

Shantideva's Bodhicaryâvatâra

བྱང་ཆུབ་སེམས་པའི་སྣོད་པ་ལ་འཇུག་པ།

Group Study with Venerable Lama Sangyay Tendzin

Session 54 - Saturday November 12, 2022

Chapter SIX: Showing Patience (Continued)

REFUGE | MANDALA | REQUEST for TEACHINGS

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

Short practice of Mental Quiescence – Further generation of Bodhicitta

Tashi Deleg!

We have completed the detailed presentation given by Shantideva in the Bodhicaryâvatâra and are now studying three topics about showing respect for beings:

- Practicing respect for beings, considering them as the field of merit (verses 112–118)
- Practicing respect for beings with the wish to rejoice the Buddhas (verses 119–127)
- Practicing respect for beings, thinking of the consequences of the good and evil done to them (verses 128–134)

Today we will go through the explanation of the first:

Practicing respect for beings, considering them as the field of merit (verses 112–118)

Stanza 112:

Thus, the Sage has spoken of the field of limited beings

As well as the field of the Triumphant,

For, having made them happy, many have gone, thereby,

To the far-shore of Excellence.

The seed of Buddhahood as spoken by the Buddha consists in the perfection of the twofold aim: the accumulation of merit and that of wisdom. These are the direct result of practicing virtue.

Because it is in relation with argumentative beings that we achieve patience and the other virtues, it follows that the fertile ground in which virtue is perfected, consists of beings and Buddhas, the fertile fields on which the harvest of virtue is obtained and can be developed.

This was declared by the Tathagata himself as declared in the *Sutra of Perfectly Pure Aspiration*:

Formerly upon the field of beings and on the field of Buddhas did I base myself.

It is thus that I have harvested the endless qualities of Buddhahood.

These two “fields” are specified because in the beginning, when inspirational Bodhicitta is first cultivated, one focuses on beings through compassion and on perfect Buddhas or Buddhahood through wisdom.

Bodhisattva practices such as the four immeasurable attitudes and the six paramitas are based mainly on beings, whereas practices like the taking of refuge are based on the Buddhas.

As one manifests perfect Buddhahood, there remains the commitment to bring every living being on that same level. Since the meaning of the scriptures is to be substantiated by reasoning, an argument is supplied regarding this question.

This consists of pointing out that by making beings happy through their practice of love and compassion and by rejoicing the hearts of the Buddhas, many holy beings have perfectly secured their own and others' benefit; in other words, they attained Buddhahood.

Stanza 113:

**When the acquisition of a Buddha's Dharma (attainments)
Is equally due to (both) limited beings and the Triumphant,
What kind of order is it that the respect shown to limited beings
Is not like that to the Triumphant?**

Therefore, to realise within our mind streams the qualities of perfect enlightenment, -such as the ten strengths (*) and the four types of fearlessness (**)-, we depend equally upon beings and Buddhas.

What sort of practice is it then to serve and respect only the Buddhas and not beings?

- (*)
- (1) the power of knowing what is true and what is not.
 - (2) the power of knowing karmic causality at work in the lives of all beings throughout past, present, and future.
 - (3) the power of knowing all stages of concentration, emancipation, and meditation.
 - (4) the power of knowing the conditions of life of all people.
 - (5) the power of judging all people's levels of understanding.
 - (6) the power of discerning the superiority or inferiority of all people's capacity.
 - (7) the power of knowing the effects of all people's actions.
 - (8) the power of remembering past lifetimes.
 - (9) the power of knowing when each person will be born and will die, and in what realm that person will be reborn.
 - (10) the power of eradicating all illusions.

(**) **The four types of fearlessness of a Buddha:**

- (1) fearlessness in declaring oneself to be enlightened to the truth of all phenomena,
- (2) fearlessness in proclaiming oneself to have extinguished all desires and illusions,
- (3) fearlessness in proclaiming oneself to have elucidated the obstacles to Buddhist practice and enlightenment, and
- (4) fearlessness in declaring oneself to have clarified the way of liberation from the world of suffering, and thus the way of attaining emancipation.

Stanza 114:

**The excellence of an intention is not from itself,
But due to its result, and by that, the pre-eminence
Of that which is had by limited beings is, in fact, the same.
And because of that, they are equal.**

It can be objected that Buddhas and beings are not on an equal footing, since the former are without defect and are endowed with every excellence, whereas beings possess many faults. But no claim is made that Buddhas, and sentient beings are not comparable with their qualities.

They are equal in the sense that it is through depending on them both that we accomplish the qualities of buddhahood.

The excellence of beings is like that of the Buddhas in that it is thanks to them too that we are able to bring forth the enlightened state. From that point of view, therefore, beings and Buddhas are indeed said to be similar or equal.

Stanza 115:

**Whatever is honoured in having a loving intention (toward them),
That, in fact, is the greatness (coming) from limited beings;
And whatever positive force there is in confident belief in the Buddhas,
That, in fact, is the greatness from the Buddhas.**

Let us consider those whose minds are absorbed in love, the essence of the fourth samadhi. If we make offering to such practitioners promptly, when they have arisen from their meditation but not yet from their seats, the result of such an action will ripen quickly and will be experienced in this present life.

This reveals the eminence of living beings. Through having their loving minds focused on beings, such meditators become perilous objects. (*) Again, merit that derives from faith in the Buddhas, the offering of a single flower or a single drop of water, the holding up of just one hand in a gesture of homage and so on —all this will turn into inexhaustible virtue tending to liberation. And this reveals the eminence of the Buddhas.

(*) Bodhisattvas are described as གནམ་པོ། - nyän po “perilous” because evil actions done in their regard are particularly grievous, while good things done to them are very meritorious. It is therefore the responsibility of those who have become Bodhisattvas to act in such a way that others will respond positively toward them and not take offence.

གནམ་པོ། - nyän po is a Tibetan word that means "anything that imposes itself with great force, severity", something which is very "serious" in the sense of weighty, cannot be taken lightly, having a very strong effect.

Stanza 116:

It’s the share they have in actualizing a Buddha’s Dharma (attainments),

And because of that, they’re asserted as their equals.

**But, of course, no one can be the equal of the
Buddhas In endless oceans of excellent qualities.**

In short, since it is through beings also that we can achieve the resultant qualities of enlightenment, we consider that the Buddhas and beings are equal. They are not, of course, equal in their qualities.

The Buddhas possess indeed oceans of infinite excellence such as the ten strengths, the four types of fearlessness (as explained previously commenting stanza 114), the eighteen distinctive qualities (*), and so forth, none of which qualities are present in beings.

(*) The eighteen unshared qualities of Buddhas:

1. Their actions are consistent.
2. Their speech is not jarring.
3. They are not forgetful.
4. Their state of cessation is not a state of indifference.
5. Their perception is not discursive.
6. Their minds are always composed.
7. Their diligence never wanes.
8. Their recollection never wanes.
9. Their effort never wanes.
10. Their meditative absorption never wanes.
11. Their insight never wanes.
12. Their liberation never wanes.
13. Their physical actions are guided by wisdom and are in alignment with wisdom.
14. Their verbal actions are guided by wisdom and are in alignment with wisdom.
15. Their mental actions are guided by wisdom and are in alignment with wisdom.
16. Their wisdom vision is unobstructed and unaffected by the past.
17. Their wisdom vision is unobstructed and unaffected by the future.
18. Their wisdom vision is unobstructed and unaffected by the present.

Stanza 117:

If even a speck of the excellent qualities

Of the unique syntheses of the best excellent qualities

Were to be seen somewhere, an offering of the three planes of existence

Would be inadequate for honouring it.

The ten strengths and other supreme qualities of Buddhahood are unique and without compare.

Would the tiniest part of such qualities be present in ordinary beings, then even if the three worlds replete with all riches and the seven kinds of precious substances were given to them alone, the offering would not suffice to honour them.

Stanza 118:

**Since a share giving rise to a Buddha's
Foremost Dharma (attainments) exists in limited beings,
It's fitting that, limited beings be honoured,
In accordance with this very share.**

Thus, although from the perspective of their qualities, beings and Buddhas are not the same, nevertheless, possessing Buddha nature, the potentiality to obtain the supreme state of Buddhahood is also possessed by beings. And on account of just this likeness, beings, as much as the Buddhas, are the proper objects for our veneration. They constitute a field that is to be treasured and respected.

We will stop here for today.

Next Saturday, we will study the second topic related to respect for beings:

Practicing respect for beings with the wish to rejoice the Buddhas (verses 119–127)

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

