

Shantideva's
Bodhicaryâvatâra

བྱང་ཆུབ་སེམས་པའི་རྫོད་པ་ལ་འཇུག་པ།

Group Study with Venerable Lama Sangyay Tendzin

Session 66 - Saturday February 25, 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

Amongst the four forces that we must summon to implement the favourable conditions for diligence, we are currently investigating the second, **the force of steadfastness.**

After providing us with a general explanation of that force through stanzas 47 to 49, Shantideva engaged a detailed explanation of three specific points.

Last week we went through the first of these:

1. Cultivating a feeling of self-confidence with regard to the task (verses 50–51).

The following eight stanzas provide us a detailed explanation of the second point:

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

The stanza 52 reminds 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 merit caused him to discover a great and inexhaustible treasure that had been hidden away on that abandoned spot.

Stanza 52:

**Even a crow makes itself act like an eagle
When encountering a snake that's already dead.
But if I remain timid,
Even the slightest setback impairs me.**

When they find a dead snake, the crows behave like eagles soaring in the sky, and without fear and disdain they devour it.

If our self-esteem is very low, that is to say if our ability to remedy a situation is failing, we must like the crow, consider that the dead snake is vulnerable to minor injuries caused by the slightest misconduct.

So we will know that a minor offense can harm us to the point of dragging us into the lower realms, just like much more serious misconduct such as the attack of the eagle.

Stanza 53:

**Discouraged and having given up effort,
Will there be liberation due to feeling bankrupt, or what?
But by strengthening my effort through having my pride,
Even huge things will have difficulty triumphing (over me).**

Because of their weak determination, some of us sink into lack of self-esteem and doubt their ability to practice virtue and to circumvent wickedness.

Feeling hopeless, they give up all efforts to subdue their weaknesses. As a result, they cannot overcome their miserable condition, either in this life or in future lives.

But those who hold firm, proudly resolute, with determination and perseverance - confessing what must be confessed with a firm promise of amendment - even those cannot be brought down even by grave faults. These will not have the strength to drag them into the lower worlds.

As it is said in the *Mahaguhyaupaya-kaushalya-sutra*:

“Bodhisattvas who are wise in emptiness and skilled in the methods of compassion will not be defeated even by serious downfalls, just like holders of the vidya-mantras, who are able to deliver themselves as they wish from the fetters of the five enchantments.”

Stanza 54:

**Therefore, with my mind steadfast,
I shall set back setbacks.
For if setbacks bankrupt me,
My wishing to triumph over the three realms becomes a joke.**

Therefore, Shantideva concludes, with a steadfast heart confident in his abilities, that he will overcome the tinniest downfalls that are to be discarded.

He sees indeed, that if he allows himself to be overwhelmed by his own weaknesses, his wish to attain Buddhahood, to gain victory over all the defilements in the three worlds, is indeed most pathetic.

Stanza 55:

**I shall triumph over everything
And nothing shall triumph over me!
As a spiritual offspring of the Triumphant Lion,
I shall maintain this pride.**

By doing so, Shantideva declares that he will triumph over all the defilements of the three worlds and that no affliction will prevail in him.

For he is the son of the Victorious-One, the Lion among men, who defeated the four demons and acquired the power of the four intrepidities.

He will therefore retain a dignified confidence in his abilities, thanks to which no conflicting emotions can dictate his conduct.

Stanza 56:

**Wandering beings conquered by pride
Are disturbed: they have no dignity.
For those having dignity don't fall under the enemy's power,
But instead, have power over the enemy, pride itself.**

Here, Shantideva teaches us to differentiate between the “fake pride” that is the arrogance of the emotional samsaric beings and the “genuine pride” that is the dignity and confidence of the Bodhisattvas.

Indeed, beings in the three worlds who are ruined by their arrogance are defiled and miserable creatures. They are in fact completely devoid of the type of self-confidence.

Would they possess this kind of self-confidence and dignity, which is an antidote, they would not fall beneath the power of their enemy: the kind of pride that is the defilement of arrogance.

Stanza 57:

**Filled up with the disturbing emotion of pride,
They're led by pride to the worse rebirth states,
And even as humans, their festivity is killed.
They become slaves, eating the scraps of others,**

When one falls into the power of “fake pride”, when the mind is imbued with arrogance, the consequence is that it draws beings down to the states of misery of the lower realms or, if failing this, it destroys any happiness and joy of the human condition, should it be still attained on behalf of previously gained merit.

In such situation, one will take rebirth as a slave or a servant, wholly dependent on the gifts of others for one's sustenance.

Stanza 58:

**Stupid, ugly, feeble, and insulted in all situations.
If filled up with pride, those having trials
Are also included among those having pride,
Then what kind of pathetic beings are they, tell me please?**

Alternatively, one will be born as stupid as a pig, not knowing what to adopt and what to reject. Or else, one will have an ugly appearance, looking as dreadful as a toad.

And even if one is not actually harmed, one will be despised like an old dog, the butt and laughingstock of everyone.

Those whose minds are puffed up with conceit -those so called “ascetics” who are able to live without tasting the food of the sublime Dharma-, they are the ones who are the real objects of contempt.

Although they are unable to cultivate true Bodhisattva pride, if they are numbered among the stable ones i.e., those who have self-confidence regarding their ability, then, Shantideva exclaims, whom shall we call worthless?

Stanza 59:

**But those who hold on to their pride in order to triumph over the enemy of arrogance,
Are the holders of dignity, the triumphant heroes.
And those who kill off the enemy, pride, even though it's gargantuan,
Bestow then the fruit of triumph in full on wandering beings, whatever they wish.**

The offspring of the Conqueror, who maintain a stable self-confidence the antidote that overturns the enemy of afflictive pride are the ones who have cultivated dignity or true pride in the positive sense and are worthy of praise. For they are heroes who have vanquished their foe, the pride that is a defilement.

Those who have true self-confidence in their ability overwhelm completely the mighty force that holds the three worlds in its power—the thought of “I.” And thus, according to their wish, they are able to offer to beings the perfect fruit of Buddhahood.

It is in this way that Shantideva praises the qualities of a healthy sense of self-worth that is the antidote to pride.

The third specific point, is now presented:

“Cultivating a feeling of self-confidence with regard to the afflictive emotions”

Stanza 60:

**So, when standing amidst a horde of disturbing emotions,
I shall hold my ground proudly, in a thousand ways,
And not be thrown off by the pack of disturbing emotions,
Like a lion with jackals and such.**

When one keeps the company of attractive people, desire will grow; when one is with hateful people, anger develops. When therefore we find ourselves in dangerous situations in which there are abundant stimulants for the afflictions, we should cultivate the antidotes to them with a proportionate intensity and we should stand up to them in a thousand ways.

For example, just as a lion cannot be injured by a fox, we should ensure that our minds are proof against the onslaught of the afflictions. It is said that the best practitioners use as the path the very object that gives rise to the afflictions.

Average practitioners apply the antidotes and hold their ground. By contrast, practitioners of a more basic capacity must abandon such objects and retreat.

Stanza 61:

**Just as a person would protect his eyes
When events of great danger actually arise.
Likewise, I'll never fall under the power of disturbing emotions,
When danger actually arises.**

However difficult may be the circumstances in which they find themselves, even when their lives are threatened, people will instinctively protect their eyes, their most cherished possession.

In the same way, and regardless of the dangers, we must protect ourselves from falling into the power of the afflictions of desire and anger.

Stanza 62:

**Let me be burned to death,
Or even have my head chopped off, that would be better.
But I'll never, in any way, bow to the enemy, disturbing emotions.
Likewise, in all situations, I shall never do anything other than what's fit.**

Therefore, we may be burned to death or decapitated with a sword (this is of comparatively minor importance), but at no time must we allow ourselves to bow and clash before our enemies, our defilements.

From the very first, we must take an earnest and determined pledge never to allow ourselves to be stained by defiled emotion. In every circumstance of time and place, we shall only act properly, and never in a manner that is inappropriate.

This stanza concludes the detailed explanation on the second force, **the force of steadfastness**.

Next week, we will continue with the presentation of the third force, **the force of Joy** evoked by Shantideva in the next four stanzas (63 to 66), followed by **the force of relinquishment** (Stanza 67).

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

