

Shantideva's
Bodhicaryâvatâra

བྱང་ཆུབ་སེམས་པའི་རྫོད་པ་ལ་འཇུག་པ།

Group Study with Venerable Lama Sangyay Tendzin

Session 67 - Saturday March 4, 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 engages a detailed explanation of three specific points.

Last week we went through the first two of these three points:

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

Next eight stanzas provided us a detailed explanation of the second point:

2. Cultivating a feeling of self-confidence with regard to one's abilities (Stanzas 52 to 59)

With stanzas 60 to 62, Shantideva presents the third point,

3. 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 stays in the company of appealing people, longing will develop; when one is with unbearable people, hatred develops. In general, when you find yourselves in threatening situations as in being exposed to various stimuli causing you conflicting emotions, you must cultivate the antidotes to them thoroughly and stand up to them as much as you possibly can.

For example, just as a lion cannot be injured by a fox, we should warrant that our mind stays immune against the incursion of the conflicting emotions.

In this way, average practitioners apply the antidotes and hold their ground.

By contrast, practitioners of a more basic capacity must abandon such objects and retreat, while for the best practitioners, the very object that gives rise to their afflictions dictates their path.

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 instinctively protect their eyes, their most cherished possession.

Similarly, regardless of the dangers, we must protect ourselves from losing control over the afflictions of longing and hatred. We are so much addicted to these that it requires great strength and determination to remain non-contrived by them.

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, says Shantideva, whether he may be burned to death or decapitated with a sword (the suddenness of which is a minor suffering), in any case, will he allow himself to bend and conflict before his enemies, the very conflicting emotions.

From the start, he takes a sincere and resolute pledge never to allow himself to be stained by defilement. Anywhere anytime, he proclaims, he will 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**.

From Stanzas 63 to 67, Shantideva gives us a brief presentation of the remaining two forces, **the force of Joy** (63 to 66) & **the force of relinquishment** (67). First, **the force of Joy**.

Stanza 63:

**Like someone wishing for happiness as the result of play,
Any positive actions a bodhisattva's engaged in,
He clings to those actions
And delights in those actions, never having enough.**

Just like young children delight in their games and do not expect any reward for what they do whether now or in the life to come. They want only the simple joy of playing, and never have enough of it.

This is exactly how Bodhisattvas must behave in whatever they do for the sake of others; perform acts of generosity and/or any of the other paramitas.

They must not expect any reward for what they do. Indeed, they should be devoted to their tasks with ever greater urge. They should never be satisfied but yield the most intense delight from what they do.

Stanza 64:

**Although people do actions for the sake of happiness,
It's not clear that they'll become happy or not.
But for a bodhisattva whose actions in fact bring happiness,
How can he be happy without doing those actions?**

In their endeavour for pleasure and contentment, worldly people strive strenuously in their jobbing activities. Yet success is in fact unpredictable.

How can one gain happiness if acting unwholesomely? How can one ultimately succeed if one fails to accomplish the virtuous deeds of the Bodhisattvas, such as generosity, discipline, and the like from which happiness derives? Unhappiness is their destiny in this and future lives.

Stanza 65:

**If there can never be enough desirable sensory objects,
Though they're like honey on a razor's edge,
How can there ever be enough ambrosia of positive actions,
Which have as their ripening (sweet) happiness and peace?**

There is little profit and even great danger in the enjoyment of the five sensual objects (གཞུགས་ - 'zug'- ལྷ་ - 'dra'- རྩི་ - 'dri'- རྩོ་ - 'ro' - རྩེག་ - 'reg', forms, sounds, scents and so forth).

Indeed, it is like licking honey on the edge of an extremely sharp razor.

We are attached to the ephemeral pleasure that comes from the concurrence of an object and its related consciousness. We crave for such enjoyment and want it to repeat again and again. It is just like drinking salty water; we never can quench our thirst from it.

But if our search for pleasure has no end, how can we ever have enough of the Bodhisattva's assignments? These are indeed like nectar, are of the greatest benefit, and are most friendly.

They cause us to accumulate merit and wisdom, bringing us to the fully ripened effect of the happiness in human and celestial realms and forward to the ultimate result of Buddhahood i.e., the state of peace free from pain and suffering.

In this way, our longing for virtue should never end unless we get fully satisfied.

Stanza 66:

**So, after completing a positive action,
I'll plunge into the action that's next, right then,
Like an elephant parched by the midday sun,
When encountering a pond, plunging into the water.**

Therefore, with a view to completing whatever aspect of the Bodhisattva's activities we have undertaken, we ought to be like elephants in the summer noontime sun; when tormented by heat and thirst, they catch sight of a cool lake. Without a moment's hesitation, they throw themselves into the water with the greatest pleasure.

Just like this, for the sake of ourselves and others, we should engage joyfully the practice of generosity and similar virtues.

This completes the explanation given by Shantideva on the force of Joy.
Next comes the comment on the fourth force, **the force of relinquishment.**

Stanza 67:

**But, following upon a decline in my strength,
I'll set my activity aside, to take up again.
And having completed it well, I shall leave it,
With thirst for the next and the next.**

If our strength is impaired by weakness, exhaustion, or illness, and we are unable to accomplish some activity, we should resolve to lay it aside for the time being, the better to resume it at some later stage.

And when the task we engaged is reaching completion, we should not rest on our achievement, thinking that we have done enough. Instead, we should move on, let all tasks that have been accomplished and look forward eagerly to doing even greater things.

With this brief explanation, there is no other comment on this force given by Shantideva. We now will engage the study of the two strengths that need to be applied while practicing the four forces that serve the purpose of enhancing diligence:

- The strength of earnest practice and,
- The strength of controlling body, speech, and mind.

The strength of earnest practice is presented in the next seven stanzas. (verses 68–74)

Stanza 68:

**Then, like engaging a sword in a duel
With a seasoned opponent,
I shall parry the disturbing emotions' thrusts,
And decisively stab my opponent, the disturbing emotions.**

With regard to the serious practice of carefulness, it is just as when seasoned fighters, confronting the swords of their enemies on the battleline, are skilled to avoid their weapons and crush them down instead.

In the same way, we must escape the sharp weapons of our enemies, the defilements. We must overcome and vanquish these foes so that they are rendered harmless.

Stanza 69:

**Just as someone, having dropped his sword in a duel,
Would snatch it up quickly, out of fear,
So, having dropped the sword of mindfulness,
I shall quickly snatch it up, mindful of the fears of the joyless realms.**

When it comes to the earnest practice of mindfulness, it is as when a soldier drops his sword in battle. He quickly grabs it again for fear of being killed.

In the same way, if are carried away by distraction or just become absent-minded and lose the weapon of mindfulness, in other words, if we forget to apply the antidote, we must quickly recover and strive to implement it, feeling the dread of falling under the power of the afflictions and the ensuing destiny to fall in the hell realms.

Stanza 70:

**Just as poison on (the blade of a sword, finding) blood as its carrier,
Spreads throughout the body,
Similarly, a fault, when finding an opening,
Spreads throughout the mind.**

When one is struck by a poisoned arrow, the venom, carried through the blood, seeps through the body with lethal effects.

In just the same way, when our senses are carried away toward their objects and when even a small affliction gets its chance to attack our minds, greater afflictions are able to spread through the mind and devastate the life of happy destinies.

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

