

Shantideva's
Bodhicaryâvatâra

བྱང་ཆུབ་སེམས་པའི་སློབ་པ་ལ་འཇུག་པ།

Group Study with Venerable Lama Sangyay Tendzin

Session 58 - Saturday December 10, 2022

Chapter SIX: Showing Patience

Q&A Session: Session 2

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!

In the previous session we defined anger and its various manifestations as mental formations ('Samskaras') belonging to the negative mental events causing suffering and the destruction of merit that we need to attain Buddhahood.

Having therefore identified the major problem that we must solve, to progress on the path of enlightenment, we have concluded on the need to face it and gain mastery of our mind through systematic training.

This training is about letting go of any form of reaction to our experiences as confirmed by Shantideva in the stanzas 27 to 29 reviewed in the coming questions 4 & 5.

Question 3 - Stanzas 12 to 24:

Could it be that the need for change experienced by beings, would be the cause of a discouragement to practice the virtue of patience in a firm and steady way?

Answer:

This question seems like a guess indicating a lack of comprehensive study of these stanzas which I have not reproduced here for the sake of saving time.

Taken together, they stress the absolute necessity of closing the debate and engaging without laziness in the training of the mind through the mastery of patience.

The answer asked is related to and was answered by what was taught in the previous session. It is then confirmed through analysis and reasoning by Shantideva in the following stanzas.

Questions 4, 5 & 6 - Stanzas 27 to 29:

Stanza 27: *What some (the Samkhyas) call "primordial matter"
And what they imagine to be "the self"
(They don't think with some purpose), "I shall come into being (to cause some harm),"
And then come about.*

Stanza 28: *In fact, as they haven't arisen, they do not exist,
So, what would have then had the wish to arise?
And, since a static sentient self would be permanently occupied with an object,
It would never come to cease being so.*

Stanza 29: *But if the self were static and non-sentient, like Nyaya asserts,
It would obviously be without actions, like the sky;
So even if it met with other conditions,
What activity could something unchangeable have?*

Question 4:

With regards to cultivating patience in relation to the ultimate reality of things, May I request Lama to explain a bit more on stanzas 27-29?

Answer:

As indicated by His Holiness Karmapa in the Secret Mantra Summer Teachings, an in-depth study of the Buddha's teachings requires looking at the various Indian philosophies that were present at His time and at non-dualistic modes of logical reasoning.

In stanzas 27 to 29, Shantideva refutes the existence of a permanent self by demonstrating the invalidity of the fundamental principles of two of the six so-called orthodox Indian philosophical schools, the Shamkya school (*) and the Nyaya school (**), based on the belief in the atman or permanent self.

(*) The Sāṃkhya school is based on a rational analysis of reality whose outcome leads to liberation from samsara. In Indian Sāṃkhya philosophy, the original cause of the phenomena of the material world is first their Primordial Nature (*prakṛti*); but it is also the Original Nature combining the potentialities of Energy and Matter. The dynamic female principle is activated by contact with the static male principle, Spirit.

The moral future of the individual is considered as a creation of the intellect orienting it in eight different ways:

1. If he is 'virtuous', that is, if he fulfils his duties (the socio-religious dharma of this school), he rises in the hierarchy of beings.
2. If he is not virtuous, he descends.
3. If he is endowed with "sovereignty" i.e., with powers such as strength in the animal sphere, power in the human sphere and magical powers in the celestial sphere), he does not encounter any obstacle.
4. The opposite if he has no powers.
5. If he is 'passionate', it dies and is constantly reborn, unless it is detached.
6. If he attains non-attachment, he dissolves into *prakṛti* (what "yogis" do but which does not constitute liberation).
7. If he does not possess knowledge, he chains himself.
8. He is liberated if he possesses knowledge, i.e., the practical knowledge of the Sāṃkhya philosophy, which must result in the cosmic being (*purusha*) understanding that he is not the person this individual believes to be, that he is pure consciousness, and ceases to identify with his psychic apparatus.

(**) The Nyaya school maintains that human suffering results from errors produced by an activity carried out under the influence of bad or incomplete knowledge (notions and ignorance). Liberation from suffering comes through right knowledge. False knowledge is not just ignorance, it includes illusion. Correct knowledge is about discovering and overcoming one's illusions and understanding the true nature of soul, self, and reality.

The four foundations of right knowledge are:

1. Direct observation in observation
2. Inference
3. Assimilation by comparison
4. The testimony of authority

Question 5:

I fail to understand whether the self is permanent or not. Can Lama clarify this point?

Answer:

Although they share certain principles with Buddhism, these schools are nevertheless divergent by their views. The established point in Shantideva's reasoning is the refutation of the existence of a permanent self.

The main thing for us is to consider the non-dualistic school of Buddhism initiated by Nagarjuna and according to which the self, the self, does not exist permanently.

Question 6:

Can Lama define the self?

Answer:

In view of the information given in response to the previous question, the abandonment of the "I" obviously makes such a question obsolete. The games played by the "I" are indeed illusory and fallacious!

However, this does not mean that this issue should be ignored. Instead, set the goal of defining it yourself, which will undoubtedly provide the only answer you can validate.

So, ask yourself the question of the existence of what you are trying to define. Do this not without remembering that the answer to this question is fourfold:

1. Yes, it exists in relative and illusory truth. Created out of a need for survival, it responds to the whims of limited beings.
2. No, nothing can totally describe it.
3. Yes and no, although it exists, it cannot be identified with anything.
4. Neither yes nor no, the contemplation that dissolves the question.

Only yourself can solve this riddle. Like a Zen Koan, is not resolved by extraneous mentalisation, associating with it durably will place oneself in the "Eureka" of its spontaneous realisation!

Question 7 & 8 - Stanzas 53 & 54:

Stanza 53: *Insults, cruel language,
And defaming words
Don't hurt my body,
So, why, O mind, do you become so enraged?*

Stanza 54: *Others' dislike for me
That won't devour me,
Either in this life or in any other lifetime!
So, why do I find it undesirable?*

Question 7:

Lord Shantideva asks the question: why get angry and why oppose, when neither our mind nor our body can be impacted by backbiting and judgment?

Is there a concrete answer to this question which makes it possible to define the cause of these reactions, a precise cause which it would be beneficial to identify so that we can observe it and no longer suffer from it?

Answer:

Not abiding in an atmosphere of loving kindness, accepting the present moment as-it-is, leads to an implementation of mental activity caused by egocentric appropriation of the experience.

This interrupts the dance between our perception of relative and absolute truths.

Consequently, the emptiness of the present moment is no longer realized, provoking the loss of its spontaneous clarity. As a result, we engage in a triple metamorphosis:

1. Physically, in response to the situation frozen by the ignorance of emptiness, our mental consciousness finds itself dazed in an emotional conflict causing us to lose control of the body: our breathing is altered, we sweat, our heart races and-so-forth.

2. Verbally, because of these physical reactions, we lose control and lock ourselves into incoherent or absent speech.

3. Mentally, due to previous inherent tendencies, we grasp or deny the situation and confine ourselves in comfort zones.

Question 8:

Could it be the ego?

Answer:

The answer is obviously yes: failure to evolve in the suchness of phenomena caused by ignorance induces egocentric grasping as just described. Egocentric grasping is a process unfolding in a chain-reaction.

Habitual patterns, clinging, and naïve beliefs combine to generate a state of confusion in the mind. Not finding a way to step out, yet pretending to do so, the building of the ego which is then used as an armour to protect and impose to others.

Let us practice mental stillness for a moment, before dedicating the merit of this study for the benefit of all.

