

Shantideva's
Bodhicaryâvatâra

བྱང་ཆུབ་སེམས་པའི་སློབ་པ་ལ་འཇུག་པ།
Group Study with Venerable Lama Sangyay Tendzin

Session 64 - Saturday February 11, 2023

Chapter SEVEN: Joyful Perseverance - The Support of the Practice

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! After completing the study of "***how to remove the conditions inimical to diligence***", last week, we closed the session at stanza 32, introducing the new topic of "**Implementing the favourable conditions for diligence.**" We now continue with a more detailed explanation of the need to rely on the force of aspiration.

Stanza 33:

**But the faults of both, myself, and others
That I'll need to vanquish are boundless!
And when the depletion of each individual fault
Will take oceans of eons,**

Shantideva understands that since he cultivates Bodhichitta, he must himself subdue all uncontrolled evils, the afflictions of himself and all other beings. And to succeed abandoning any of these obscurations, he must now apply his diligence.

He must do so, even if any single one of the eighty-four thousand defilements and other faults takes many kalpas to dissipate.

Stanza 34:

**And even a fraction of that initiative
For depleting those faults can't be seen yet in me,
Then how is it that my heart doesn't burst
At the fathomless sufferings that I'll need to endure?**

Moreover, regardless to his keenness to claim such gigantic liability, Shantideva does not find within himself even the slightest inclination towards diligence.

Aware of the boundless sufferings that he will have to endure in the future, he asks himself how his heart can possibly take it. Doing so, Shantideva stresses the absolute urge for us to free ourselves from faults.

Stanza 35:

**The excellent features, for both, myself, and others,
That I'll need to actualize are also enormous!
And there when the repeated practice for each individual feature
Will take oceans of eons,**

In the same spirit, he says that he himself must now acquire all the innumerable spiritual qualities related to the path and result, both for himself and others, even if one of them alone, such as the different kinds of supernatural vision and extraordinary knowledge, takes countless kalpas to be realised.

Stanza 36:

**And I've never developed the repeated practice
For even a fraction of the excellent features,
It's amazing how I've rendered meaningless
This rebirth somehow attained!**

And once again he reflects that he has never possessed the kind of endeavour necessary for achieving even a fragment of such qualities.

How strange, he adds ironically, to waste this precious human life, endowed with eight freedoms and ten advantages, something indeed so extremely rare, which he managed to obtain by the power of his karma!

Stanza 37:

**I've not made offerings to the Vanquishing Master,
Nor provided the joy of magnificent feasts.
I've done no services for the teachings,
Nor fulfilled the hopes of the poor!**

It may be thought that his behaviour has not been entirely meaningless and that at least he has managed to accomplish some virtue. Yet, Shantideva asks, what virtue has he ever accomplished, knowing that he has never made offerings to the Buddhas, whether in reality or through the power of his imagination.

No pleasant feasts or services have been provided for the sangha through his well-intended donations. Neither has he ever done anything for the Buddha's Doctrine in the way of teaching and studying the Tripitaka or the practice of the three trainings of the path.

Meanwhile, he has never provided material gifts, food, or clothing to fulfil the needs of the poor. He has not given them anything, not even so much as a cup of tea or buttermilk; he has treated them with disdain.

Stanza 38:

**I've given no freedom from fear to the frightened,
Nor offered comfort to those in distress!
It comes down to all that I have produced
Is only discomfort, and the pain of an alien object in the womb for my mother!**

He abstained to give protection from fear to those in terror of their lives.

Neither has he ever comforted those miserable ones ignorant of what to do and what not to do, with the gift of Dharma by teaching them well and bringing them to an understanding of the principle of correct conduct.

His only achievement is the pain he caused his mother when she carried him in her womb and gave him birth at which point both of them almost died of pain.

He has totally failed to achieve the potential of the human life that he has obtained, endowed with freedoms and qualities, so rare to obtain.

Stanza 39:

**Since such a poor mess has come about
Through my lacking a strong intention for the Dharma
In former lives and now,
Who would ever give up strong intention for the Dharma?**

Reflecting that his lack of virtue comes from his failure to aspire to the sublime Dharma, to which he has been as taken interest like a dog to a pile of grass. But what kind of person is he who, although he wants happiness, nevertheless abandons all aspiration to the sacred Dharma?

Stanza 40:

**The Sage has taught, “A strong intention is the root
Of every constructive facet.”
And the root of that is constantly having meditated on
The ripening results of karma:**

Aspiration to the sacred Dharma, the Buddha has said, is the root of every virtue, whereby high rebirth, and the definitive excellence of Buddhahood is achieved.

As stated in “The Manifestation of Manjushri’s Buddhafield”:

*“Everything depends upon conditions and lies within the root of eager aspiration.
Whatever prayers a person makes, results in kind are surely to be reaped.”*

Indeed, it is those who have the keenest interest in the Dharma who will be the best practitioners. Average interest and aspiration make for an average practitioner; lesser interest will result in a practitioner of lesser capacity.

Thus, aspiration and interest are crucial! Since it is difficult to possess these qualities from the very beginning, it is necessary to cultivate them in the mind.

Yet, today’s people disparage themselves and doubt their ability to observe the discipline to receive the teachings, to reflect, and to meditate on them. This is how they wreck themselves. We must never allow this.

By earning how to observe the discipline, and by receiving, reflecting, and meditating on the teachings, we will gain in happiness, and we will progress.

For sure, if from the very beginning we had every good quality and were totally free of defilement, there would be no point in the Dharma’s being taught. But this is clearly not the case.

The root of aspiration or keen interest in the Dharma is a constant reflection and confident meditation on the fully ripened effects of positive and negative actions—knowing that these effects are unavoidably experienced as happiness or misery.

Stanza 41:

**Pain, foul moods, and assorted forms of fear,
And being parted from what I would like,
Come about from behaving
With negative karmic force.**

All physical discomfort experienced because of disease, heat and cold, together with anxieties and mental sufferings, all the dangers of being killed and wounded, and the pain of being separated from what one wants and of encountering what one does not want, are not ultimately caused by wicked people.

The cause of all of them is our own negative behaviour. In making this point, Shantideva gives a general hint of the law of karma, cause, and effect.

Stanza 42:

**Consider this: by enacting the constructive deeds
That my mind has intended,
Wherever I’m reborn, I’ll be honoured, through their positive force,
With an oblation as the karmic result.**

Statements about the results of “mixed” actions which display both good and bad aspects are not just empty words. If our intentions and corresponding actions are wholesome, then no matter where we go or where we

are born, the merit of the virtue accomplished in the past will offer us its fully ripened fruit, namely, an abundance of happiness and good qualities.

This is illustrated by the story of Prince *Punyabala* (*), who, taking up residence in a poor man's dwelling, discovered a great and inexhaustible treasure there.

(*) In Shravasti, at Prince Jeta's Grove, several elder monks in the Buddha's assembly couldn't agree on which human quality is most valuable and beneficial: beauty, diligence, artistry, or insight. They ask the Buddha, who replies that merit, which gives rise to all the qualities they have noted, is of most benefit to beings.

To illustrate this point, he tells the story of a past life in which he was born as Punyabala, with four older brothers who were each named after their most prized quality: Rupabala, Viryavanta, Shilpavanta, and Prajnavanta.

In an ensuing contest to determine which quality produces the best outcomes in real life, Punyabala won, and through his merit, he was granted dominion over much of the world.

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

