

Shantideva's
Bodhicaryâvatâra

བྱང་ཆུབ་སེམས་པའི་རྫོད་པ་ལ་འཇུག་པ།

Group Study with Venerable Lama Sangyay Tendzin

Session 59 - Saturday December 17, 2022

Chapter SIX: Showing Patience

Q&A – Session 3

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! We are approaching the third session dedicated to questions & answers on Chapter Six of the Bodhicaryâvatâra dedicated to the Practice of Patience. As there are still 12 outstanding questions, I am counting on your patience as we will probably be called upon to extend the session.

Last Saturday, we analysed the validity of emotional questioning and the habitual tendency to come into conflict with everyday situations.

We then approached the question of the existence of the self, a source of recurring conflicts due to the absence of realization of emptiness and its inseparable clarity allowing phenomena to be experienced in the total acceptance of their suchness. We now continue with the next questions:

Question 9 – Stanza 64:

Stanza 64: *Even toward those who revile and destroy
Images, stupas, and the sacred Dharma,
My anger's improper,
Since there can be no harm to Buddhas and the rest.*

Question:

It says in the French transcript of the commentary:

« Ces personnes ne devraient jamais être les objets de notre compassion.

Nous ne devrions pas être en colère contre eux. » In English this is to say "These people should never be the objects of our compassion. We shouldn't be mad at them."

Why is this so?

Answer:

As you might have doubted, the French transcript is mistaken and does not translate the original comment in the English transcript. The sentence in English reads: "These people should only ever be the objects of our compassion. We should not be angry with them!"

The correct French translation should read "Ces personnes ne devraient jamais être que les objets de notre compassion. Nous ne devrions pas être en colère contre eux !" instead, i.e., just the opposite!

Question 10 & 11 - Stanza 71:

Strophe 71: *Likewise, when the fire of anger is spreading,
Due to my mind being attached to something,
I shall throw it out at that instant,
For fear of my positive force being burned.*

Question 10:

How to prevent the fire of anger to spread?

Answer:

To control our anger and redirect it to positive attitude, we need to be in tune with our thoughts and feelings. To succeed gaining control over our emotions, we must know and understand how they work.

Emotions result from the unfolding of a succession of unrecognised thoughts which are conflictual or afflictive in as much as they are not in harmony with our mind nature.

Such emotions are not being apprehended lightly as they should i.e., as simple display of the clarity of the mind. Instead, they are being frozen in the coldness of dualistic mental analysis generated under the influence of aggression, attachment, or indifference.

The egocentric tendency is to relate to phenomena reacting exclusively to the way they appear or manifest. The lack of emptiness-clarity is evident at this point and therefore, we engage in nothing else than a manipulation of the ego through the cleverness of its mental intelligence.

The ego will use anger to react against a situation encountered that it finds unpleasant.

It will do the same whether what he wishes would be criticized, doubted, or made inaccessible by an external source.

Anger is often then reoriented towards the agent involved or towards whom the ego will consider to be held responsible. It is a systematic process that, once recognized, becomes easier to prevent. Training the mind is essential to succeed in achieving this.

Question 11:

Speaking of anger, we train to appease it every time it arises. But what do you do when it's too late and it's ravaging the mind?

Lama Rinpoche advised us to open our mouths wide, but it is sometimes difficult to do so in front of our boss or our customers...

Answer:

Aside from shyness and submission to societal conventions, only pride and arrogance can prevent you from doing so. Anyway, a more discreet way is to leave the premises to avoid outbidding by direct confrontation.

When you disagree with a situation or if you do not tolerate a person's attitude, it is better to avoid confrontation by simply leaving the premises without further ado!

If ever necessary, it will always be possible to assert what is right later, in a climate more conducive to the authentic communication of your point of view.

Question 12 - Stanza 107:

Stanza 107:

*Therefore, I shall be delighted with an enemy
Who's popped up like a treasure in my house,
Without having had to be acquired with fatigue,
Since he becomes my aide for bodhisattva behaviour.*

Question:

Could the current situation in the world be considered being an ideal time for practising patience due to the obvious opposing trends in dealing with the various "crises"?

Answer:

This is correct insofar as the stress of today's world is a real challenge for some and could therefore be seen as a stimulus for the practice of patience.

However, the real suffering to be overcome with patience is that created by the five conflicting emotions. The format of their manifestations is all illusory and unlikely to make a difference at the time they occur.

Nevertheless, the evolution of morals today brought about the tendency in younger people to splash their inner emotional experiences on social media. This is counter-productive to the subtle development of patience whose foundation is humility.

Question 13 - Stanza 122:

Stanza 122:

*The Sages delight in their happiness
And enter distress at their injury.
And so, in my bringing them joy, the Sages will all have become delighted,
And in bringing them harm, the Sages will have been hurt.*

Question:

My first reaction is "Buddha has no need to be pleased!". I feel that pleasing the Buddhas is superfluous because their state is already above these qualitative levels; could it be that this is said to have this pleasing reflect on us to be able to rise to a similar state?

Answer:

Indeed, Buddhas are beyond conceptualisation and cannot be pleased or displeased on a dualistic level. Since the teaching of Bodhicaryâvatâra pertains to the relative truth, pleasing the Buddhas is just a way to speak and addresses our inner relationship to our true nature.

Pleasing the Buddhas is done by practicing virtue which is in tune with our true nature. It leads to accumulate the merit that we need, to have less obstacles as we work on the accumulation of wisdom. Wisdom will be accumulated essentially through the practice of meditation onward, through the bhūmis of enlightenment.

Understanding this then permits to define our conduct in a way not to displease the Buddha, which is happening when we practice non-virtue and take the path that leads to the sufferings of samsara.

General Questions on Chapter Six:

Question 14:

"Praise does not feed us or make life any longer".

However, in difficult situations, receiving compliments provides a feeling of warmth and security. We also know that it is good to highlight the qualities of others rather than practicing slander. Can praise then be beneficial in these cases?

Answer:

Answering this question calls for developing more accuracy in the terminology that is being used: I would make a difference between praising and complimenting.

Praising is always beneficial but is not formulated directly to the concerned individual. Praising is a virtuous action in as much as it is clearly differentiated from flattery and, therefore, not made directly.

Quite different is complimenting someone, which is an action of communication, addressed directly to the concerned individual or group. It can be a gratifying word, a written comment, or a physical gesture.

The motivation here plays an important role; it must be that complementing is done to value someone who usually abides in low self-esteem and needs encouragement. Often can we see that someone uses complementing to receive some appreciation and even sometimes to gain favours.

Beware of relational politics: egocentric games are many! Sometimes even, compliments serve the purpose of levelling the feeling of pity.

Therefore, the reason to compliment someone must be examined carefully to avoid the danger of turning into flattery and create dependency in the individual, reinforcing attachment to habitual patterns such as addiction to victimisation or arrogance.

As Dharma practitioners, we ought to support one another of course. Nevertheless, we ought to be clear about what does this involve: the real support provided to someone cannot be detrimental to the person's ability to abandon the eight worldly concerns.

Question 15:

How to achieve the balance between not getting angry at those who cause us sufferings; and justice, fairness and to stop them from harming more people?

Answer:

There is not such balance to be achieved if not to promote genuine presence and practice the teachings. The Bodhicaryâvatâra is quite clear about not getting angry and specially at those who cause us sufferings!

In fact, nobody but yourself causes you suffering ultimately. Other beings involved in such 'suffering-creating dreamlike-reality' are the beings who help you to resolve pending negative karma.

They are just representing the conditions for this resolution to take place here and now. You must therefore be grateful to them.

Question 16:

Even though those who cause beings sufferings are not at fault in the ultimate sense, they are responsible for their actions in the conventional world, how should they be treated by society?

Answer:

Unless you are requested to oversee dealing with such outcome, I see no point in trying to answer anything more than "with fairness".

Look at the evolution of the way society deals with this topic over the past six decades, it appears to me that the attempt of asserting the criteria needed to bring about any decent way to respond are more and more questionable.

The original tendency to initiate a so-called 'democratic' One-World citizenship with its unique modes of societal, political, juridical, and legal behaviours, turns to be a grandiose travesty of justice where wisdom has long been replaced by greed for power and material gain.

This type of short-sightedness brings major suffering and is no incentive to promoting essential values such as respect, love and understanding between individuals.

Question 17:

Could Lama describe the notion of Competitiveness (his source, his characteristics, his antidote)?

Answer:

The source of competitiveness undoubtedly lies in the eight mundane dharmas that must be abandoned if we seek wisdom and enlightenment.

By attraction of gain, the actors of social life, on the contrary, have not ceased to contrive to multiply the characteristics of this competitiveness by means of emphasizing, not what brings people together but on the contrary, what increasingly individualizes.

Whether it's social hierarchy, skills, movable and immovable property, consumer goods, clothing fashion, haircuts, piercings, tattoos, in short, the multitude of assets that divides individuals is a form of absurd competitiveness denying what unites them: the nobility of being.

Question 18:

...when speaking about others who are acting out of their conflicting emotions producing circumstances which engender the suffering of others and themselves.

The teachings seem to say that when faced with unfavourable circumstances, we should grin and bear it at best, or roll over and die at worst and try again next life and do nothing about the circumstances...

Am I missing some points here?

Answer:

I should think so! The point here is to work on the cause of suffering as taught by the Lord Buddha in the Four Noble Truths. The causes lie with us, not with the agent involved who embody the conditions for our own pending karma to unfold. It is beneficial to handle the situation as advised in the previously given answer to Question 10, 15 and 16.

Ask yourself: "Have I been appointed by anyone in the entire trichiliocosme to save the universe or to provide some advice to those who so-to-say 'misbehave'?"

Everything that happens happen for a reason. Aiming at enlightenment, we must learn to face the reality, which is ours, as it is. While making positive wishes and supporting others around us if welcomed to do so, we ought to take care of ourselves.

We are all interdependent, however, while we can change ourselves, it makes no sense trying to change others. You must think clearly about the fact that we do not teach dharma unless requested.

Why is it so? Because, regardless of the value of the teaching that could be given, it will be of no benefit whatsoever to those who do not call for it. It will be just an untimely display of the precious dharma which requires the elementary condition of humility before being transmitted.

Question 19:

In previous chapters we learned patience with those who wrong us.

At the time, I had a problem with a contractor I had hired. The job was poorly done; the worker stood stubbornly! When I reported the issues to the Registrar of Contractors, the inspector declared the work to meet minimum standards. Even though I didn't agree, I decided to let go.

However, since then the extent of the damage has continued to increase. Should I just let things go?

Answer:

The situation described here has been the subject of previous comments. However, all paid work imposes an obligation of result. The poor workmanship must therefore be the subject of a new intervention.

The next session will be held on Saturday January 7, 2023. Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.

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

