

The Way of the Bodhisattva

Chapter 4: Carefulness

- Chapters 4 (on carefulness) and 5 (on vigilant introspection) address the paramita of *ethical discipline*
- Emphasis is given to the importance of carefulness, mindfulness, and vigilant introspection (rather than precepts and vows, per se) in cultivating virtue
- Shantideva encourages us to maintain bodhicitta, consider the difficulty of escaping lower realms, and ponder the defects of negative emotions
- Reflecting on the precious opportunity afforded by a human life helps us to cultivate carefulness

*This is why Lord Buddha has declared
That like a turtle that perchance can place
Its head within a yoke adrift upon a shoreless sea,
This human birth is difficult to find! (4:20)*

Chapter 5: Vigilant Introspection

- Inner watchfulness involves the **principle of adopting and rejecting**
 - Repeatedly examining – at all times and in all situations – whether our physical, verbal, and mental behaviors are positive, negative, or neutral
- The elephant is used as a metaphor for the wandering mind and a rope is used as a metaphor for mindfulness

*Wandering where it will, the elephant of mind,
Will bring us down to the pains of deepest hell.
No worldly beast, however wild,
Could bring upon us such calamities. (5:2)*

*If, with mindfulness' rope,
The elephant of the mind is tethered all around,
Our fears will come to nothing,
Every virtue drops into our hands. (5:3)*

- We cannot eliminate all of the potential objects of anger in the world, but through the cultivation of patience, we can subdue and overcome our anger

*To cover all the earth with sheets of hide –
Where could such amounts of skin be found?
But simply wrap some leather round your feet,
And it's as if the whole earth has been covered! (5:13)*

*Likewise, we can never take
And turn aside the outer course of things.
But only seize and discipline the mind itself,
And what else is there remaining to be curbed? (5:14)*

- Shantideva advises us to:
 - Refrain from pursuing what attracts us
 - Refrain from performing negative actions toward what repels us

*When the urge arises in the mind
To feelings of desire or wrathful hate,
Do not act! Be silent, do not speak!
And like a log of wood be sure to stay. (5.48)*

Chapter 6: Patience

- *Patience* is the third paramita; anger is the antithesis of patience
- In a single moment of anger, we can extinguish our virtue (and perhaps a longstanding relationship)

*Good works gathered in a thousand ages,
Such as deeds of generosity,
Or offerings to the blissful ones
A single flash of anger shatters them. (6.1)*

- Shantideva encourages us to serenely reflect on problems and potential solutions

*If there is a remedy when trouble strikes,
What reason is there for despondency?
And if there is no help for it,
What use is there in being sad? (6:10)*

- People who harm us are under the control of confusion and negative emotions, which arise due to causes and conditions (dependent arising); therefore, we should respond to them with compassion

*If those who are like wanton children
Are by nature prone to injure others,
What point is there in being angry –
Like resenting fire for its heat? (6:39)*

*Although indeed it is the stick that hurts me,
I am angry at the one who yields it, striking me.
But he is driven and impelled by anger –
So it is his wrath I should resent. (6:41)*

- We should appreciate and value seeming “enemies” because they help us to develop patience

*So like a treasure found at home,
Enriching me without fatigue,
All enemies are helpers in my bodhisattva work
And therefore they should be a joy to me. (6.107)*

Chapter 7: Diligence

- *Diligence* is the fourth paramita

- The opposite of diligence is *laziness*, of which there are three types
 1. Orientation toward comfort and indolence
 2. Distraction; being caught up in busyness
 3. Discouragement, self-doubt, or self-depreciation
- We should be realistic about our current abilities, trusting that our bodhicitta and virtue will develop progressively – “step-by step” – if we persevere in our study, contemplation, and practice

*Our guide instructs us to begin
By giving food or other little charities,
That later, step-by-step, the habit once acquired,
We may be able to donate our very flesh. (7.25)*

- Diligence involves developing a sense of joy, courage, and heroic pride with regard to our virtue and ability to transform afflictive emotions

*For, mounted on the horse of bodhicitta,
That puts to flight all mournful weariness,
Who could ever be dejected,
Riding such a steed from joy to joy? (7.30)*

Chapter 8: Meditative Concentration

- *Meditation* is the fifth paramita
- The eighth chapter includes meditations on *equalizing and exchanging self and other*
 - These (relative bodhicitta) meditations have influenced practice in the *lojong* (mind training) tradition of Tibetan Buddhism
 - The Eight Verses for Training the Mind, by Langri Tangpa (1054 -1123)
 - The Seven Points of Mind Training, by Chekawa Yeshe Dorje (1101-1175)
 - The Thirty-seven Practices of a Bodhisattva, by Ngulchu Thogme (1297 - 1371)
 - **Equalizing Self and Other** (verses 8:90 – 8:110)
 - Contemplate that all beings are equal in wanting:
 1. Happiness and the roots of happiness
 2. Freedom from suffering and the roots of suffering
 - When “I” and “other” are realized to be selfless (mere mental imputations), an attitude of wanting to care for others as oneself will naturally arise

*The hand and other limbs are many and distinct,
But all are one - one body to be kept and guarded.
Likewise, different beings in their joys and sorrows,
Are, like me, all one in wanting happiness. (8:91)*

*Since I and other beings both,
In wanting happiness, are equal and alike,
What difference is there to distinguish us,
That I should strive to have my bliss alone? (8.95)*

*Since I and other beings both,
In wanting happiness, are equal and alike,
What difference is there to distinguish us,
That I should save myself and not the other? (8:96)*

*Those whose minds are practiced in this way,
Whose happiness it is to soothe the pain of others,
Will venture in the hell of unremitting agony,
As swans sweep down on a lotus lake. (8.107)*

– **Exchanging Self and Other** (verses 8:111 – 8:154)

- This meditation involves imagining yourself in another person’s position in order to (a) appreciate how they feel and (b) understand how they might see and experience you:
 1. Taking an *inferior* person’s perspective, with a sense of envy and jealousy
 2. Taking an *equal* person’s perspective, with a sense of rivalry and competition
 3. Taking a *superior* person’s perspective, with a sense of pride and condescension
- Having identified with these perspectives, compassion arises when we realize that: (a) others suffer when they experience these emotions; and that (b) we, too, have experienced these negative emotions

*Those desiring speedily to be
A refuge for themselves and other beings
Should interchange the terms of “I” and “other,”
And thus embrace a sacred mystery. (8.120)*

*All the joy the world contains
Has come through wishing happiness for others.
All the misery the world contains
Has come through wanting pleasure for oneself. (8.129)*

*Take others – lower, higher, equal, – as yourself,
Identify yourself as “other.”
Then, without another thought,
Experience envy, pride, rivalry. (8.140)*

Chapter 9: Wisdom

- *Wisdom* is the sixth paramita
- The famous wisdom chapter is a defense of the **Madhyamika Prasangika** approach, which systematically refutes the philosophical critiques of Hindu and other Buddhist schools
 - This complex chapter has sometimes been treated as stand-alone topic of study and teaching
- *Madhyamika Prasangika* proponents refute the four extremes of (a) existence, (b) nonexistence, (c) both existence and nonexistence, and (d) neither existence nor nonexistence
 - The true status of phenomena is beyond conceptual thought and verbal expression

- Shantideva was purported to begin rising into the air when he spoke the following verse:

*When real and nonreal both
Are absent from before the mind,
Nothing else remains for the mind to do
But rest in perfect peace, from concepts free. (9.34)*

Chapter 10: Dedication

- The tenth and final chapter of the Way of the Bodhisattva emphasizes lovingly dedicating our virtue and positive actions (i.e., accumulated merit) to benefit others
- His Holiness the Dalai Lama often recites his favorite verse from this text as a simple prayer:

*And now as long as space endures,
As long as there are beings to be found,
May I continue likewise to remain
To drive away the sorrows of the world. (10.55)*

Primary Resources:

Padmakara Translation Group. *The Way of the Bodhisattva*. Boston & London: Shambhala Publications, 1997 edition and the revised 2008 edition.

Kunzang Pelden. *The Nectar of Manjushri's Speech: A Detailed Commentary on Shantideva's Way of a Bodhisattva*. Boston & London: Shambhala Publications, 2007.

Secondary Resources:

Edelglass, William. *The Bodhisattva Path of Wisdom and Compassion*. Barre Center for Buddhist Studies, Barre, MA, 5/29 – 5/31/15.

Acharya Lhakpa Tshering. *The Way of the Bodhisattva by Shantideva*. Acharya Lhakpa Tshering. Nalandabodhi Connecticut, Bloomfield, CT, 8/4/13 – 9/29/13 (eight sessions).