

## Dharma Talk 06/12/2022 Vigilant Introspection

### Shantideva – Bodhichryavatara, or the Way of the Bodhisattva

#### Chapter 5 Vigilant Introspection

Good morning, how are you all doing? I hope you are well and that life is good. I also hope you had a chance to see the almost full moon last night. So beautiful. For me, the real magic happened when clouds moved in front of the moon and just a patch of clouds was lit up. The full moon turns me sentimental every time I see it. All beings who look up – they all see the same moon.

I had a hard time writing this talk. I distracted myself with Nalanda, Nagarjuna, a very interesting article why Zen is not actually Buddhism, and so on. It was like sitting zazen and the mind wanders and needs to be recalled every minute.

I don't mind coming back to Shantideva, though. It is one of my favorite Buddhist books. And there is another kind of trouble, because I REALLY love this book and I ended up reading instead of writing. Reading and re-reading I continue to dive deeper into different facets of the Way of the Bodhisattva.

One way that side-tracked me a lot this time was awe how many different teachings Buddhism offers. And how each one, followed to the end, will arrive at the same destination. Hearing the Buddha's words, following the paramitas, or just one of them. The compassion path or the way of emptiness. All these ways to open oneself to reality...

But back to Shantideva and bodhichitta.

Shantideva was born a prince in 8th century India. However, he left the night before he was to take the throne (there are various stories why he did that). He eventually arrived at Nalanda University, which was the largest Buddhist University in India at that time. His fellow students did not like him much and came up with a plot to embarrass him in hopes that he would leave Nalanda: they asked him to give a talk to the entire university. Shantideva accepted the challenge. He then took the seat and taught the Bodhicharyavatara.

It is usually organized into 3 sections: How to generate, raise and strengthen bodhichitta. Bodhi is awakening/enlightenment. Chitta stands for heart/mind. Bodhichitta is the wish to attain complete enlightenment in order to be of benefit to all sentient. One who has bodhichitta as the primary motivation for all activities is called a bodhisattva. Way of the Bodhisattva is practical optimism. I also want to make very clear that bodhichitta does not include idiot compassion that enables people. Nor does it include the hallmark flavored pity.

I now recognize that I should have started, like Shantideva did, in the beginning, instead of my favorite chapter 6 on patience. Just like the paramitas build on each other, the chapters in the Way of the Bodhisattva build on each other. Elements are grounded and built on previous chapters. It is a very fun weaving and I still don't quite see the shape of it yet.

But now, let us start with Shantideva's words on Vigilant Introspection.

5.1

Those who wish to keep the trainings  
Must with perfect self-possession guard their minds.  
Without this guard upon the mind,  
The trainings cannot be preserved.

The issue in this chapter is the mind itself. and the emotions arising in it. We need to set ourselves the simple but difficult task: to become aware how thoughts arise and develop. Vigilant introspection without having a strangle-hold on the mind: For just as much as the mind is the source of suffering, anger, aggression, delusion, it is the wellspring of joy, compassion, and bodhichitta.

I mentioned earlier the inter-weaving of different traditions. During one of our Samish retreats we talked briefly about the twelve-fold chain of causation and when and where we have the best opportunity to break it. It might interest you to investigate that a bit further in conjunction with this teaching.

5.3

If with mindfulness' rope,  
The elephant of mind is tethered all around  
Our fears will come to nothing  
Every virtue drop into our hands.

If I was to write that stanza, I would not tie up the elephant. I would make friends with him and train him so that he and I would both hold on to a silken thread and walk together. Don't get me wrong, I'm not editing J but that is the picture in my mind!

5.4

Tigers lions elephants and bears  
Snakes and every hostile foe  
Those who guard the prisoners in hell,  
All ghosts and ghouls and every evil phantom,

## 5.5

By simple binding of this mind alone,

All these things are likewise bound.

By simple binding of this mind alone,

All these things are likewise tamed.

Norman Fischer, the guiding teacher of our community made a great comment to this verse. He said that tigers and snakes and so on were a reality for monks in India at Shantideva's time. So how can you bind and tame them with your mind? "You'll still get eaten but ... you'll be in great spiritual condition. The REAL suffering is our fear and confusion."

Taming the mind takes time. Through good and bad moods, monkey mind jumping from thought to thought, meditation period after period, upset, without "gaining mind." Training the mind to not wander off or pursue every thought with a vengeance is called mindfulness. Mindfulness brings us back to the present moment, to our breath, the sensation of walking while we walk and sitting while we sit, the warmth of a tea cup in our hands ... I don't know about you. Me - I get distracted. I come back. I get distracted. I come back. My meditation at times appears to be discursive thought rudely interrupted by short gaps of meditation. I get distracted. I come back.

## 5.6

For all anxiety and fear,

All sufferings in boundless measure,

Their source and wellspring is the mind itself,

Thus the Truthful One has said.

Shantideva does one of his fine turns: first he does seem to agree with our conceptual thinking, but then with one sentence he twists our reality: For all anxiety and fear, All sufferings in boundless measure, Their source and wellspring is the mind itself ... It is the mind that turns either information or absence of information into fear. I remember, when I was a kid, I was out hiking in the forest by myself. There was a strange noise, like a large animal stomping through the dried leaves. I was full of fear. Well, even then I was not too bright. And when the noise did not come closer I decided to go look. And there it was, a small brown bird scratching around in the leaves to find bugs.... The fear was in my mind.

In the following verses (5.9-5.17) Shantideva addresses the six paramitas: generosity, discipline, patience, enthusiasm, meditation and wisdom. He describes the role of our minds when we practice the paramitas. Following the paramitas is activity. Letting go of

self-clinging and raising bodhichitta does change following the paramitas to enlightened activity.

5.12

The hostile multitudes are vast as space

What chance is there that all should be subdued?

Let but this angry mind be overthrown

And every foe is then and there destroyed.

This is the perfect antidote to aggression. Also, it is reference to the paramita of patience. Patience is the subject of the following chapter. The next verse seems to be one of the most famous ones:

5.13

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 world had been covered.

5.14

Likewise, we can never take

And turn the outer course of things.

But only seize and discipline the mind itself,

And what is there remaining to be curbed?

This ends the opening argument of the chapter. The question is: Do we buy the premise? Do we accept the argument for guarding the mind?

Shantideva compares our mind with an open wound or broken bones that we protect in unruly company. Norman in his talk called it the "beginningless karmic wound." We can be in a beautiful place, with friends, surrounded by comfort, but if our mind is suffering everything turns sour. To me, Shantideva makes a strong case for guarding the mind.

He continues 5.24: "The mind when cramped by ignorance is impotent and cannot do it's work." Viewed from the perspective of bodhichitta our deepest ignorance is dualistic perception, the illusion of self and other, subject and object. The misperception of separateness causes the aggression and conflict that pervades "what human is."

## 5.27 Lack of vigilance is like a thief

Who slinks behind when mindfulness abates.  
And all the merit we have gathered in  
He steals ...

Shantideva asks us to use mindfulness, staying in a teacher's company, living like you are in the Buddha's company (great thought!), being the guardian of the world. We should aim to be constantly aware of our condition:

5.34 If at the outset, when I check my mind,  
I find within some fault or insufficiency,  
I'll stay unmoving like a log,  
In self-possession and determination.

This starts one of my favorite phrases which will show up several times in this chapter "to remain like a log." Now Shantideva describes how one should act "never for an instant to be distracted." But then, right after he says that "the rules of discipline may be suspended" in times of generosity and celebration. One important part of bodhichitta is to remain open and not to get stuck. Not even in perfection. Especially not in perfection. Perfect conduct for the sake of perfect conduct means being stuck. Perfect conduct coming from an open, warm heart to help others may look the same, but I would call it unstuck anyway.

Oh, and Shantideva is a great advocate for mono-tasking

5.43 When something has been planned and started on,  
Attention should not drift to other things.  
With thoughts fixed on the chosen target,  
That and that alone should be pursued.

And if I had listened to this advice I would have been able to write down this talk with enough editing time to fit the whole chapter into one talk. However, this way you only get about half of Shantideva's vigilant introspection today!

## Definitions

Twelve-fold chain of causation (short version :-)

Also, twelve nidanas or twelve-linked chain of dependent origination. An early doctrine of Buddhism showing the causal relationship between ignorance and suffering. The Sanskrit word nidana means cause or cause of existence. Shakyamuni is said to have taught the twelve-linked chain of causation in answer to the question of why people have to experience the sufferings of aging and death. Each link in the chain is a cause that leads to the next. The first link in the chain is ignorance (Skt avidya ), which gives rise to (2) action (samskara) (also, volition or karmic action); (3) action causes

consciousness (vijñāna), or the function to discern; (4) consciousness causes name and form (nāma-rūpa), or spiritual and material objects of discernment; (5) name and form cause the six sense organs (śaḍ-āyatana); (6) the six sense organs cause contact (sparśa); (7) contact causes sensation (vedāna); (8) sensation causes desire (trishṇā); (9) desire causes attachment (upādāna); (10) attachment causes existence (bhava); (11) existence causes birth (jāti); and (12) birth causes aging and death (jara-maraṇa). The twelve-linked chain of causation is seen in two ways: the way of transmigration and the way of emancipation. From the viewpoint of the way of transmigration, ignorance gives rise to action, action causes consciousness, etc.; finally, birth causes aging and death as explained above. Thus one is caught in the cycle of delusion and suffering. On the other hand, from the viewpoint of the way of emancipation, if ignorance is wiped out, so is action; if action is wiped out, so is consciousness, etc.; finally, if birth is wiped out, so are aging and suffering. In short, if one eliminates ignorance, which is the source of suffering, one becomes free from the cycle of delusion and suffering, or attains nirvāna. The Great Commentary on the Abhidharma, a text of the Sarvastivāda school, views the twelve-linked chain of causation as operating over the three existences of life, meaning one's past, present, and future existences. (1) Ignorance and (2) action are together interpreted as the causes created in a past life; (3) consciousness through (7) sensation, as the effects manifest in the present life; (8) desire through (10) existence, as the causes created in the present life; and (11) birth and (12) aging and death, as the effects manifest in the next life. Aging and death in this life are thus the results of causes formed in a previous life.

### The six paramitas

In Mahayana Buddhism, the Lotus Sutra (Saddharmapundarika), lists the Six Perfections as (original terms in Sanskrit):

1. Dāna paramita: generosity, giving of oneself (in Chinese, "檀 越 施 舍"; in Wylie Tibetan, sbyin pa)
2. Śīla paramita : virtue, morality, discipline, proper conduct (尸 罗 持 戒; tshul khriṃs)
3. Kṣānti (kṣhanti) paramita : patience, tolerance, forbearance, acceptance, endurance (羼 提 忍 辱 行, bzod pa)
4. Vīrya paramita : energy, diligence, vigour, effort (勇 健 行, brtan 'grus)
5. Dhyāna paramita : one-pointed concentration, contemplation (禅 定 行, bsam gtan)
6. Prajñā paramita : wisdom, insight (智 慧 行, shes rab)

In the Ten Stages (Dasabhumika) Sutra, four more Paramitas are listed:

7. Upāya paramita: skillful means

8. Praṇidhāna (pranidhana) paramita: vow, resolution, aspiration, determination

Bala paramita: spiritual power

9. Jñāna paramita: knowledge

10. Bodhicitta

Bodhicitta (Ch. 禪願, Rś, 佛udixin, Jp. bodaishin, Tibetan jang chub sem, Mongolian бодь цэтрэл) is the wish to attain complete enlightenment in order to be of benefit to all sentient beings -- beings who are trapped in cyclic existence (samsāra) and have not yet reached Buddhahood. One who has bodhicitta as the primary motivation for all of their activities is called a bodhisattva.

Etymologically, the word is a combination of the Sanskrit words bodhi and citta. Bodhi means 'awakening', or 'enlightenment'. Citta may be translated as 'mind' or 'spirit'. Bodhicitta can therefore be translated as 'mind of enlightenment' or 'spirit of awakening'. Bodhicitta may also be defined as the 'Union of Compassion and Wisdom'. While the Compassion and Wisdom aspects of Bodhicitta are actually highly dependent on each other, in the Mahāyanā tradition they are often referred to as:

Relative Bodhicitta, in which the practitioner works for the good of all beings as if it were his own. Absolute, or ultimate, Bodhicitta, which refers to the wisdom of shunyata (śūnyatā, a Sanskrit term often translated as 'emptiness'). The concept of "śūnyatā" in Buddhist thought does not refer simply to nothingness, but refers, loosely, to freedom from attachments (particularly attachment to the idea of a static "self") and fixed ideas about the world and how it should be. The classic text on śūnyatā is the Prajñāpāramitā Hṛdaya Sūtra, a discourse of the Buddha commonly referred to as the "Heart Sūtra."

So, the term bodhicitta in its most complete sense would combine both:

- the arising of spontaneous and limitless compassion for all sentient beings, and
- the falling away of the attachment to the illusion of an inherently existent "self."

Some bodhicitta practices emphasize the absolute (e.g. vipaśyanā); others emphasize the relative (e.g. metta), but both aspects are essential to develop on the path to enlightenment. The Relative without the Absolute can degenerate into pity and sentimentality while the Absolute without the Relative can lead to nihilism and lack of desire to engage other sentient beings for their benefit. The cultivation of both the relative and absolute aspects of Bodhicitta is an important part of all Mahāyāna practices, including in particular the Tibetan Mind Training practices of tonglen and lojong.