

criticising a bodhisattva means you will face very severe karmic consequences.

We have to be careful about judging other beings on the basis of their external appearances, conduct and behaviour. Their external deeds and behaviour do not necessarily reflect who they really are. Some bodhisattvas, siddhas and practitioners can externally look as if they are just any other ordinary beings. The famous yogi Milarepa was regarded as insane by many other people in his time. However, from the perspective of Milarepa, the world is insane. Therefore we are reminded here not to criticise others on the basis of how they look and what others do to us externally.

I heard a story about a lama who was doing outstandingly well with his studies and practices, and his neighbour who didn't pay much attention to his studies and didn't look like he did any practices. One day, when an old monk who lived nearby became very ill, and the monk who wasn't very academic went to look after the old monk and cared for him for a long, long time. The academic monk who looked down on his neighbour was surprised and quite shocked at the way his neighbour looked after and took care of the old monk. He then realised that it was he who was second-rate, as there was no way that he could look after the old monk in that way. There are so many real stories that show who the real practitioners are.

When it comes to the qualities of people we can use the analogy of fruit. Some fruits externally appear to be ripe but are unripe inside, and there are others that are the opposite. They are ripe inside although there is no clue to this from its external appearance. People are the same. What we see externally does not show who they really are.

The Buddha once said, 'I and those who are like me can make an accurate judgement about another being, but in general making judgements about another person will only be the cause of for your own virtues to decline.' From this we can understand that to fully know another being you have to be a buddha yourself, otherwise, we can easily make a mistake when we make judgements about another being. The result of that only diminishes our virtue and merit.

Gyaltsab Rinpoche, who was one of Tsongkhapa's principal disciples, said that as we do not know who is a noble person and who is not, criticising others is like burning our hands by putting them in ashes that are covering a fire underneath. That is the danger we face when we criticise others.

One of the reasons why criticising bodhisattvas is a very great fault is that bodhisattvas have devoted all their actions of body, speech and mind over their entire life to benefiting all sentient beings. They literally exemplify one who represents all sentient beings. So criticising bodhisattvas is a very grave error that will destroy the merit we have accumulated over many lifetimes.

Destroying virtue by anger does not necessarily mean that the virtue will be nullified and completely gone and extinguished. It can also mean that it causes the result of our virtues to be delayed. For example, we may be close to gaining sudden realisation on our spiritual path in this lifetime, but due to the force of our anger, that realisation may be deferred until future lives.

The greater the merit of the person who is the object of our anger the greater the destruction of our virtue. In the same way, when we engage virtuously with another, the greater their merit the more merit we will accumulate.

It is said that rejoicing in the merit of other beings is a great way of multiplying our own merit and virtues. Of course, if we rejoice in the merit of someone who is a great being and who has an infinite amount of merit, then we will accumulate a greater amount of merit. So, rejoicing and admiring the virtues and actions of others is a great way of increasing one's virtues. Tsongkhapa said that rejoicing is a cause for the accumulation of great merit with little effort or exertion.

That completes the second of the four dharmas of the four trainings.

Abandoning attachment to the households of benefactors

The third one is abandoning attachment to the households of benefactors. *The Thirty-Seven Practices of Bodhisattvas* says in verse 33:

Reward and respect cause us to quarrel
And make hearing, thinking and meditation decline
For this reason give up attachment to
The households of friends, relations and benefactors
This is the practice of Bodhisattvas

This verse has particular relevance to lamas and ordinary monks and nuns or even whole monasteries who depend on the support of benefactors for their day-to-day needs. If they are not careful, disputes and fights over these benefactors may arise, as the lamas and monks worry that about other monks stealing their benefactors. Monasteries can also feel that if they don't take care other monasteries may steal their benefactors. This can bring much damage not just because of the loss of their benefactors but, most importantly, the loss of their reputation as a centre for learning and practice. The bottom line is, they are fighting with each other because they are attached to their benefactors and possessions and a worldly reputation. The instructions in this verse warn of the dangers of this.

The verse is saying that the monks and nuns and indeed whole monasteries should not be overly concerned with wealth and possessions and their living conditions. The implication is that they should not be attached to material wealth and possessions. That is not to say that monasteries do not need to be supported or that monasteries do not need to be financed to ensure good material conditions. Supporting monasteries can be of great benefit to the practice of the Sangha community as well as to the local community or society in general. For example, during this pandemic, a lot of monasteries in India have reached out to support the local Tibetan and Indian communities who are experiencing great hardship. The monasteries have been able to do make these huge contributions to the local communities because of the support they receive from their benefactors.

We will end the teaching for tonight here.

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