

**Shantideva's**  
**Bodhicaryâvatâra**

བྱང་ཆུབ་སེམས་པའི་རྫོད་པ་ལ་འཇུག་པ།

Group Study with Venerable Lama Sangyay Tendzin

Session 65 - Saturday February 18, 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**

In Lord Shantideva's presentation of the topic on **"Implementing the favourable conditions for diligence"**, we currently study a detailed explanation of the need to rely on **the force of aspiration**.

More precisely, the stanza 42 was reminding us that our good actions will carry on their effects wherever we are. In the story of Punyabala taking up residence in a poor man's dwelling, his own merit caused him to discover a great and inexhaustible treasure that had been hidden away on that spot. This is also applying to bad actions and to mixed actions as we will learn in the next stanzas.

**Stanza 43:**

**But by enacting negative deeds,  
Though I wish for happiness,  
Wherever I'm reborn, I'll be assaulted, through their negative karmic force,  
By weapons of pain.**

To the opposite, if we do evil in our quest for satisfaction, then no matter where we go, wherever we are born, the sharp knife of misery, the ripened effects of former evils, will cut us down and destroy us.

**There are four combinations in which incentives (propulsive action) and completing actions affect karma:**

1. When a positive incentive is brought to fruition through positive action, the result will be birth into the higher destinies under happy and comfortable conditions.
2. When both, incentive and completing action are both negative, they give rise to rebirth in the infernal realms where suffering is the only form of existence.
3. When a virtuous incentive, which may cause birth in the divine realms, is followed by a non-virtuous completing action, one will be deprived of the benefits that normally accompany that rebirth and will suffer as a result.

For example, through inheritance or winning the lottery, some people experience abundance. Nevertheless, the cause of this wealth being made up of mixed actions, these same people suddenly suffer the misfortune of losing the advantages acquired and even have to endure miserable sufferings at times.

4. When a negative incentive is accompanied by positive completing action, one's destiny is of a lower rebirth but yet experiencing good fortune, like that of an animal that has the enjoyment of a happy and fortunate life.

Similarly, a non-virtuous incentive may result in the ephemeral hells; yet, if the completing action is both positive and negative, the perpetrator will have to experience a corresponding alternation of happiness and suffering by day and by night in the ephemeral hells.

Such a situation is described in the story of Shrona (\*).

(\*) This story is reported in detail by Patrul Rinpoche in his description of the sufferings in the preta realms. (See Words of my Perfect Teacher, p.79). I recommend you read this text in its various realms descriptions which can enhance greatly the compassion that otherwise we only generate in a limited way through mentalisation.

Likewise, if because of positive incentive one is born in a human form, and if this is complemented by actions that are both positive and negative, one will have to undergo a variety of experiences of both joy and sorrow, as for instance, in the earlier and later stages of one's life.

In short, though one may have been born in a fortunate realm, all the experiences of happiness and suffering in one's very lifetime are the effects of virtuous and non-virtuous acts, the same being also true of the happiness and suffering of those born in the lower realms.

The effects of one's actions must all be experienced; they do not fade away and disappear.

With such understanding of the Law of Karma Cause & Effects, we naturally find it more imperative to develop our force of motivation.

**Stanza 44:**

**By constructive behaviour, I'll come to stay as a spiritual child in the presence of the Blissfully Gone,  
With a superb body, born from a lotus opened by the splendour of the Sage,  
And dwelling in the heart of a spacious, fragrant, cool lotus,  
My radiance shall grow with nourishment from His melodious voice.**

The result of exclusively positive action, untarnished by even mild negativities, will result in birth in the pure lands such as Sukhavati. In such places, the actual place of birth is far superior to that of a hot womb, cramped and foetid.

For in the pure lands, one dwells in bliss within the heart of a many-colored lotus flower, spacious, fragrant, and cool to the touch. All the splendour of one's body and senses will grow and come to maturity, nourished by the nectar of the Dharma expressed by the sweet voice of the Buddha.

Moreover, the way of being born in Sukhavati is far superior to the kind of birthing that exists in our human realm, which, on account of the narrowness of the birth canal, is as painful as being dragged through an iron keyhole.

The rays emanating from the Buddha will cause the lotus petals to open, and one will miraculously emerge from the fully blossoming flower, equipped with a beautiful body endowed with the major and minor marks of Buddhahood.

Subsequently, one will live in the presence of the Buddha Amitabha and other enlightened beings. This is a manner of dwelling far superior to the coarse homes of ordinary beings. And nurtured by the Dharma, one will become a fortunate child of the Sugata. All this will be the outcome of perfect virtue.

**Stanza 45:**

**But, by serial destructive behaviour, I'll fall onto a fiercely flaming iron ground,  
Horribly tortured by Yama's henchmen, ripping off my entire skin,  
Pouring into my body molten copper liquified by enormous heat,  
Stabbing me with flaming swords and daggers and rending my flesh into hundreds of bits.**

On the other hand, the result of evil action for which one has no remorse, is to be devastated by suffering.

The skin of one's sensitive and tender body flayed off with the fierce knives of the creatures of the Lord of Death, his terrifying workers, who pour into one's body melted liquid bronze as dreadful as the conflagration at

the end of time. Pierced by burning swords and knives, one's flesh will be dismembered into a hundred parts that fall upon the white-hot iron ground. Such experience of endless terrible suffering is due to negative karma.

This completes the explanation of the force of Aspiration, the root of the four forces of a Bodhisattva to enhance diligence.

Next Shantideva teaches us the second of these four forces, that of **steadfastness**. He will give us a brief presentation in the next four stanzas and then provide us a detailed explanations over stanzas 50 to 62.

**Stanza 46:**

**Hence, I shall set a strong intention to do what's constructive  
And make it a habit, with regard.  
Undertaking it, then, I'll make it a habit of having pride,  
Through the lines in the Vajradhvaja Sutra.**

Therefore, it is through having confidence in the principle of karmic cause and effect that we will abandon negative actions and aspire and tend exclusively to virtue by means of keen and focused interest. We must steep ourselves in this understanding of the principle of adopting and rejecting.

In the sixth chapter of the Avatamsaka, we find the following text:

*"Deva Putra, when the sun rises, it is not perturbed by the fact that some men are blind nor by the mountain shadows that it is unable to dispel. No, it sheds light on all that can be illuminated.  
In the same way, when Bodhisattvas appear for the sake of beings, they are not dismayed by the fact that some are wild and hostile. They bring to maturity and liberate all those who are capable of liberation".*

It is therefore with this kind of courage, that we must cultivate a solid confidence and determination, telling ourselves that we will bring to completion whatever positive action we have begun for the sake of others. In stanzas 47 to 49, Shantideva gives us a general presentation of the subject.

**Stanza 47:**

**Examining my talents first,  
To undertake (something) or not undertake it,  
It's better not to undertake it at all –  
Not to start it and then turn back.**

First, as Shantideva says, we must evaluate our resources in both spiritual and temporal terms and begin or hold back according to whether we can or cannot complete the given action.

For if we are unable, it is better not to begin at all. Once we have begun, however, we must never turn back from what we have promised.

**Stanza 48:**

**For that turns into a habit in future lives too  
And causes negative force and suffering to increase.  
While other undertakings and the time for their results  
Are weakened and do not succeed.**

The reason for this is that if we act in such way for example, dropping our studies or abandoning our practice in retreat, the effect similar to the cause will be the habitual tendency in this and future lives to fail to complete the good deeds we have begun. Likewise, with taking some vows.

The proliferating effect of the breaking of our pledge to virtuous practice will make for an increase in negativity. As for the fully ripened effect, the result will be an increase in suffering.

If, however, before finishing the action we began, we embark upon another action, the result will be that we will fail to complete both the earlier and the later actions. At the time of harvest, the fruit will be insignificant.

**Stanza 49:**

**Actions, disturbing emotions, and abilities –**

**Pride is to be applied regarding the three.**

**“It’s something that I myself shall do”**

**Is having pride regarding actions.**

**We must apply or cultivate a sense of daring self-confidence with respect to three things:**

the action, our ability and, the affliction.

- First, we must decide that we ourselves will accomplish the task.
- Second, we must assure ourselves that we are able to do it, reflecting that we are indeed able to discard all faults and accomplish every excellent quality. However, this sense of intrepid self-esteem is not to be cultivated in the preparatory stages. It is for the time when we are already engaged in the task and have started to be less enthusiastic and become tired of it.
- Third, we must tell ourselves that we will not surrender to the defiled emotion of defeat.

Kunzang Palden’s commentary approaches these three points in details:

**1. Cultivating a feeling of self-confidence with regard to the task**

In the *Avatamsaka Sutra*, Manjushri states the following to a Deva Putra:

*“The outer palace of the sun, which is material, has no choice but to do its work of illuminating the four continents all by itself. It is unobstructed by cloud, dust, or wind, and it sheds its light impartially over everything. Although all beings place their hope in it, the sun for its part has no need to rely on anything.*

*In the same way, I, a Bodhisattva skilled in emptiness and the means of great compassion, will bring to maturity and liberation all beings, whose number is as limitless as space itself.  
And I will do this by myself alone!*

*I shall be impeded by none of the faults or defects of beings, wild and barbarous as they are. I will become the great and unknown friend of every being. Though they may place their hopes in me, I do not place my hopes in them.”*

It is the cultivation of this kind of determination and courage that constitutes the feeling of self-confidence.

**Stanza 50:**

**Worldly beings, not under their own power,**

**Due to disturbing emotions, are unable to accomplish their very own aims.**

**But I’m not incapable, like wandering beings,**

**So, I’ll do this for them.**

Overwhelmed by their afflictions, worldly beings, whose deeds, and wishes are constantly at war with each other, are unable even to secure their own happiness in this present life. Therefore, Shantideva reflects, they are unable to secure the happiness of all beings, as he, a Bodhisattva, is able to do. This indeed will be his chosen task. He will labour for the sake of the happiness of himself and others.

**Stanza 51:**

**How can I stand by**

**While someone else is doing an inferior job?**

**If it’s because of being proud that I’m not doing it instead,**

**Then best to let pride be exterminated in me.**

Shantideva's words here can be interpreted as meaning that, when others are engaged in the mundane activities of making hay, chopping wood, carrying loads, and so on, how can he idly stand by?

It is inappropriate! On the contrary, he should give help to people in everything that does not involve negative action. Such is a correct practice of the Paramitas; just as the great master Dromtönpa was seen carrying the luggage of an old tantrika.

We should not have the pride of thinking that our actions make us superior to others. To rid ourselves of such ordinary conceit is the best of Bodhisattva practices.

We will stop here today.

Next week we will resume with stanza 52, illustrating the second point:

**2. Cultivating a feeling of self-confidence with regard to one's abilities**

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

