

Shantideva's Bodhicaryâvatâra

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Group Study with Venerable Lama Sangyay Tendzin

Chapter Five: Safeguarding Alertness

Session 37 - Saturday November 13, 2021

Good morning, everyone.

Let us start with the traditional prayers.

REFUGE | MANDALA | REQUEST for TEACHINGS

Lama's Invocation | Mental Quiescence

We ended last session at stanza 80 of the fifth chapter on Vigilance. Shantideva was inviting us as we catch sight of other people, regardless of their status, to recognize that it is through them that we are, in the first place, able to engender Bodhichitta.

It is through them that we are then able to practice the Bodhisattva activities related to the two accumulations as expressed in the six paramitas; and it is through them too that we will ultimately attain Buddhahood.

We should therefore acknowledge them as friends and helpers on the way of the Bodhisattva, and we should never look at them with angry eyes. We should gaze on them as a mother might look at her baby, with open, honest, and loving heart.

Chapter Five - Stanza 81:

Being continuous, driven by a strong intention,
Or driven by an opponent force,
And directed toward those with good qualities, the helpful, or the suffering,
My constructive actions will become mighty.

From the teachings on the *Dhasabhadra Karma Marga Sutra*, we learn that the practice of virtuous deeds leads towards the accumulation of great merit in as much as the action possesses four specific features:

1. From the point of view of time, the action must be steady and uninterrupted.
2. From the point of view of motivation, the action must be informed by a steadfast attitude of faith, compassion, and so on.
3. From the point of view of antidotes, it should act as a remedy to its contrary, the related negative action. As an example,
 - In the practice of generosity, giving away the thing that is most precious and dear to us, will certainly counteract our avarice.
 - In the case of discipline, the abandoning whatever we are most attached such as habitual patterns, will counteract our weaknesses and addictions be they physical, verbal, or mental.
 - The same applies for the other aspects of Paramita.
4. From the point of view of the field of the action, if the action—giving, for instance—is performed in relation to the “field of excellence” (the Three Jewels), the “field of benefit” (our parents), or the “field of suffering” (travellers from afar, the sick, and so forth), it will be far more meritorious than if it were done in relation to other beings.

Whatever positive deeds are performed; it is not sufficient to mimic the conduct of others. Especially in the case of the Bodhisattva practices of generosity and the other paramitas:

- If we are unaware that there are different kinds of generosity (both pure and impure).
- If we do not know the proper motivation, the way in which generosity is to be practiced,
- If we ignore the need to dedicate the merit, our practice of giving remains quite ordinary, no different, for instance, from the way that animals give things.

Therefore, we must know how to practice generosity; our actions must go to the vital point. The teachings to rely on are found in the "*LamRim*" compositions of the great Kadampa teachers. For a brief yet complete approach on this, consult the Jewel Ornament of Liberation by Chöje Gampopa Sonam Rinchen. The Chapter 12 teaches pure and impure giving and the three kinds of generosity practice.

Chapter Five - Stanza 82:

Skilful and filled with exuberance,
I shall always do my deeds myself.
I shall never rely on anyone else
To do any of my deeds.

Whatever Dharma practice we do, we must have a clear understanding of its purpose and with this clarity, develop confidence in it. Therefore, at all times, the good deeds such as the six paramitas of the Bodhisattvas are to be performed.

It is just as in the account of how Atisha used to make tsa-tsas himself—in all actions of offering and giving, and so on, we should not depend on others: people exhorting us or people who would do them on our behalf.

If we ourselves can do them, we should. But if we are not able, it is not at all appropriate to rely on others to do them for us.

Chapter Five - Stanza 83:

I shall practice the far-reaching attitudes of giving and so on
As being more exalted, one after the other.
I shall never discard a greater for the sake of a smaller:
I shall consider, most importantly, the benefit for others.

The paramitas of generosity, discipline, and so on, are presented in a sequential way: the higher ones are considered to bring more benefit to such an extent that the contrast between each of them is like the difference between the water contained in the ocean compared with the water contained in a cow's hoofprint.

As an example, greater benefit results from observing discipline for a single day than from practicing generosity for a hundred years.

It is said in the *Sutralankara* that the paramita that follows depends on the one preceding it, for they are set forth in sequence, being successively more elevated, successively more subtle i.e., more difficult to practice.

As a general principle, the greater paramita should not be sacrificed for the sake of the lesser one. Yet, in some situations, the Bodhisattva should consider as more important whatever is of greater benefit to beings. This should be the aim behind a Bodhisattva's thoughts and deeds. Shantideva pursues this statement by stressing the need to be earnestly working for the welfare of beings.

Chapter Five - Stanza 84:

Having realized it's like that,

I shall always keep striving for the benefit of others.
The Far-Seeing Compassionate One has permitted,
For such a bodhisattva, what's prohibited for others.

Understanding and undertaking the disciplines of avoiding negative action and of accumulating virtuous action, one should abide with constancy and diligence in the discipline of bringing benefit to others. One must strive to achieve the welfare of others in a manner that is completely free from self-interest.

To great Bodhisattvas, who labour in such a way and are completely free from selfish motives, the Buddha, greatly compassionate, allowed the seven negative actions of body and speech which are always forbidden to practitioners of the lower vehicle and to novice Bodhisattvas.

He did this because he saw that the sacrificing of trivial and ephemeral joys, and the provoking of lesser suffering can lead to lasting happiness and to the removal of greater suffering.

This may be illustrated by the story of Guru Rinpoche's incarnation as a yogi, he killed the minister's son to protect him from falling into hell. There are a few stories exemplifying this in the scriptures.

It is said that, by their actions, both these Bodhisattvas gained a degree of merit that otherwise would have taken many kalpas to accumulate.

Chapter Five - Stanza 85:

I shall share with those fallen to ruin, those without guardians,
And those maintaining tamed behaviour,
And merely eat a proper amount.
With the exception of my threefold robes, I shall give away all.

When one is living in the solitude of the mountains, for instance, whatever alms one has should be shared with three categories of beings:

- Those who have fallen into the lower realms, such as animals like birds and dogs;
- Those who have no protection, like beggars; and,
- Those who are engaged in the outer and inner yogic disciplines, namely, solitary meditators.

In addition, one should offer the first part of one's own share to the Three Jewels, and ignoring one's likes and dislikes, one should take just enough to sustain one's body, dedicating the leftovers and donating them to the spirits. For if one eats too much, one will be heavy and dull; if one eats too little, one will be weak and unequal to the practice of virtue.

The last verse of this stanza addresses the monastics: apart from the three Dharma robes that monks must wear, one should give everything away to beggars.

The three Dharma robes, however, should not be given.

We will stop here for today. Next week, we will start with a new topic by Shantideva, that of Avoidance of giving scandal to others.

Let's practice mental quiescence for a short while, before dedicating the merit of this session for the benefit of all.

