
What they are actually doing is contradicting the spiritual tradition – and the founder of that tradition – which they claim to follow. If you look at the founders of the world's major religions, their motivation and aspiration was to benefit and bring peace to humankind through their spiritual teachings. They taught solely to benefit other beings. Thus, if spiritual teachers or preachers teach with a self-centred motivation, this completely contradicts their traditions.

For example, as a follower of Lord Buddha, your duty is to spread the teaching of the Buddha, which are largely contained in what we call the 'Three Baskets' of scriptures. One basket of the scriptures mainly deals with the training or the practice of moral ethics. The next basket deals with the topic of cultivating single-pointed concentration. The third basket deals with metaphysical topics.

Therefore, the teachings of a follower of the Buddha should accord with the Three Baskets. These are also called 'inside teachings', in the sense that they are mainly concerned with mental development. Further, when teaching the Buddhadharma to others, your motivation should be as pure as possible. The purest motivation is that of wanting to wholeheartedly benefit other beings.

This verse also refers to how, apart from having the above-mentioned defects in their motivation and teachings, people who claim to be spiritual teachers can be cynical about or critical of other belief systems. This causes disharmony between different religious traditions.

We can also relate the meaning of this verse to ourselves, and see it as an instruction for our practice. It clearly points out that the most important thing we can do is TO maintain a positive state of mind. If we want to improve our behaviour, we need to first improve the thoughts that precede our actions. So, the best way to benefit and show care to other beings is to cultivate an altruistic attitude or the constant thought of benefiting other beings.

Shantideva advised that before we perform any action of speech or body, we should first check our intention. We may be just talking with someone or giving them advice, or moving our body to perform some action. Whatever we do, the force our speech and bodily movements is the mind. So, if we check the mind prior to speaking or doing something and notice some anger, obsessive desire and so forth, we should try to replace that negative mind with a positive state of mind before we act.

This process of checking our attitude depends on how much we understand about the effects of negative states of mind. For example, what happens when you act from a negative state of mind such as hatred or obsessive desire? Check up on what happens when you then talk with others or even try to advise them. Whatever action you do, you can just observe the faults that follow from actions motivated by a negative state of mind. This helps us gain a deeper understanding of the shortcomings of negative states of mind and the actions they trigger. Consequently, we will be more deeply motivated to get

rid of negative states of mind and their associated harmful actions.

This verse is also clearly warning us to make sure that our actions benefit others and don't harm them. We do this by making sure, for instance, that our speech is not deceptive, unpleasant, harsh or in any way hurtful to other beings. That includes not criticising others or putting them down. The practice we need to apply here is cultivating positive states of mind, which bring more peace and happiness to one's life. With such an outlook, you will benefit other beings, or at least refrain from harming them.

One of the benefits of studying texts such as this one is that they encourage you to investigate the link between your mind and your actions. Whether your state of mind is positive or negative will determine whether any ensuing actions are beneficial or harmful. The benefit of such study is that it gives rise to discriminating wisdom. This enables you to be clearer about which actions are worth doing, and which ones should be avoided or are potentially harmful.

To finish off the commentary on this verse, the text goes on to identify the main cause of all the faulty actions of the followers of all spiritual traditions. The main cause is holding the attitude of self-cherishing. As the next half of the verse says:

Trample him, trample him, dance on the head
Of this treacherous concept of selfish concern.
Tear out the heart of this self-centred butcher
Who slaughters our chance to gain final release.

That's all for teaching tonight. Now we will chant the Buddha's mantra seven times. Adopt a meditation posture again, and try to fully stabilise the mind by removing all distracting thoughts. Then as the chanting begins, try to focus the mind single-pointedly on the sound of the mantra.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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