

The Urban Well

The Mercy Seminar 2026, Term 1

Reading I.5

Santideva, *Bodhicaryavatara*: Praise of the Awakening Mind

1 In adoration I make obeisance to the Sugatas and their sons, and to their bodies of Dharma, and to all those worthy of praise. In brief, and in accordance with scripture, I shall describe the undertaking of the observance of the sons of the Sugatas.

2 Nothing new will be said here, nor have I any skill in composition. Therefore I do not imagine that I can benefit others. I have done this to perfume my own mind.

3 While doing this, the surge of my inspiration to cultivate what is skilful increases. Moreover, should another, of the very same humours as me, also look at this, then he too may benefit from it.

4 This opportune moment is extremely hard to meet. Once met, it yields the welfare of mankind. If the advantage is neglected now, how will this meeting come again?

5 At night in darkness thick with clouds a lightning flash gives a moment's brightness. So, sometime, by the power of the Buddha, the mind of the world might for a moment turn to acts of merit.

6 This being so, the power of good is always weak, while the power of evil is vast and terrible. What other good could conquer that, were there not the perfect Awakening Mind?

7 This is the benefit, seen by the Lords of the Sages meditating for many aeons, whereby deep-welling happiness elates immeasurable masses of beings, through happiness alone.

8. Those who long to transcend the hundreds of miseries of existence, who long to relieve creatures of their sorrows, who long to enjoy many hundreds of joys, must never abandon the Awakening Mind.

9 When the Awakening Mind has arisen in him, a wretch, captive in the prison of existence, he is straightaway hailed son of the Sugatas, to be revered in the worlds of gods and men.

10 Taking this base image, it transmutes it into the priceless image of the Buddha-gem. Grasp tightly the quicksilver elixir, known as the Awakening Mind, which must be thoroughly worked.

11 You who are accustomed to travelling abroad among the trading towns of the realms of rebirth, grasp tightly this gem that is the Awakening Mind. It is precious, assayed by those of immeasurable expertise, the unique caravan-leaders of the world.

12 Like the plantain stem, all other good things assuredly shed their fruit and then wither, whereas the Awakening Mind is a tree that constantly fruits. It does not wither, but continues to produce.

13 In its protection, as in the protection of a hero, one immediately escapes great dangers, even after committing extremely cruel acts of evil. So why do ignorant beings not seek refuge in it?

14 Like the holocaust at the end of a world age, it completely consumes great evils in an instant. The wise Lord Maitreya related its unmeasured praises to Sudhana.

15 The Awakening Mind should be understood to be of two kinds; in brief: the Mind resolved on Awakening and the Mind proceeding towards Awakening.

16 The distinction between these two should be understood by the wise in the same way as the distinction is recognized between a person who desires to go and one who is going, in that order.

17 Even in cyclic existence great fruit comes from the Mind resolved on Awakening, but nothing like the uninterrupted merit that comes from that resolve when put into action.

18 From the moment that he takes on that Mind to release the limitless realm of beings, with a resolve that cannot be turned back, Praise of the Awakening Mind.

19 From that moment on, though he may close off or be distracted many times, uninterrupted streams of merit like the bursting sky continuously pour forth.

20 This is what the Tathāgata himself explained with proof in the Question of Subahu, for the benefit of beings who are disposed toward the inferior path.

21 Immeasurable merit took hold of the well-intentioned person who thought ‘Let me dispel the headaches of beings’.

22 What then of the person who longs to remove the unequalled agony of every single being and make their virtue infinite?

23 Whose mother or father ever has such a desire for their welfare as this, what deities or sages or Brahmas have it?

24 Those beings did not conceive this desire before, even for their own sake, even in a dream. How could they have it for the sake of others?

25 Such a being, unprecedented, an excellent jewel, in whom there is born a concern for the welfare of others such as others have not even for themselves, how is he born?

26 That jewel, the Mind, which is the seed of pure happiness in the world and the remedy for the suffering of the world, how at all can its merit be measured?

27 Worship of the Buddha is surpassed merely by the desire for the welfare of others; how much more so by the persistent effort for the complete happiness of every being?

28 Hoping to escape suffering, it is to suffering that they run. In the desire for happiness, out of delusion, they destroy their own happiness, like an enemy.

29 It satisfies with every happiness those starved of happiness, and cuts away oppressions from those oppressed in many ways.

30 It also drives off delusion. How could there be a holy man its equal, how such a friend, or how such merit?

31 Even if someone returns a favour, he is praised. What, then, can be said of the Bodhisattva, who does good without obligation?

32 People honour someone who gives alms to a few people, saying, 'He does good', because he contemptuously supports their life for half a day with a moment's gift of mere food.

33 What then of the one who offers to a limitless number of beings, throughout limitless time, the fulfilment of all desires, unending until the end of the sky and those beings?

34 The Protector has said that one who harbours in his heart a turbid thought against such a lord of gifts, a son of the Conqueror, dwells in hells for aeons as numerous as the moments of that turbid thought.

35 But fruit outweighing that flows forth for one whose mind becomes serenely confident. For evil action against the sons of the Conqueror requires great force, while pure action comes effortlessly.

36 I bow down to the bodies of those in whom that excellent jewel, the Mind, has arisen, and towards whom even harm will lead to happiness. To those mines of happiness, I go for refuge.

Confession of Faults

1 That I may fully grasp that jewel, the Mind, I worship here the Tathāgatas, and the flawless jewel, the true Dharma, and the sons of the Buddhas, who are oceans of virtue.

2 As many blossoms and fruits and medicinal herbs as there are, as many jewels as there are in the world, and clear refreshing waters;

3 Along with jewel-formed mountains and other places delightful in solitude, the forest groves, creepers brilliant with beautiful flowers their ornaments, and trees, boughs bowed low under the weight of full fruit;

4 And, from the worlds of gods and celestials, scent and incense, magical trees that fulfil every wish and trees laden with gems, lakes adorned with lotuses, where the calls of the geese steal the heart beyond bounds;

5 Plants which grow wild and those which are sown, and whatever else might adorn the honourable, and all those things unowned within the boundaries of the breadth of space;

6 See, in my mind I take hold of all these, and present them to the Bulls amongst Sages, and their sons. With great compassion, tender toward me, may those most worthy of gifts accept these from me.

7 I have no merit, I am completely destitute. I have nothing else to offer in worship. So, through their power, may the Lords resolved on the well-being of others accept this for my well-being.

8 I give my entire self wholly to the Conquerors and to their sons. Take possession of me, sublime beings; out of devotion, I am your slave.

9 You take possession of me. I become fearless. I act for the benefit of beings. I leave behind previous wrongdoing completely; never again shall I do another wrong.

10 In those sweet-smelling bath-houses, where canopies gleam with pearls, over delightful pillars, brilliant with gems, rising up from mosaic floors of clear, brilliant crystal,

11 From many pots, encrusted with enormous gems, filled with exquisitely fragrant water and flowers, see, I bathe the Tathāgatas and their sons, to the accompaniment of songs and music.

12 I wipe down their bodies with cloths beyond compare, scented, cleansed of impurities; then I present them with the finest robes, richly dyed and fragrant.

13 With each and every celestial garment, soft, smooth, of many-coloured splendour, and with choice ornaments, I adorn Samantabhadra, Ajita, Manjughosa, Lokeshvara, and other Bodhisattvas.

14 With the costliest perfumes, their fragrance pervading the entire universe of three thousand worlds, I anoint the bodies of all the Lords of Sages brilliant with the lustre of gold well-heated, polished, and cleansed.

15 I glorify the most glorious Lords of Sages with all sweetly scented blossoms, delightful to the mind: celestial flowers, jasmine, blue lotus, and others; and with garlands, alluringly arranged.

16 I envelop them in heady clouds of incense, rich, pervading, and aromatic. I make them an offering of foods, soft and hard, and many kinds of drink.

17 I offer bejewelled lamps, arrayed in rows on golden lotuses, and on the mosaic floors sprinkled with perfume, I strew lovely drifts of flowers.

18 To those formed of goodwill I also offer those shining clouds that are celestial palaces, ornamented at the entrances in the four directions, splendid with pendulous ropes of pearls and precious stones, entrancing with songs and poems of praise.

19 Now, for the Great Sages, I set up splendid, bejewelled umbrellas, encrusted with pearls, fully raised on beautifully formed shafts of gold.

20 Hereafter, may heady clouds of worship arise, and clouds of instrumental music, thrilling every being.

21 May flowers and jewels and other offerings rain down incessantly upon the caityasy images, and all the jewels which make up the true Dharma.

22 Just as Manjughosa and others following him have worshipped the Conquerors, so I, too, worship the Tathāgatas, who are Protectors, and their sons.

23 I praise the Oceans of Virtue with hymns that are a sea of notes and harmonies. Let clouds of chanted praise arise no differently among them.

24 With as many prostrations as there are atoms in all the Buddha-fields, I throw myself down before the Buddhas of all three times, before the Dharma, and before the highest assembly.

25 I worship all caityas and places associated with the Bodhisattva. I bow down to my teachers, and to spiritual aspirants who are worthy of praise.

26 As far as the seat of the Awakening, I go to the Buddha for refuge; I go for refuge to the Dharma, and to the assembly of Bodhisattvas.

27 To the perfect Buddhas arrayed in all directions, and also to the Bodhisattvas of great compassion, holding my hands together in reverence, I declare:

28 Throughout the beginningless cycle of existence, and again in this very birth, the evil I, a brute, have done or caused,

29 Or anything I, deluded, have rejoiced in to my own detriment, I confess that transgression, tormented by remorse.

30 The harm I have done, in arrogance, to the Three Jewels, or to my mothers or fathers, or to others worthy of respect, with body, speech, and mind;

31 The cruel evil I have wickedly done, corrupted by many faults; O Leaders, I confess it all.

32 How can I escape it? I am continually in a state of alarm, O Leaders. Let death not come too soon to me, before my mass of evil is destroyed!

33 How can I escape it? Rescue me quickly, lest death come swiftly, before my evil is destroyed!

34 This death pays no heed to what is done or undone; a killer of security; not to be trusted by those sick or well; a shattering thunderbolt from nowhere.

35 I did evil in many ways on account of friends and enemies. This I did not understand: I must abandon all and go.

36 Those I loathe will die; those I love will die; I too will die; and all will die.

37 Everything experienced fades to memory. Everything is like an image in a dream. It is gone and is not seen again.

38 Even in this life, as I have stood by, many loved and loathed have gone. But the evil occasioned by them remains, ghastly, before me.

39 Just like them I am a fleeting wraith. This I failed to recognize. In delusion, yearning, and aversion, I did evil many times.

40 Night and day, without respite, more of life is lost. It never gets longer. Surely, will I not die?

41 Though here laid on my bed, though in the midst of family, it is alone that I must endure the agony of the throes of death.

42 For one seized by the messengers of Death, what good is a relative, what good a friend? At that time, merit alone is a defense and I have not acquired it.

43 By clinging to this transient life, not recognizing this danger, heedless, O Lords, I have acquired great evil.

44 Even someone, taken away today to have a limb cut off withers, throat parched, gaze wretched. He sees the world in a completely different way.

45 But that is nothing to the feverish horror which grips me, covered in my own uncontrolled excrement, as Death's terrifying messengers stand over me.

46 With cowering glances I search the four directions for deliverance. What saint will deliver me from this great fear?

47 Seeing the directions devoid of deliverance, I fall into total confusion once again. What will I do then in that state of great fear?

48 Right now I go for refuge to the mighty Protectors of the world, who have undertaken the care of the world, the Conquerors who remove all fear.

49 I also go whole-heartedly for refuge to the Dharma they have realized, which destroys the danger of cyclic existence, and to the assembly of Bodhisattvas.

50 Trembling with fear I give myself to Samantabhadra, and again freely I give myself to Manjughosa.

51 Terrified I cry out in anguish to the Protector Avalokita whose conduct overflows with compassion. I have done evil. May he protect me.

52 Seeking deliverance with all my heart I cry out to noble Ākāsagarbha, too, and Ksitigarbha, and all those of great compassion.

53 I bow down to the Holder of the Vajra. As soon as they see him the ministers of Death and all malign creatures flee, quaking, in the four directions.

54 I have transgressed your command. Now, at seeing the danger, terrified, I go to you for refuge. Destroy the danger, quickly!

55 Even one afraid of passing illness would not ignore the doctor's advice; how much more so one in the grip of the four hundred and four diseases,

56 Of which just one can wipe out all the people in Jambudvīpa; for which no remedy is found in any region.

57 Yet on this I ignore the advice of the omniscient doctor who removes all barbs. Oh, there is no end to my stupidity!

58 I stand with exceeding care even on an ordinary cliff. How much more so above a precipice of a thousand leagues through great expanses of time?

59 Death may not come this very day, but my complacency is ill-founded. Inevitably the time approaches when I shall die.

60 Who has granted me impunity? How shall I escape? It is certain I shall die. How can my mind be at ease?

61 What essence has remained mine from things I once enjoyed, now perished, for which my infatuation led me to ignore the advice of my teachers?

62 Leaving behind this world of the living, along with relatives and intimates, wherever I go I shall go alone. What to me are all those I love or loathe?

63 Rather, at all times night and day, my sole concern should be this: suffering is the inevitable result of wrong. How can I escape it?

64 Whatever evil I, a deluded fool, have amassed, what is wrong by nature and what is wrong by convention,

65 See, I confess all that as I stand before the Protectors, my palms together in reverence, terrified of suffering, prostrating myself again and again.

66 Let the Leaders accept my transgression for what it is. It is not good, O Protectors. I must not do it again.