
positive, will not be very beneficial. However if our mental attitude is positive – for example, an attitude of love and compassion and care for other beings – then our subsequent actions can be really beneficial to others; they will have a more positive impact. If our motivation is one of love and compassion and benefiting others, then even if externally we act aggressively towards others, our actions will be beneficial, and people will appreciate us despite any temporary inconvenience caused. For example, when someone is sick and has to have surgery, in that situation, the patient will be prepared to tolerate whatever pain and discomfort they have to go through, because they know it will be beneficial in the long run.

It is said that bodhisattvas are wise and skilful, in the sense that all the actions or deeds they perform are ultimately aimed at benefiting all other beings. The motivation of every action and deed they do is to benefit others. This attitude is incredibly effective and fulfils all the bodhisattvas' wishes.

When everything seems to go wrong

The next verse (verse 18) is about how bodhisattvas practise in situations where everything seems to go wrong:

Though you lack what you need and are constantly
disparaged,
Afflicted by dangerous sickness and spirits,
Without discouragement take on the misdeeds
And the pain of all living beings –
This is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

In this verse, we learn how bodhisattvas practise when they face many serious problems, for example, not finding material wealth or losing everything they have. They may also face other misfortunes, such as severe illness or being influenced by harmful spirits.

As we can see in this verse, in such situations, bodhisattvas will not lose their courage and motivation. They don't worry about the difficulties they face; they don't feel depressed or wallow in their problems. Rather, they think of all other beings facing the same kinds of difficulties and misfortune. They use their own situation to further understand how other beings undergoing the same misfortunes feel. They use their experience to strengthen their empathy and compassion because they can understand the hardship and pain that other beings experience.

So bodhisattvas maintain a positive frame of mind and courage even in the face of great hardships. In his *Bodhisattvas' Way of Life*, Shantideva lists the benefits of suffering. Normally, we don't talk about the benefits or qualities of suffering, because we regard suffering as something we don't want, But in his text, Shantideva says that suffering has some good qualities. For example, it helps suppress our pride and arrogance. When we think about it, pride usually arises when we become wealthy or well-educated, inflating our sense of self-importance. However, when everything in our life seems to be going wrong, we don't feel such pride.

Such positive thinking can help us take advantage of these adverse situations.

When we experience good fortune

Verse 19 says:

Though you become famous and many bow to you,
And you gain riches to equal Vaishravana's,
See that worldly fortune is without essence,
And be unconceited –
This is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

This verse relates to what to do when we are endowed with worldly riches, such as material wealth, reputation, skills, knowledge, beauty and power. It says here that when bodhisattvas are endowed with such riches, their practice is to see their *worldly fortune* as being *without essence*, so they will not be conceited. Even though he or she may have wealth equal to Vaishravana's – who is the Guardian King of the North, a god of wealth – the bodhisattva recognises all such worldly riches and excellences as impermanent and without essence; they are transient and can easily disappear like lightning in the sky. By regarding their wealth and excellent qualities in this way, bodhisattvas will not feel any sense of pride.

While what we are studying here relates to the practices of bodhisattvas, we can also apply the advice to our own lives. These verses remind us that when we face various difficulties and problems in our life, it's important not to feel discouraged and depressed. On the other hand, if we are successful, or become wealthy or educated, we may feel an inflated sense of pride, which in turn can make us feel discontented and worried about what we have. We may think that if we don't acquire more wealth and qualities, someone else may have more than us. We may also look down on, and criticise, those who are less wealthy or poorer than us.

If we don't control our state of mind in such situations, we may engage in negative actions arising from disturbed states of mind, such as pride or competitiveness. Therefore, we should understand from this advice that there is no reason for us to feel proud of our success.

We won't go through verse 20 tonight, which relates how bodhisattvas practise in those provocative situations where others appear as their enemies.

This weekend is the Easter long weekend, so we will have a week's break and there will be no teaching next Wednesday. I wish you all a happy Easter, and hope you all have happy Easter celebrations with your family and friends. Thank you.

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