

Epitome of Shantideva's "Entering the Path to Enlightenment" (Bodhicaryâvatâra-Samgraha)

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Preface

Shântideva was one of the great adepts of Buddhism, who lived in the early eighth century A.D. Very little is known about him. Tradition remembers him as the son of a minor ruler of what is now Gujarat. He was initiated by a yogin at the tender age of six, and as a result of the higher meditation practices he was given, he had a vision of Manjushrî early in life.

He renounced the world the night before his coronation and after a period of wandering became a Buddhist monk and joined the famous university of Nâlandâ.

He authored two major works, the Shiksha-Samuccaya ("Compendium of Teachings") and the Bodhicaryâvatâra ("Entering the Path to Enlightenment"). The former, as the title suggests, is a compilation of valuable instructions by various masters for those desiring to tread the spiritual path. The latter celebrates the ideal of the bodhisattva, the person who is dedicated to rigorous spiritual discipline in order to attain enlightenment as quickly as possible for the benefit of all beings.

The Bodhicaryâvatâra, a beautiful poetic Sanskrit composition, comprises 913 verses distributed over ten chapters. I have selected 122 verses that I believe represent the essence of Shântideva's work. Thus the Bodhicaryâvatâra-Samgraha can serve as a convenient introduction to the complete text, but is certainly not intended to be a substitute for it. For those wishing to study the unabridged original version of this extraordinary work, I can recommend the translation by Marion L. Matics, as well as the rendering by Parmananda Sharma. The numbers in parentheses refer to the complete text.*

*See M. L. Matics, *Entering the Path of Enlightenment* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1971);

P. Sharma, *Sântideva's Bodhicharyâvatâra* (New Delhi: Aditya Prakashan, 1990), 2 vols.

1: Bowing to the Dharma-embodiment Sugatas together with their Sons and all praiseworthy ones, I shall speak briefly and in accord with scripture about entering the vow springing from the essence of the Sugatas. (I.1)

2: The fortunate moment that is difficult to attain has arrived, leading to the highest human goal. If not deemed beneficial now, will this opportunity ever come again? (I.4)

3: Just as lightning brightens momentarily a dark overcast night, so by the power of the Buddhas the world's thinking may possibly, at least for an instant, be turned toward meritorious things. (I.5)

4: The good is always weak, whereas the power of evil is great and most terrifying. By what other good can evil be conquered if not by the Mind of Enlightenment? (I.6)

5: Reflecting for many eons, the foremost sages realized this Mind of Enlightenment to be good. In this way, joy growing from joy spills over into the immeasurable mass of people. (I.7)

6: Those who wish to escape the hundreds of sorrows of existence, who wish to remove the suffering of others, and who wish to enjoy the many hundreds of joys must never abandon the Mind of Enlightenment. (I.8)

7: By seizing this impure form, one can transform it into the priceless form of a Conqueror's jewel. Very firmly seize the effective elixir known as the Mind of Enlightenment. (I.10)

8: By relying on this Mind of Enlightenment, one is at once released even when one has committed grievous sins, just as a hero's protection releases one from great fear. Why, then, do ignorant beings not resort to it? (I.13)

9: In short, the Mind of Enlightenment is to be understood as being twofold: the Mind intent on Enlightenment and the Mind proceeding toward Enlightenment. (I.15)

10: The fruit of the Mind intent on Enlightenment is great, even in the midst of the world, but it is not like the continuous merit of the Mind proceeding toward Enlightenment. (I.17)

11: Over and over again the Bodhisattva brings about the fulfillment of all happiness for those who are afflicted and hankering for happiness, and cuts off all their afflictions. (I.29)

12: He also destroys their delusion. Where else is there goodness equal to his? Where else is there such friendship? Where else is there such virtue? (I.30)

13: In order to fully grasp this jewel of the mind, I offer worship to the Tathâgatas, to the spotless jewel of the true Dharma, and to the Sons of the Buddha, who are oceans of virtue. (II.1)

14: And I give myself to the Victors and their Sons wholly and completely. Take hold of me, O foremost beings! With devotion I enter Your service. (II.8)

15: By Your taking hold of me, I become fearless and able to work for the good of beings, to transcend former sins, and also to commit no further sins. (II.9)

16: I go for refuge to the Buddha until adorned by enlightenment. I go for refuge to the Dharma and also to the hosts of Bodhisattvas. (II.26)

17: Whatever wrong I have done to the Three Jewels, to my mother and father, to my teachers, or to others through the misuse of body, speech, and thought . . . (II.30)

- 18:** . . . and, O Lords, whatever grievous sin I who am sinful and afflicted with many faults have committed—all that I confess. (II.31)
- 19:** May the Lords pardon my sins and transgressions. O Lords, I will not do again that which is inauspicious. (II.66)
- 20:** I rejoice with delight at the good done by all beings, ending suffering and harm. May all who suffer be joyous! (III.1)
- 21:** I rejoice at migrators' release from suffering in the world, and I rejoice at their Bodhisattvahood and Buddhahood. (III.2)
- 22:** I am medicine for the sick. May I be their physician and their nurse until their sickness is gone. (III.7)
- 23:** Having dedicated myself to the happiness of all embodied beings, may they strike me! May they revile me! May they constantly cover me with dirt! (III.12)
- 24:** May they play with my body and laugh at or toy with me! Having given my body to them, why should I be concerned? (III.13)
- 25:** May those who denounce, injure, and mock me, as well as all others, share in enlightenment! (III.16)
- 26:** May I be a protector for those without protection, a guide for travelers, a boat, a bridge, a passage for those desiring the farther shore. (III.17)
- 27:** For all embodied beings, may I be a lamp for those in need of a lamp; may I be a bed for those in need of a bed; may I be a servant for those in need of a servant. (III.18)
- 28:** For all embodied beings, may I be a wish-granting gem, a miraculous urn, a magical science, a panacea, a wish-fulfilling tree, a cow of plenty. (III.19)
- 29:** This Mind of Enlightenment has arisen in me somehow, just as a blind man might chance upon a jewel in a pile of dirt. (III.27)
- 30:** This elixir has arisen to eliminate death in the world. It is the imperishable treasure removing poverty in the world. (III.28)
- 31:** A son of the Victor, holding very firmly on to the Mind of Enlightenment, should always make an effort, without laziness, not to transgress the teachings. (IV.1)
- 32:** For a Bodhisattva, every transgression is momentous because in transgressing he reduces the welfare of all beings. (IV.8)
- 33:** Innumerable Buddhas have passed who favored all beings. Because of my own fault I have been beyond the reach of their medical science. (IV.13)

34: When will I again obtain a human birth, faith, the capacity for skillful practice, and the presence of the Tathâgatas, all of which are difficult to obtain? (IV.15)

35: If I do not do good now, even though I am capable of goodness, what will I do when I am stupefied by pain and suffering? (IV.18)

36: The passions are not in the sense objects and they are not in the sense organs, nor in between them. They are not anywhere else either. Yet they stir up the entire world. (IV.47)

37: They are an illusion! O heart, abandon fear! Exert yourself for the sake of wisdom! Why torment yourself in the hells? (IV.48)

38: Considering thus, I will make every effort to realize the procedures and teachings as explained. How can there be health for one who, in need of medicine, departs from the physician's prescription? (IV.49)

39: He who desires to protect the teachings should diligently protect the mind. It is not possible to protect the teachings without protecting the fickle mind. (V.1)

40: If one binds the elephant of the mind on all sides with the rope of mindfulness, all fear disappears and complete goodness emerges. (V.3)

41: Just as one standing in the midst of a mob carefully protects his wound, similarly one abiding in the midst of evil folk should always protect his mind as an open wound. (V.19)

42: What one has heard or pondered with an inattentive mind does not stay in one's memory, like water in a broken vessel. (V.25)

43: Many who have been instructed and are full of faith and intent on effort become defiled with guilt because of the fault of inattention. (V.26)

44: Because of inattention—the thief responsible for the theft of mindfulness—those who are deprived of merit approach an unfavorable state. (V.27)

45: The passions, which are a community of thieves, desire incarnation. Having obtained incarnation, they rob and destroy any favorable course of life. (V.28)

46: Therefore one must never withdraw mindfulness from the gates of the mind. But if it is lost, one should restore it by fully remembering the pain of hell. (V.29)

47: One should never cast one's eyes about aimlessly. One's gaze should constantly be fixed downward as if one were meditating. (V.35)

48: But in order to rest one's vision, one may sometimes look into the distance and when seeing someone approach may look up for the sake of welcoming them. (V.36)

49: O mind, why protect the body as if it were your own? If it is separate from you, then what is its death to you? (V.60)

50: Take apart this leather bag by means of understanding, and with the weapon of wisdom sever the flesh from this cage of bones. (V.62)

51: Pick up the bones and look at the marrow within. Then ask yourself, "What essence is there?" (V.63)

52: Because the body comes and goes without rest, regard it as a boat. Then oblige your body to move as you desire for the benefit of all beings. (V.70)

53: Thus one who has brought his own self under control should always cultivate a smiling countenance and stop frowning. Also, one should speak first and be a friend to the world. (V.71)

54: One should always be a pupil of all and with bowed head receive the words of those who are skilled in guiding others and who volunteer their help. (V.74)

55: One should speak confidently and modestly such words as are intended to clarify, are pleasing to the mind, delightful to hear, rooted in compassion, and soft and gentle in tone. (V.79)

56: One should always look with the eyes straight at others, as if drinking them in, thinking that one will achieve Buddhahood through them. (V.80)

57: One should always be skillful, self-reliant, and full of enthusiasm, and never make space for anything else in all one's activities. (V.82)

58: Thinking thus, one should always be active for the sake of others. Even that which is ordinarily forbidden is allowed to one who sees the purpose of compassion. (V.84)

59: Sharing with those who are downtrodden, unprotected, or observing vows, one should eat only a moderate amount and apart from the three robes should give up all else. (V.85)

60: One should not torture one's body, which serves the true Dharma, for the sake of someone else. For only thus can one swiftly fulfill the hopes of all beings. (V.86)

61: Hence one should also not give up one's life for someone whose request for compassion is impure, but only for one whose request is appropriate. In this way, one does not lose out when one gives up one's life. (V.87)

62: One should overtly or covertly act for the sake of others and for nothing else. One should bend everything to the enlightenment and the welfare of all beings. (V.101)

63: Hostility destroys all one's wholesome conduct, such as charity and worship of the Buddhas, which has been accumulated over thousands of eons. (VI.1)

64: There is no sin equal to hatred and no austerity equal to patience. Therefore one should diligently cultivate patience by various means. (VI.2)

65: So long as the arrow of hatred is buried in one's chest, one does not achieve mental stability nor attain the joy of delight nor find sleep or constancy. (VI.3)

66: Suffering, humiliation, rudeness, or disgrace are undesirable both for ourselves and for those who are dear to us, as well as for our enemy. (VI.11)

67: Happiness is rarely attained, but suffering exists effortlessly. And yet, escape is only from suffering. Therefore, make the mind firm! (VI.12)

68: Even in suffering a wise person should not disturb the tranquillity of his mind. For he is at war with the passions, and in war suffering is easy to come by but is quite unimportant. (VI.19)

69: The mind, because it is formless, cannot be destroyed by anyone anywhere. The mind is oppressed by suffering only because of its attachment to the body. (VI.52)

70: Humiliation, rudeness, disgrace—this multitude does not oppress the body. Then why, O mind, are you angered by them? (VI.53)

71: It would be better for me to die today than to live a long life in falsehood. Because even after enjoying a long life, the sorrow of death awaits me. (VI.56)

72: As a child cries in distress when its sand castle is destroyed, so does my own mind appear to me at the loss of praise and fame. (VI.93)

73: Accepting praise destroys my equanimity and my spiritual fervor, and it creates jealousy toward the virtuous and agitation about their attainments. (VI.98)

74: Accepting praise is a bond unsuited for my goal of attaining release. How can I hate those who free me from that bond? (VI.100)

75: Aggression is not justified by thinking that another person has created an obstacle to one's merit. There is no austerity equal to patience. Surely, now is the occasion for it. (VI.102)

76: Hence, like a treasure easily discovered in my own house, I must appreciate my enemy as a helper on the path to enlightenment. (VI.107)

77: To honor the Tathagatas, to realize my goal, and to remove the suffering of the world—let this indeed be my vow. (VI.127)

78: While in the world, the patient person attains tranquillity, health, prosperity, delight, long life, and the joy of a world ruler. (VI.134)

79: One who has thus become patient should acquire vigor, for enlightenment is based on vigor. Without vigor there can be no merit, just as there is no movement without the wind. (VII.1)

- 80:** What is vigor? Wholesome effort. What is said to be adversity? Laziness, a weakness for that which is reprehensible, despondency, and self-contempt. (VII.2)
- 81:** Having acquired a human “boat,” cross the great river of suffering! O fool, this is not the time for sleep! Such a boat is not easily acquired again. (VII.14)
- 82:** The body is happy because of merit. The mind is happy because of learning. Remaining in the world for the sake of others, what could possibly make the compassionate person despondent? (VII.28)
- 83:** To achieve the welfare of all beings, one must resort to the power of zeal, constancy, joy, and release. Zeal should be cultivated out of apprehension for suffering and translated into action. (VII.31)
- 84:** The Sage has said that zeal is the root of all wholesome things and that its root is constant meditation upon the ripening of the fruit of one’s actions. (VII.40)
- 85:** One should guard against the blows of the passions and firmly strike at the passions like someone engaging a sword fight with a skillful opponent. (VII.67)
- 86:** In such a fight, just as one would out of fear pick up one’s sword after dropping it, so also, remembering the hells, one should pick up the sword of mindfulness after dropping it. (VII.68)
- 87:** Just as poison, upon entering the bloodstream, spreads throughout the body, so also a fault, when it can find an opening, spreads throughout the mind. (VII.69)
- 88:** Just as one instantly leaps up when a snake is put in one’s lap, so one should immediately take counteraction at the approach of sleep and laziness. (VII.71)
- 89:** Having thus developed zeal, one should fix the mind in concentration, because the man whose mind is fickle is caught in the fangs of the passions. (VIII.1)
- 90:** By detaching oneself from the body and the mind, no distraction can arise. Therefore, renouncing the world one should shun distracted thinking. (VIII.2)
- 91:** Well-disciplined in insight by means of tranquillity, one should remove the passions. One should first desire tranquillity, and this comes from delighting in indifference toward the world. (VIII.4)
- 92:** One should flee far from the fool. On meeting with one, however, one should conciliate him with kindnesses, yet not out of attachment to praise but with the indifference of an ascetic. (VIII.15)
- 93:** Trees do not think nor are they particularly honored. When shall I live with such pleasant fellow beings? (VIII.26)
- 94:** Primarily, one should carefully cultivate the equality of others and oneself. I must heed all their same joys and sorrows as if they were my own. (VIII.90)

- 95:** Recognizing that one is full of faults but others are oceans of virtue, one should aspire to abandon the self-sense and give oneself to others. (VIII.113)
- 96:** He who wishes to quickly rescue himself and others should practice the supreme secret: the exchanging of oneself with others. (VIII.120)
- 97:** Whatever adversities there may be, and whatever sorrows and fears come into the world, they are all from embracing the self. What about this embrace of myself? (VIII.134)
- 98:** Without renouncing the self one is not able to abandon suffering, just as one cannot avoid being burned without avoiding fire. (VIII.135)
- 99:** Countless eons have passed with you pursuing your own goals. By this enormous effort you have gained only suffering. (VIII.155)
- 100:** Therefore, at my request, unhesitatingly act on this. You will see the benefits of your actions later because of the Sage's word. (VIII.156)
- 101:** The passions and shattered hopes spring from desiring the impossible. He who is free from hope has everywhere never-ending good fortune. (VIII.176)
- 102:** Therefore the body's desires should not be given any opportunity to grow. Only a thing that is not grasped out of desire is auspicious. (VIII.177)
- 103:** Hence, in order to destroy the hindrances, I practice collectedness by withdrawing the mind from wrong pathways, constantly relying on myself. (VIII.186)
- 104:** The Sage spoke of this practice as being entirely for the sake of wisdom. Therefore, one should generate wisdom with a desire to remove suffering. (IX.1)
- 105:** It is thought that truth is twofold: veiled and transcendental. Reality is beyond the range of the mind. The mind is what is called "veiled." (IX.2)
- 106:** The world is experienced as twofold: that of the yogi and that of the ordinary person. The world of the ordinary person is contradicted by the world of the yogi. (IX.3)
- 107:** By holding to the idea of emptiness, one recognizes that the idea of existence is nothing at all. Later, with practice, even that notion is abandoned. (IX.33)
- 108:** When neither existence nor nonexistence is present in the mind, then, because there is no other possibility, the mind without support becomes tranquil. (IX.35)
- 109:** Without emptiness, the fettered mind arises again, as in the case of unconsciousness. Hence one should cultivate emptiness. (IX.49)
- 110:** Emptiness is the antidote to the dark veil of the passions and their objects. Why, then, does one who desires omniscience not cultivate it quickly? (IX.55)

111: If existence is not possible at the same time as nonexistence, when will existence ever come to be? Indeed, nonexistence will not disappear so long as existence is not created. (IX.148)

112: Thus there is no cessation, nor is there ever existence. Hence this entire world is not created and not destroyed. (IX.150)

113: Life passes quickly and in vain, and discernment is very difficult to obtain. Whence comes the disposition to ward off its repeated distractions? (IX.161)

114: Moreover, the present moment is difficult to come by, and exceedingly difficult is an encounter with a Buddha. Ah, but the flood of passions is hard to overcome. It is a succession of sorrows. (IX.163)

115: May all those everywhere who are suffering bodily or mental pain obtain oceans of happiness and delight through my merits. (X.2)

116: May the blind see forms. May the deaf always hear. May pregnant women give birth without pain, like Mayadevi . (X.19)

117: May all have clothes, food, drink, ornaments of garlands and sandal-wood—whatever the mind desires that is good. (X.20)

118: And may the fearful be without fear, and those afflicted with grief attain joy. And may those who are distressed be without distress and filled with fortitude. (X.21)

119: May the sick be well. May the weak be strong. May all be released from bondage. May all have affectionate thoughts for each other. (X.22)

120: May all beings have unlimited life spans. May they always live happily. May even the word “death” vanish! (X.33)

121: For as long as space endures and the world exists, may my own existence bring about the removal of the world’s suffering. (X.55)

122: May the Teaching, which is the only remedy for the world’s suffering, and which is the cause of all happiness and prosperity, endure with honor and advantage for a long time. (X.57)

Here ends the *Bodhicaryâvatâra-Samgraha*.

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