The best, an unending fount of joy**

**How can you find any joy in such causes for suffering**

**As shenanigans, joking, and the like?**

In this stanza, Shantideva praises the sacred Dharma as the cause of boundless joy:

- First, when the sacred Dharma is heard in the beginning, it is like a nectar for the ears, bringing inspiration and faith where there had been no faith before.
- Then one reflects on it later, it dispels all the wandering thoughts of the distracted mind.
- Finally, when one meditates upon it, it causes the primordial wisdom of liberation to be born in the mind.

Virtuous in the beginning, in the middle, and at the end, the Sacred Dharma is Supreme Joy.

Therefore, how is it possible for us to turn away from listening to the tripitakas (\*) and from practicing the three trainings? (\*\*) How is it possible that we take delight in what causes unbearable suffering in this and future lives?

(\*) The Vinaya, the Sutras, and the Abhidharma.

(\*\*) The trainings in discipline itself, the training in concentration and the training in higher knowledge.

How can we take pleasure in the reckless agitation of body in games and sports; in the excesses of unvirtuous speech motivated by desire and aversion; in pointless jokes, neither positive nor negative, in loud, wild hilarity; and, in all kinds of mental distraction with thoughts roaming pointlessly past, present, and future?

**Stanza 16:**

**So, don't get discouraged, amass the supporting forces,**

**Readily accept, and take control of yourself,**

**Then equalize self and others,**

**And exchange self for others, too.**

From misbehaviour comes lack of contentment and defeatism, leading to the need of looking for pleasure. As will be explained later, regarding virtuous conduct, do not allow yourself to fall into a defeatist attitude. Instead, put on the armour of diligence, and summon all your strength, namely, the four counteractive forces. (\*)

(\*) These are:

- Like a king, with mindfulness and vigilant introspection, adopt positive behaviour and reject negative one.
- Like a minister, implementing the antidotes: bring your body, speech, and mind under control.
- Meditate on the equality of self and other and then,
- Strive with joy and diligence in the trainings of Bodhichitta.

Next, Shantideva teaches how to “Cultivate an antidote to the type of laziness that consists of self-deprecation and defeatism”. His exposition extends over no less than the following fifteen stanzas (17 to 31).

He brings a lot of attention to this point because it is the way to prevent the abandonment of the Path.

The first two stanzas come as a whole:

**Stanza 17:**

**Never get discouraged by thinking,  
“How can there be enlightenment for me?”  
For the Speaker of Truth, the One Thus Gone,  
Has pronounced this truth, like this:**

**Stanza 18:**

**“Even those who’ve become gnats, mosquitoes,  
Hornets, and worms likewise too,  
Shall attain unsurpassable enlightenment, so hard to attain,  
By generating the force of enthusiastic vigour.”**

Do not put yourself down by telling yourselves downheartedly that you are such a great sinner and that you have so many emotions; wondering how you ever could attain the state of unsurpassable Buddhahood.

The One who speaks only the truth and never lies, the Buddha himself, stated very clearly that even weak and feeble beings, will succeed in manifesting supreme enlightenment if they can yield the strength of diligence.

As stated in the *Subahuparipriccha*-sutra:

*“This, moreover, is how Bodhisattvas should perfectly train themselves:*

*They should reflect that if even lions, tigers, dogs, jackals, vultures, cranes, crows, owls, worms, insects, flies, and stinging gnats will awaken into the state of unsurpassable Buddhahood, why should they, human beings, allow their diligence to weaken as they know it will lead to Buddhahood? They should never allow this to happen even at the cost of their lives.”*

The idea that triggers this argument is that all beings primordially possess the Buddha nature. And when they encounter the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, their Buddha-nature awakens, the seed of liberation is nurtured, and, gradually, as they progress from life to life, they manifest Buddhahood.”

**Stanza 19:**

**How much more so for someone like me, having Buddha nature and born as a human,  
Able to perceive what’s of benefit or harm!  
Why shouldn’t I reach enlightenment,  
So long as I don’t quit bodhisattva behaviour?**

For someone like me, ponders Shantideva, who gained a precious human rebirth endowed with the ability of speech and understanding and able to distinguish good from bad, if I cultivate Bodhichitta without discouragement, not abandoning the practice of Bodhisattvas, why ever should I not reach enlightenment?

I will doubtlessly achieve it since it is said that even those who have been inconstant in their practice of Bodhichitta, will attain enlightenment.

**Stanza 20:**

**Suppose I said, "But it frightens me  
That my arms, legs, and so on are to be given away."  
Well, I'm being reduced to fear by a state of bewilderment,  
From failing to discern what's heavy or light.**

We may accept that by striving in this way we will indeed attain great enlightenment and yet, we are still scared and afraid at the loss of our life and limbs. Speaking like this only shows that our fears are all inappropriate.

Failing to distinguish between the kind of intense suffering that we should dread and the trivial worries that it is unnecessary to fear. Confused about what to adopt and what to abandon, we are terrified by things of which there is no reason to be anxious.

**Stanza 21:**

**For countless millions of eons,  
I'll be gashed, stabbed, burned, and split open  
Innumerable times,  
And still won't attain enlightenment.**

What we must be afraid of, is the failure to generate Bodhichitta. We should worry about seeing it pointless for us to undergo the pain of losing our heads and limbs for the sake of others. But this does not scare us at all!

Although from beginningless time, for incalculable and numberless kalpas, our heads and members have been again and again cut by swords, impaled upon spikes, burned in hot hells, and torn apart by incandescent saws.

Yet again, enduring of all these torments has been utterly useless. No accumulation of merit has been gained from it; no enlightenment has been achieved!

**Stanza 22:**

**But this suffering I'll have  
In achieving enlightenment is something with a limit,  
Like the pain from an incision made on my body  
To remove the harm from a foreign object festering inside.**

Compared with all this, Shantideva notes, the hardships suffered for the sake of accomplishing unsurpassable Buddhahood are undeniably limited. Therefore, we should bear with them, knowing that the suffering endured is limited and kept to the span of three countless kalpas.

It is just as when the tip of an arrow pierces the body and causes great pain. To put an end to such harsh suffering, it is necessary to make an incision, cutting away some skin, flesh, and bone. No matter what, we must put up with the discomfort of the operation.

**Stanza 23:**

**All doctors, in fact, bring freedom from sickness  
Through the discomforts of medical treatments.  
So, a little discomfort must be endured  
To kill off a plague of sufferings.**

Furthermore, the doctors of this world and those who are skilled in the arts of healing use unpleasant methods to cure our ailments (painful treatments such as bleeding, cauterization, and amputation). And we must bear with the distress of being bled and burned.

Thus, to overcome and banish all dreadful sorrow, the multitude of long-lasting ailments of the three worlds, we should accept and put up with what are indeed but minor discomforts.

**Stanza 24:**

**Yet, the Foremost Physician hasn't offered  
The usual healing treatments like these.  
But rather, cures countless chronic afflictions  
With an extremely gentle procedure.**

By contrast, as a remedy for our mischiefs and injuries, the Buddha, the greatest of healers does not make use of the kind of harsh and drastic treatment just described. The healing he prescribes is of most excellent and mild.

It consists in sitting cross-legged on a comfortable seat and exercising strong and perfect mindfulness! In this way, we can relieve the intense and immeasurable ailments caused by the two kinds of defilement, such as the chronic diseases of the eighty-four thousand afflictions, suffered by all beings in the world.

**Stanza 25:**

**As a start, the Spiritual Guide prescribes  
Giving away a vegetable and the like.  
Once accustomed to that, one may eventually, through stages,  
Come to give away even one's own flesh.**

Of course, people will wonder how the giving away of one's flesh can be described as gentle treatment. The answer is that there is no need to do this in the beginning. When people are completely incapable of being generous, they must train themselves by passing something from their right hands to their left and back again, thus gradually getting used to the act of giving.

They should think to themselves that they are [truly] giving, accompanying their gesture with a verbal expression. Later, they should make little gifts of food to others: fragrant herbs and so on. For this is what the Buddha, who guides beings along a gradual path, instructs us to do at the beginning.

As the habit of giving develops, we will gradually acquire the capacity to give evermore until eventually the time comes when we are able to make the great gift of our flesh and blood without holding anything back.

This completes today's session.

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

