
Verse 4: May I Cherish This Precious Treasure

*Whenever I see ill-natured people,
Or those overwhelmed by heavy misdeeds or suffering,
I will cherish them as something rare,
As though I'd found a priceless treasure.*

Great numbers of beings, who have a negative disposition or an unpleasant character, and who are constantly oppressed by negative habits and sufferings, accumulate bad karma endlessly, endangering both themselves and others. When I, as a practitioner, meet such beings, may I consider them as precious as a rare treasure, so that they may become a special object of the patience practice.

This instruction is exceedingly precious. If a Mahayana practitioner has not fully developed such a merit, attaining Buddhahood in a single lifetime is impossible, and even the ordinary worldly accomplishments will be virtually out of reach. Therefore, we should value highly, this marvelous pith instruction of the Mahayana practice.

a. Ill-natured people in degenerate time

In this degenerate time, most sentient beings seem to be of a very negative disposition: wicked, depraved, rough, and unreasonable. Their continuum is filled with unwholesome understandings, bad thoughts, and wrong views. Regardless of this, we must determine the correct way to treat them. Obviously, it is not right if we respond to the depraved dispositions of these beings with contempt and aversion and remain aloof from them. For detailed elaborations on these instructions, you may refer to *The Way of the Bodhisattva*.

On the level of intrinsic nature and ultimate truth, sentient beings and the Buddha are exactly the same; but in terms of manifest appearance, sentient beings are oppressed by afflictive emotions, and enjoy no freedom of either their body or their mind, which explains why they have acquired such negative dispositions. In other words, because sentient beings have accumulated so much negative karma in the countless eons of their previous lives, and are now so heavily oppressed by this karma or these misdeeds that they are devoid of freedom, and thus, have further developed extreme and terrible dispositions.

Nevertheless, we must be convinced that most sentient beings, especially those who have -their trust in the Buddha, or those who are the practitioners of Buddha-dharma, would like to conquer their own mental afflictions, yet, influenced by the force of their karma, although they have not been able to act on this beautiful wish. As an example, people who are frequently seized by strong anger, often feel deeply the suffering caused by this anger. When their anger subsides, they feel anguish, and struggle in their mind, stung by a strong sense of remorse. They may think, "Next time, I will not behave like this." However, the next time that they encounter a situation that provokes them, history repeats itself, and thus, again and again, they remain greatly and endlessly tortured by such afflictions.

Being laden with karma accumulated since beginningless time, if these sentient beings

cannot sever these afflictions at their root in the course of this life through enthusiastic perseverance and practice, their next life will be one that is even more pathetic, more miserable, and one in which they have even less freedom. Eventually, they will fall into three lower realms and suffer countless, endless, and unfathomable misery.

Particularly in this day and age, the majority of beings, due to a lack of freedom in their bodies and minds, tend to do harmful deeds to other living beings. These actions may take place at any time, in any place and often without any reason. We practitioners, if our mental afflictions have not yet been removed, are still mortals that can be affected by external conditions. Inevitably, we will have to face harm from evil beings, and endure pain and anxiety. How should we, then, react to such situations? We should react using the key instructions given here. This verse has some resemblance to the second instructions of this text, but this one provides us with further illustrations on the pith instruction of deeper practice.

b. Cherish them as something rare

Although there are all kinds of sentient beings who may have strong attachments, strong anger, strong ignorance, strong arrogance, or strong doubt, we cannot let aversion or aloofness towards them arise within ourselves. Actually, it is impossible for us not to interact with them, which has been explained in the first verse of this text. And in *The Thirty-Seven Practices of a Bodhisattva*, it is also mentioned that:

*For a bodhisattva who desires the joys of virtue,
All who harm him are like a precious treasure.
Therefore, to cultivate patience toward all,
Without resentment, is the practice of a bodhisattva.*

Whenever sentient beings harm us, we should give rise neither to aversion nor to anger, on the contrary, we should receive them as a great jeweled treasure. This instruction is easier said than done. It is very difficult to even contemplate this, let alone to carry it out in action. However, we must first understand the reason behind, and progressively learn how to put it into practice. All things are difficult before they are easy. Habits become second nature by getting used to them, little by little. Before long, we begin to act in these ways naturally. For instance, when we first tried to learn to use a computer, we might have been confused by its complicated operating procedures, but once we grew skillful on it, using a computer became a convenient way to do our work. When we begin to practice this spiritual instruction, we may also feel that it is difficult to become accustomed to. But if we keep trying, with the blessing of our guru combined with our own constant practice, we will finally find ourselves capable of applying it freely in our association with different kinds of people.

As was said by Shantideva: “Even if I cannot develop compassion towards all such people, who, through the arousal of disturbing emotions, set out to try to kill me, and so forth, I should at least refrain from being angry.” And once, Venerable Dromtonpa asked Lord Atisha: “If people beat me, curse me, or try to kill me, what should I do?” To this, Lord Atisha replied in a way that was fairly close in its meaning to Thogme Zangpo’s answer to this same question,

*If, in return for not the slightest wrong of mine,
Someone were to cut off even my very head,*

*Through the power of compassion to take all his negative actions
Upon myself is the practice of a bodhisattva.*

c. An inspiring example of Garcho Rinpoche

There was a well-renowned lama called Garcho Rinpoche in Qinghai Province, who was persecuted during the Cultural Revolution. Every time he was persecuted, he would make the aspiration in his heart like this: “Today, may I practice patience for the sake of all sentient beings.” Thus he exhibited “-excellence in motivation”. During the persecution, when people were beating him, insulting him, or slandering him, he rested in a state of emptiness, free of conceptualization, and practiced the patience paramita. This was truly “excellence in action”. And when the persecution was over temporarily, he dedicated, quietly: “By the virtue of this practice of patience, may all those who have beaten me and cursed me, and all sentient beings, obtain Buddhahood.” This again, was “excellence in dedication”.

When the Cultural Revolution was over, there was a freer political environment for religious beliefs. Many of the people who had participated in the lama's persecution went to see Garcho Rinpoche to confess and repent. However, he always replied leniently: “You have nothing to confess. Without you, I would not have been able to practice the paramita of patience, and that was a supreme convenience. Therefore, I do not hate you at all. Instead, I owe each of you gratitude. So, please, forget about the confession!” This was the unique and virtuous deed of a Mahayana Bodhisattva!

It is indeed quite true that those who try to harm us are like a wish-fulfilling jewel, for they are the indispensable assisting factors for attaining Buddhahood. The Buddha has said that only those who have accomplished patience can become true Bodhisattvas. This is the standard being set for Mahayana practitioners, no matter whether it is in *The Way of the Bodhisattva*, *The Thirty-Seven Practices of a Bodhisattva*, or in this text, *Eight Verses for Training the Mind*. Therefore, when facing a bad person, we should repay their kindness with gratitude, just as we did to our precious and kind lama. For we Mahayana practitioners, foes are the inexhaustible treasures that help us perfect the merit of the patience paramita. So we really ought to cherish them constantly, as a precious treasure rarely found.