

TIBETAN BUDDHISM CENTER FOR WORLD PEACE
San Antonio, Texas

**Shantideva's *Bodhicharyavata*, The Way of the Bodhisattva
Chapters 4 and 5: "Carefulness" and "Vigilant Introspection"**

The following consists of edited and modified excerpts transcribed from a series of talks about the Bodhicharyavatara given by Wulstan Fletcher of the Padmakara Translation Group, presented by the Tsadra Foundation & Shambhala Publications

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Geshe Nima requested we study Shantideva's text following his two month teaching residency at the TBCWP between November 2022 and January 2023.

Recap of the first three chapters

1. Shantideva's *Bodhicharyavatara* (*The Way of the Bodhisattva*) is a key text of Buddhism of the Great Vehicle, or *Mahayana*. We've discussed the first three chapters of this text in which Shantideva presents the benefits and excellence of bodhicitta—the awakened heart-mind, or the mind of enlightenment. Bodhicitta is essentially the wish to gain enlightenment, Buddhahood, for the sake of all beings. It's not just a question of finding happiness for oneself in the ordinary sense of the word, either in this life or a future life. And it's not the same as wishing to be liberated from samsara for oneself.

2. It arises from a feeling of compassion towards the suffering of all beings and an awareness that in our present state, we can do little to actually help them. Therefore the essence of bodhicitta is, to be precise, the aspiration and the decision to train on the path until one completes the highest goal of the omniscient state of Buddhahood for the benefit of all beings. When one achieves that position, one is able to work with beings—to teach and instruct them, to show them how to escape the essential problem of suffering themselves.

3. Kangyur Rinpoche says in his commentary to the *Treasury of Precious Qualities* that bodhicitta, this attitude of mind, is the most precious thing in the universe. Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche said, "If you have bodhicitta, you have everything you need. And if you don't have bodhicitta, no matter how much you have, you haven't got enough." So bodhicitta is the essential element of the path of the Great Vehicle, which includes not just the state of being free from samsara, but also the complete and full development of the mind itself, what is called omniscience in Buddhism. The state in which all objects of knowledge appear to the mind, which is one of the definitions of Buddhahood.

The second main section of the text

4. In our last session we finished the third chapter, which Shantideva closes with the taking of the Bodhisattva vow. That vow brings to completion, or conclusion, what is called aspirational bodhicitta, the wish to attain enlightenment for the sake of others. We are now moving on to the second main section of this text. Shantideva places huge emphasis on the fact that bodhicitta is an inestimable treasure, and once it has been generated, it is something we must try not to lose. So the second section of the text contains instructions on how to maintain bodhicitta and

prevent it from degenerating. This section is divided into three parts. The chapter on Carefulness, the chapter on Vigilant Introspection, and the chapter on Patience—how to deal with anger.

5. The entire text of the *Bodhicharyavatara* is considered to be an exposition of the six *paramitas*, or the six perfections, which are the essential components of the Great Vehicle—the Mahayana. When cultivated, these six virtues enable us to completely transcend the self-grasping ego and its disturbing emotions and bring to perfection all the excellent qualities within our potential. They are often called the path of the Bodhisattva. These six perfections are: generosity, ethical discipline, patience, enthusiastic effort or diligence, meditative concentration, and wisdom. The first section of the text, which is comprised of chapters one through three (“The Excellence of Bodhicitta”, “Confession”, and “Taking Hold of Bodhicitta”) addresses the *paramita* of generosity. The *paramita* of ethical discipline is taken up in chapters four and five (“Carefulness” and “Vigilant Introspection”). Chapter six is “Patience”, chapter seven is “Diligence”(or “Heroic Perseverance”), chapter eight is “Meditative Concentration”, and chapter nine is “Wisdom”.

Ethical Discipline

6. Chapters four and five, “Carefulness” and “Vigilant Introspection”, can be considered aspects of the *paramita* of ethical discipline. Discipline seems like a rather cold word. Etymologically it comes from the Latin word *discipulus* simply meaning “learner” or “trainee”. It’s what disciples due. Discipline and disciple—the two words are connected. It corresponds also to the Greek word, *ascecis*—ascetic, which also is another cold word. But again, we should understand that *ascecis* in Greek just means “training”, “exercise”, “practice”, and it’s what athletes do. In classical Greek it refers to athletes training in the gymnasium.

7. So, we’re taking up the whole challenge of training ourselves in this new way of looking at things, the way of the Bodhisattva. Discipline is learning how to stay the course. Remember in this part of the text, Shantideva is speaking to the monks at Nalanda, and what he’s talking about are the monastic vows and how to keep them. But by extension he’s also talking about the vows of laypeople. All Buddhists have taken vows. The very fact of taking refuge involves commitments. In order to maintain refuge, or the ordination of a layperson, we have to protect our vows. We have to know what they are, of course, and protect them, make sure we don’t break them.

8. If our observance of the vows doesn’t spring from a kind of joy, a kind of enthusiasm for the path, the vows themselves will become a burden. This is something to think about and try to avoid. If you try to maintain your vows just as a duty, or as a show, or as a means of living up to the expectations of others, you will eventually be unsuccessful with them. They’ll become a burden. The whole idea of discipline, the whole idea of training is to support your enthusiastic embracing of refuge and bodhicitta.

9. The main thing is to try to get the point of refuge, try to get the point of bodhicitta. It’s not a question of being clever or learning everything there is to know about it, but to get the point of it and let it sink in. We should let it inform our whole way of thinking and behaving. As Khenpo Kunpel says in his commentary, [pg. 141, par. 4] “*This implies that it is pointless to pretend to*

be learned and to make eloquent formal discourses tricked out with all sorts of examples concerning the Bodhisattva precepts, ocean-vast as they are. The important thing is to have a general knowledge of what the Bodhisattva precepts are and, in particular, to have a grasp of the crucial essence of these precepts. Regarding these same precepts, one speaks, once again, in terms of things to be avoided and things to be undertaken.”

10. You may not know the precepts (rules of conduct) of the Bodhisattvas or the downfalls (infractions) of the Bodhisattvas and it would take up too much time to actually go through them here. But if you look at any reputable text, like the *Lamrim* or *The Treasury of Precious Qualities*, you will find them all clearly described. If we're serious about this path, then we need to familiarize ourselves with them.

Chapter 4: “Carefulness”

1. As we begin this fourth chapter, what has happened is that Shantideva has taken the Bodhisattva vow and the whole chapter finishes on a high note of enthusiasm. Now, he's kind of calming down and he's beginning to see what it all implies. He's taking stock of what is implied by the Bodhisattva vow, the commitment, and trying to make sure he can maintain it. At the beginning of chapter four he says, [1] *“The children of the Conqueror who thus Have firmly grasped this bodhicitta, Should never turn aside from it, Strive never to transgress its disciplines. [2] Whatever was begun without due heed, And all that was not properly conceived, Although a promise and a pledge were given, It is right to reconsider: Shall I act or not?”*

2. So the kind of enthusiasm at the end of the third chapter is now over and he's starting to see what it implies. As in ordinary, worldly commitments or plans, when we make a decision to act in a certain way, it's usually wise to think whether we're capable of doing it—and maybe to hang back and not go ahead. But Shantideva says that when we take the Bodhisattva vow and we become a Bodhisattva in aspiration, we become the hope of beings. We talked about taking refuge, and to take the Bodhisattva commitment is not merely to have taken refuge in an object of refuge, but to become an object of refuge ourselves. To become, eventually, a protector of beings.

3. So he says, [3] *“Yet what the Buddhas and their heirs Have scrutinized in their great wisdom, I myself have probed and scrutinized. Why should I now procrastinate? [4] For if I bind myself with promises But fail to carry out my words in deed, Then every being will have been betrayed. What destiny must lie in store for me?”*

4. So, yes, bodhicitta is a wonderful thing, the Bodhisattva path is a marvelous path, but it means that one has committed oneself to all sentient beings. And therefore, to pull back from it and to refuse it out of laziness or out of a sense of defeatism, is actually to leave beings unprotected and to turn one's back on them. And, so even though it sounds almost preposterous to think in this way in terms of ourselves, that's what the whole path is about. The whole teaching is to show us how to learn to become Buddhas. If we have a mind, Buddhahood is possible, because Buddhahood is merely the full flowering of the mind, the full flowering of the mind's potential. We're already on the path because we have said that we want bodhicitta, and so the question is how do we progress step-by-step, as it is stated in the vow.

Three ways of reflecting on carefulness

5. When we get into the main part of this chapter, Shantideva divides it into three ways of reflecting on carefulness: 1) carefulness in our actions resulting from thinking about the difficulty in gaining a precious human rebirth; 2) carefulness in our actions resulting from thinking about the difficulty of escaping from the lower realms; and 3) carefulness in our actions resulting from understanding the defects of our afflictive emotions.

6. In the opening stanza of the chapter, Shantideva reflects on the Bodhisattva precepts as a means to gaining carefulness—this meticulous attitude towards one’s behavior. He does this by explaining the consequences of not observing the precepts and the dangers of falling into lower realms of existence. He says if he now turns back from the Bodhisattva vow he has taken, all beings are abandoned, because in that vow, he has taken them on as his focus of interest. And he says [6] *“How can I expect a happy destiny”* if having promised to protect beings, I let them down? He then continues with a discussion on how to prevent bodhicitta from weakening and talks about putting persistent effort into observing the precepts—not to relax his diligence in relation to them.

7. Once he has those ideas in his mind—the necessity of preventing bodhicitta from weakening, and the necessity of observing the precepts without relaxing diligence—he goes on to remind himself of the precious opportunity that he has. He says that one should reflect on the freedoms and advantages of this present human life as a means of setting carefulness firmly in our consciousness. That is to say, when we understand how precious our opportunity is—the fact that we’ve been born human, the fact that we’ve been born at a time when the Buddhadharma exists, the fact that there are still people practicing it and willing to teach it, the fact that we have an interest in it—all these are very precious. These factors are coming together and they constitute a precious opportunity. This opportunity is not going to last so we must make the most of it. We therefore must be careful not to waste it.

8. He says in stanza 15, *“The appearance of the Buddhas in the world, True faith and the attainment of a human form, An aptitude for good: all these are rare. When will they come to me again? [16] Today, indeed, I’m hale and well, I have enough to eat and I am not in danger. But this life is fleeting, unreliable, My body is like something briefly lent. [17] And yet the way I act is such That I shall not regain a human life! And losing this, my precious human form, My evils (extreme negative actions) will be many, virtues none.”*

The importance of continual training

9. Once we have met the teachings, met a qualified teacher, once we have become interested in the Dharma and the Bodhisattva path, we have to keep walking on it—we have to keep pressing on. We can’t just stop and rest. If we don’t keep training constantly in the path, and we just sort of tread water, we’ll be like someone who is sitting in a river and not swimming forward. We’ll be carried downstream automatically. If we do nothing, if we just leave things as they are, it’s certain that the Bodhisattva attitude will degenerate and we’ll eventually lose it. Not only that, we’ll even lose any interest we had in the Dharma to begin with.

10. Having attained a human life, Shantideva talks about the importance of striving in virtue. Therefore he brings to his mind the question, *what is it that prevents me from having this*

continuous enthusiasm, this continuous interest in the Dharma practice? And he says, it's because of my mental habits, my defilements. Our mental habits are the things that are in our actual hard drive—it's not a just a question of intellectual knowledge. It's a change of attitude that comes about through meditation, through habituation. We might feel that we're not in control—that we have virtuous ideas, and yet they slip through our fingers. We have an interest in the Dharma, and yet it fades away. So we should ask ourselves again and again, what is it that makes us so stupid? What is it that prevents us from seeing the opportunity that we have ?

Destroying our negative emotions

11. Shantideva says it is the defilements that have harmed us from beginningless time. Ignorance and delusion, desire, craving, anger, aversion, and so on, which constantly weaken us. Now that we've come into the sphere of the Dharma, it's important to recognize them and to put an end to them. Once again, it's a question of looking into oneself, and honestly facing oneself, getting to know oneself, not deceiving oneself about who one is. He says, [26] *"For it's as if by chance that I have gained This state so hard to find, wherein to help myself. If now, while having such discernment, I am once again consigned to hell, [27] I am as if benumbed by sorcery, As if reduced to total mindlessness. I do not know what dulls my wits. O what is it that has me in its grip?"*

12. We're all going to die. We're all going to find ourself on our last bed. We know that the end is coming. So the question is: I am a human being, I have met the Dharma—what have I done with it? If we find that we haven't done anything, then, he says, our misery will be black indeed if we miss the chance. It's important to think like this so that won't happen. We protect ourselves by constantly feeding our interest in the teaching.

13. So we have these negative emotions that constantly come up and cause chaos in our personal lives. What do we do? How do we get rid of them? And Shantideva says, *why are they there in our mind? And the answer is because we let them live there. We welcome them. He says, [28] Anger, lust, these enemies of mine, Are limbless and devoid of faculties. They have no bravery, no cleverness; How then have they reduced me to such slavery? [29] They dwell within my mind And at their pleasure injure me. All this I suffer meekly, unresenting—Thus my abject patience, all displaced!* So we are impatient with people who surround us but we are very patient with our real enemies, our negative emotions.

14. [30] *If all the gods and demigods besides Together came against me as my foes, They would be powerless to throw me down to fires of hell of Unrelenting Pain.* So, the worst that external enemies can do is kill the body. They can't kill the mind, and they can't throw us into the lower realms. But our real enemies—the negative emotions—can. And therefore we have to recognize them as enemies and destroy them. Shantideva is very strong on this point, and he adopts precisely this kind of militant language, which goes with the idea of the Bodhisattva as a hero, a spiritual warrior.

15. [32] *"O my enemy, afflictive passion, Endless and beginningless companion! No other enemy indeed Is able to endure so long! [33] All other foes that I appease and wait upon Will show me favors, give me every aid, But should I serve my dark defiled emotions, They will only harm me, draw me down to grief. [34] If thus my ancient and unceasing foes, The wellspring*

only of my growing pain, Can lodge so safe within my heart, How can I live so blithe and fearless in this wheel of life?

16. It really makes one think that in fact, all the seeds of our ruin, of our loss of the higher realms, of our loss of bodhicitta and refuge—all the qualities we’ve managed to accumulate—we have the seeds of their ruin already in us. And therefore it’s important to use discernment to identify them and to destroy them. Khenpo Kunpel says, [pg. 157, par. 1] “*The basic reason for these ills, [these negative emotions, these enemies] which dwell in our hearts, is the fact that we do not fear samsara.*” We don’t recognize samsara. We tend to think that the way we live, the world in which we live—especially if we’re living somewhere like America—is a rather pleasant place. And we try to do what we can to be happy in a rather superficial and material way. So we are good to our friends, we try to overcome our enemies, and so on. We protect our self-interest, and we settle down and have a nice time if we can. Of course, this is not the case for everybody in the world, but for many people in developed countries it is. And so it’s easy to forget that the nature of samsara is not like that at all. In the Buddhist texts, what they try to do by pointing out the defects of samsara, is to bring us to a state of mind where we think that, as it says in the sutras, samsara is actually like a ditch of fire or being caught in a den of poisonous snakes. You mustn’t feel that samsara is your friend, because it isn’t.

Using wisdom to understand the nature of our negative emotions

17. Shantideva says that discipline itself requires hardship, but it is hardship well spent, because we have to be prepared to uproot many of the things that make us comfortable in our present way of life. Our *attachment* to possessions, our *attachment* to our bodies, our *attachment* to our health, and so on. We have to be prepared to call those thoughts of attachment into question and to see and understand that there are some values that are greater than these. On the other hand, he does give us grounds for hope, because he says that even though uncontrollable anger may break out—hatred, jealousy, arrogant pride, and so on, that can draw us completely away from the path and throw us into the lower realms—he nevertheless says that what we have to do is look at their nature. They’re not like ordinary enemies that you have to attack with guns or tanks. They are just thoughts. They’re tenacious thoughts, but they are just thoughts. He says *strive to know their nature*. Once we’ve done that, these negative emotions will start to disintegrate, to fade away.

18. Therefore we must use wisdom. This is an important point, because when we are dealing with our personal defects—our jealousy, our anger, our desire—it’s not a question of suppressing them. If we push them down in an attempt to be a respectable person—which is what we do to fit into civilized society—we suppress these negative emotions. But that’s not enough, because things that are suppressed will actually break out sooner or later. That’s not the solution. What we have to do is uproot the negative emotions, these defilements—to take them out by the root. To do that we need the teachings on wisdom.

19. So Shantideva gives us a little foretaste of those teachings. Obviously, when you are in the middle of a negative emotional crisis of anger or desire, you’re not in a position to do much about it. But the whole point is to train in meditation, which is a prerequisite. Gradually, through practicing Shamatha meditation, you acquire a certain spaciousness in your mind and

the possibility to see mental events as they arise, before they completely take over. At that point you can sort of stand back from them and decide whether you're going to go ahead or not.

20. If we think about our own lives, we can see how uncontrolled emotions have ruined so many situations. You might be in a perfectly good friendship, and then you suddenly say something cruel and vicious and that's it—the friendship's over. You might be in a perfectly happy marriage—more or less content—but then you see somebody else that you want, and in a moment of desire you can wreck your life. Your marriage is over, your children's lives are also damaged. The lustful impulse can bring a lot of sorrow. So it makes sense to train in this kind of awareness, this kind of carefulness, so we can avoid these kinds of unskillful situations.

21. Shantideva says these are just thoughts. The defilement is not in the object. If you have lust for somebody, the lust is not in the object, it's not in the person. He or she may not even be aware of your desire. Again, your defilement is not in your sense faculties, not in your eyes or your ears, nose, tongue, body or your mental sense faculties whereby you detect the presence of this person. So this defilement is not in the object, and it's not in the subject. And if it's not anywhere else, where can it be? What is it? So when you identify a defilement, what you have to do is you look straight at it—search for it—try to recognize its nature. Where is it? It's not in your body, it's not even in your mental process of cognition. And it's not in the object.

22. It's a kind of mirage. Just an idea. An extremely persistent and habitual idea perhaps, but still just an idea. Even though it can inflict so much havoc and so much damage, in itself it's nothing. It's not a powerful enemy after all. If you learn the techniques of diffusing these defilements, they will eventually leave you alone. Shantideva says, [47] *“Defilements are not in the object, Nor within the faculties, nor somewhere in between, And if not elsewhere, where is their abode, Whence they inflict their havoc on the world? They are simple mirages, and so take heart! Banish all your fear and strive to know their nature. Why suffer needlessly the pains of hell? [48] This is how I should reflect and labor, That I might apply the precepts thus set forth. What invalids in need of medicine Ignored their doctor's words and gained their health?”* So he says, “Here are the instructions. If you don't implement them, of course you will fall. But here they are—all you have to do is put them into practice.”

Chapter 5 : “Vigilant Introspection”

1. This leads us into the fifth chapter, which is “Vigilant Introspection”. This refers to a faculty of mind which enables us to look inside our mind to see what's going on. It's an interesting feature of the mind, and one of the signs that the mind isn't really a concrete thing. We can make endless divisions in our mental states. We can be in a state of anger, but it is still possible to stand back and observe the anger. We can even stand back from that which is seeing the anger, in an endless series of witnesses.

2. Another word for “vigilant introspection” is “mindfulness”, which is widely taught in American Buddhism and elsewhere. If you were going to practice mindfulness obviously you would have to know what to be mindful of. The teachings of mindfulness are based on the knowledge of what is to be adopted and what is to be rejected. Here, as elsewhere, we are our own teachers in the sense that once we know what to do and what not to do, the workplace is in our own hearts and minds. On that level, one of the things we have to do is try to avoid deceiving

ourselves. To cultivate an attitude of real honesty about what we're feeling. If you're in a state of lust, for instance, look at it and don't try to say, "Oh this is a terrible thing, I'm not a lustful person," as if you're trying to pretend you're a good person when in fact you have this defilement. It's not a question of being a good person or a bad person. The thing that we have to do is look squarely at the state of mind so that we can recognize it.

3. As Khenpo Kunpel's commentary says, in this kind of practice the important thing is to be our own witness and not to rely on the gossip or the remarks of others, necessarily. Except, of course, one's teacher who is there to guide you. He says people who give us 'advice' [pg. 165, par. 2] *"succeed only in irritating us, and not placing us on the path. In other words, we should be teachers unto ourselves. If we fail to keep a guard over our minds with mindfulness and introspection, we will be unable to persevere in the training."* The teachings on mind training will say that you have to be kind to yourself, but you have to be firm. When you—as a Bodhisattva practitioner on the path—fall, you simply have to get back up and carry on. How many times you make the mistake, you acknowledge the mistake, and you carry on. You mustn't say *I'm useless, I give up*. As Shantideva says, if you give up then you're letting sentient beings down.

The self behind the facade

4. This real discipline comes from keeping a watch over our inner minds. And if we are careless and lax about the way we think, about the things we fantasize, about our daydreams, about the parts of the internet we surf to, things like this, then our behavior just becomes a kind of external structure. And what happens then, is there becomes a kind of separation between a facade that we present to the world and our real self. We put up a show, but it's not really us. When that happens we fail to do precisely what Shantideva is telling us to do, namely to train ourselves.

5. One of the great dangers of the internet is that it removes one of the factors that in ordinary society keeps us more or less on the straight and narrow. You do worry what other people think about you but when you're on the internet nobody's watching (well, we *think* there's nobody watching). It gets terribly easy to download a film without paying for it—it's quite an easy thing to do. And all sorts of other things that you can get involved in, for example extremely violent computer 'games'. This is one of the great dangers for children nowadays. They can far too easily get into situations where they have no guidelines about what is correct and incorrect behavior. Even though in a computer game you may kill your enemies, you're not actually killing a human being, so you're not guilty of murder. Still, the attitude or the habit of killing becomes normalized—one gets used to it, even to the point where it's almost second nature. In our present society, more than ever before, there are stories of children who shoot their parents or shoot other children in their schools. They've become desensitized to the idea of killing—that once you shoot somebody they'll get up again and you can carry on with the game. It's a very dangerous thing to happen in a society. So there is this facade, and the reality behind the facade can be fairly dark.

6. On the other hand, it is a mark of a truly spiritual person that there isn't a facade. What you see is the real person. When you're in the presence of an authentic teacher, for instance, you realize that teacher really is the way he or she appears. The way that person appears is simply an

expression of the way that person has trained themselves. This is something we should always try to cultivate in ourselves, that we are completely genuine. We express what we feel—we don't hide our failings, but we try to cultivate a virtuous attitude towards beings so that it becomes our real nature, our real character.

Paramitas and the emptiness of the three spheres

7. So again, the *paramita* of generosity was addressed in the first three chapters of the *Bodhicharyavatara*, and the *paramita* of discipline is addressed in chapters four and five, “Carefulness” and “Vigilant Introspection”.

But we need to understand what a *paramita* is. Generosity, discipline, patience, and so on, are virtues that everybody knows about. What makes them *paramitas*, transcendent virtues, is the unification of these virtues with wisdom—the wisdom of emptiness. What this means is that you cultivate what is called in the teachings “the emptiness of the three spheres”. That is to say, you remind yourself that when some virtue is being engaged in, the subject of that action is not a really self-existent thing, the action itself is not a really self-existent thing, and the object of that action is not a really self-existent thing. Of course, right at the beginning this doesn't make much sense. What it's getting at is that we have to try not to take our own virtues too seriously.

8. When you practice patience, when you practice generosity, you might be tempted to feel *I'm a generous person, I'm a good person, what I'm doing is a good deed*. But what the emptiness of the three spheres does is inject a certain spaciousness into that whole situation, where you no longer feel self-important, where you no longer feel that the thing you've done is a self-existing good thing, and you no longer feel that the object is a genuinely self-existing object. So what it means is you recognize that the virtues become a sort of play, or a kind of interdependent transaction, if you like. It's a way of not taking your part in the interplay of the three spheres too seriously. That also helps in the times you fail to live up to what you wanted to do. It's not a big deal. What is a big deal is that you get up and carry on. That's the point.

9. Shantideva says we have to look at our own minds, try to recognize our failings and also our virtues. He says *transcendent giving is to dissipate the poverty of beings*. Then the commentator, Khenpo Kunpel, goes into a whole discourse about the generosity of the Buddhas. If transcendent giving is to dissipate the poverty of beings, or to teach beings, we can see that many Buddhas have arisen in the past and disappeared, yet here we are. They didn't help us. That shows that the perfection of giving, or the perfection of charity, is not a question of the actual act itself, but the decision or the wish to do that act. The *paramitas* are a question of the mind's orientation.

10. He says, [9] *“If transcendent giving is to dissipate the poverty of beings, In what way—since the poor are always with us—Have former Buddhas practiced it?”* [10] *Transcendent giving, so the teachings say, Consists in the intention to bestow on every being All one owns, together with the fruits of such a gift. It is indeed a matter of the mind itself.* [11] *Where could beings, fishes, and the rest, Be placed to keep them safe from being killed? Deciding to refrain from every harmful act Is said to be transcendent discipline.*

11. If you want to practice discipline—the discipline of not harming others, for instance—it’s obvious that you can’t protect everybody in real terms. But what the *paramita* of ethical discipline is, is to cultivate the attitude of wishing to do so. Of course, if you do that, then in any given situation you never *will* do so. You don’t have to worry about whether you’re saving the world or relieving the whole human race of poverty. The main thing is to cultivate the attitude of wishing to do so.

Subduing all our foes through training the mind

12. Therefore he says that the world is full of enemies. You can’t possibly conquer them all. He says, [12] *“Harmful beings are everywhere like space itself. Impossible it is that all should be suppressed. But let this angry mind alone be overthrown, And it’s as though all foes had been subdued. [13] To cover all the earth with sheets of leather—Where could such amounts of skin be found? But with the leather soles of just my shoes It is as though I cover all the earth!”* The idea is if you want to walk comfortably over the earth—the stones, the gravel, and so on—there are only two possibilities. Either you cover everything with something like leather—which would be difficult to do—or you can cut just a little piece of leather and put it on the sole of your foot.

13. External enemies are very numerous. You can’t deal with them all—they’ll all be coming at you. But if you manage to diffuse the attitude of anger you won’t actually have any enemies. The enemies that you cognize as something hostile will no longer be there because you have so trained your mind that you no longer feel hostility.

The empty nature of the mind

14. Going back now to the idea of recognizing one’s thoughts and recognizing the nature of one’s mind, and learning by that means to cope with defilements—afflictive emotions. Our afflictive emotions completely shape the way we perceive and experience the world, the way we react to it, and the situations we create. This chapter on vigilant introspection is placing us directly in front of what our mind is. Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche used to say this text is a “pointing out” instruction to the nature of the mind. This instruction is very important in the higher teachings of Mahamudra and Dzogchen meditation where the Lama points out and transmits—to the disciple who is ready—the understanding of the nature of the mind. This is actually what Shantideva is doing. He’s explaining—demonstrating—the nature of the mind.

15. Khenpo Kunpel says, [verse 17, pg. 170] *“As for wisdom, the most important thing for everyone to understand is the nature of the mind, which is empty, devoid of self, and luminous. Although everyone possesses it, not everyone knows or realizes it—which is why it is described as a secret.”* So what he means here is we feel we are living in a world that is separate from us, outside the mind. And to some extent this is true. Everybody sitting in a room together perceives the room. It’s a common experience. So we would say that the room is existing independently of us. When we go out of the room and come back tomorrow the room will still be here. We think there is a really existent material universe outside of us. Whether or not that’s true, one thing that we can immediately recognize is that if there is such a thing as an objective room, there’s no such thing as an objective experience of the room. If we are experiencing the room, that experience is subjective. What we perceive is something happening in our own minds.

16. That's why we more or less experience something like a room that we're in, but in fact no two people experience it in the same way. A person who is a botanist, for instance, or someone who enjoys flowers will probably notice the flowers in the room. Someone who doesn't care about flowers may not even notice that the flowers are there. According to our physical position we see a different view of the room. Nobody has an identical perception of the external world. There is a universe that appears to each one of us that is slightly different, but is globally the same.

17. Why is this so? Buddhism says the way that we perceive things really depends on our karma, and the kind of body that our karma has produced. At the present moment, we have human bodies and therefore what we perceive is a sort of human world. That perception of the world depends on the organization of our sense faculties. We are sitting in what looks like a room to us, but if a mosquito, with completely different sense organs, was to fly through the room, it's very unlikely the mosquito would perceive the room as we do. The mosquito is probably looking for blood, and what the mosquito is aware of is probably various areas of blood. We don't think of the room as various areas of blood, but the mosquito might. The mosquito's mind—its consciousness—is just as much a consciousness as ours is. What the mosquito perceives and what we perceive are different, but that depends on the way our sense faculties are organized.

18. We are human beings, and to the extent that our karma is similar we will perceive a similar world, perhaps with significant variations depending on each individual. As we know, in Buddhism there is the concept of karma, and within that is also the concept of unfinished karma. It means that each of us sitting in a room together are sharing an unfinished karma. The fact that we can sit together, in human bodies, in a particular place and time, is the result of an incredibly complex system of interdependent circumstances and conditions. Our mindstreams over many, many previous lives, have gradually accumulated the necessary conditions for us to be here and perceive each other, and perceive more or less the same place. When that karma is finished, we will no longer perceive each other. If somebody's unfinished karma finishes in the next second, that person will die (or in the case of a Zoom meeting, go offline). That will be the end of their connection with us at this particular point in time. Everything appears according to an incredibly complex network of causes and conditions.

19. Khenpo Kunpel goes on to say, [verse 17, pg. 170] *“All external phenomena arise in the mind like reflections in a mirror. They are mental fabrications. They are the mere display of the mind and do not extend beyond it. The principal task therefore is to understand the mind clearly, and to that end we must use reasoning. We must examine the mind. We must look for its shape, its color, and so on. We must search for the place where the mind arises, where it dwells, and where it ceases.”* When he says mind here, he means the state of awareness we're in. When did it start? Where is it? Can I find it anywhere? Where is it going to go when it finishes? [verse 17, pg. 170] *“If we fail to understand that the mind is beyond every concept of origin, dwelling, and cessation; if we fail to penetrate this secret of the mind (its emptiness and lack of self), then however much we long to achieve the joy of nirvana and to uproot the sorrows of samsara, we will wander uselessly in misery.”* Here, Khenpo Kunpel is coming back to what Shantideva was saying—our behavior, our experience, is completely conditioned by the kind of mental contents that we have. Whether they are negative or positive. Whether they are

defilements or virtues. In the case of the defilements, which we want to remove, it's important to recognize their nature.

Mindfulness

20. Then Shantideva goes on to say that if we want to keep control of what is happening, if we want to be in a position to recognize our defilements, to be able to do something about them and dissipate them, it stands to reason that we must try to be constantly aware of what's going on. He says, [29] *“Therefore from the gateway of my mind My mindfulness shall not have leave to stray. And if it wanders, it shall be recalled By thoughts of anguish in the lower worlds.”*

21. If you want to know what samsara is, all you have to do is try to meditate for a couple of moments, right? You start watching your breath, you settle down, you try to get quiet—and before long you will find that you're thinking about something. A chain of thoughts will have started, one thought leading to another. You think about your car. You think about the fact that it has no gas. You think, *I have to go to the supermarket, aren't supermarkets great? Especially Costco. Costco is wonderful...yay, free market capitalism. I hope the government never messes with that. Uckh... the government...Ukraine...I wonder what's going on with global warming...* You go through a whole story line. But the thing is, by the time you've realized that you're doing that, the stream of thoughts is already well established for most of us. What we never notice is the beginning. We try to be present, we try to concentrate, and then we notice that we're not concentrating. But we don't notice where the flow of thoughts started. That means that although we are awake, and although we think we are aware, there's a gap—there's a hole. And that's quite interesting. It means that what we take for consciousness is actually largely a matter of unconsciousness. It's sort of like a sponge—it's full of holes. What's happening in those moments of blankness, those moments of unconsciousness? What makes us think of something and not something else? The only answer one can come up with is habit—a tendency that gradually forms through your actions.

22. And that's actually what samsara is. Samsara is wandering from one state to another without control, based on semiconscious habits, in a way that is characterized by ignorance and eventually becomes characterized by dissatisfaction and suffering. Mental wandering is the essential nature of samsara. By trying to rein in this mental wandering, we're actually working toward an understanding of our samsaric condition. Therefore Shantideva says he'll put his mindfulness like a guard at the door of his mind, and whenever it strays he'll pull it back in fear of the consequences of mental wandering. Because normally our tendencies are usually negative, and therefore they will lead to negative mental states and suffering.

23. He says, [30] *“Through fear, and by the counsels of their abbots, And staying ever in their teacher's company—In those endowed with fortune and devotion Mindfulness is cultivated easily. [31] The Buddhas and the Bodhisattvas both Possess unclouded vision, seeing everything: All lies open to their gaze, And likewise I am always in their presence.” [32] One who has such thoughts as these Will gain devotion and a sense of fear and shame. For such a one, the memory of Buddha Rises frequently before the mind. [33] When mindfulness is stationed as a sentinel, A guard upon the threshold of the mind, Introspection will be likewise there, Returning when forgotten or dispersed.*

The log teaching

24. One tries, not only in meditation practice but also in everyday life, to keep coming back to the present moment, watching what is going, being aware of what's happening. At this section of the text Shantideva introduces the "log teaching", where he says, [34] *"If at the outset, when I check my mind, I find that it is tainted with some fault, I shall be still and self-possessed, Unmoving like a piece of wood."* In other words, don't immediately rush in to react against what's happening in your mind. If you're feeling downcast, if you're feeling afraid, if you're feeling people don't like you, if you're feeling attached to something, or you're afraid of losing it — when that happens, when you become aware of what's there, if it is negative don't do anything for the moment—just look. Just remain calm. "Be still and self-possessed."

25. Then he gives a whole series of verses where he talks about how he's going to remain aware while he moves around. He even says when you're sitting in a chair or when you're standing, or when you want to move across the room, you should ask yourself what's happening. You should be aware. The walking meditation that the Theravadans practice is that. You practice being aware of how your foot touches the ground and how you lift it, the sensations that occur to the body. He says, [39] *"My body shall remain like this."* In other words, when you decide to do something, you decide how you're going to be while doing it. [39] *"Embarking thus upon a given course, From time to time I'll verify Inquiring how my body is disposed. [40] This rampant elephant, my mind, Once tied to that great post, reflection on the Teachings, Must now be watched with all my strength That it might never slip away. [41] Those who strive to master concentration Should never for an instant be distracted. They should always watch their mind, inquiring, "Where is now my mind engaged?"* Of course, he says it's important to come off it now and then. You can't carry on like this all the time. There are times when you need to relax. It's okay. But regularly one should cultivate a sense of being in a state of self awareness.

26. He says, [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. [44] Behaving in this way, all tasks are well performed, And nothing is achieved by doing otherwise. If thus we act, the secondary defilement, Lack of introspection, will not grow.* It's good advice. It's not very easy to do. We're constantly engrossed in doing a hundred and one things at once. But what he's telling us here is that if we want to progress in mindfulness, we should try to make an effort to simplify, to try and be present. When you notice situations of negativity arising, then the thing to do—especially if you're not in a position to directly recognize the nature of that thought so that it immediately dissipates as soon as it arises (people who are well-practiced in meditation are able to do that)—if you're not able to do that, what you have to do is close down the system. Perform a kind of lockdown, so that you don't let that state of negativity spill out into activity. Because once you perform an action, you have accumulated a karma, and that karma will come to fruition eventually. If you're interested in staying on the Bodhisattva path that's what you have to avoid.

27. So he says, [48] *"When the urge arises in your mind To feelings of desire or angry hate, Do not act! Be silent, do not speak! And like a log of wood be sure to stay. [49] And when your mind is wild or filled with mockery, Or filled with pride and haughty arrogance, Or when you would expose another's secret guilt, To bring up old dissensions or to act deceitfully, [50] Or*

when you want to fish for praise, Or criticize and spoil another's name, Or use harsh language, sparring for a fight, It's then that like a log you should remain." Bear in mind that Shantideva was talking to himself. Shantideva was a monk and he was living in a monastic community of men. If you've ever tried to do that—living in a retreat, or living within a closed group of people, or working in an office—you'll find these kinds of things constantly coming up. People who irritate you, people that you like, things that you don't want to do, making fun of others, feeling superior to them. He's saying that when these kinds of things come up, this is the moment when you should stay like a log, and not externalize what you're thinking.

28. [51] *"When you yearn for wealth, attention, fame, A circle of retainers serving you, And when you look for honors, recognition, It's then that like a log you should remain. [52] And when you are inclined to overlook another's need And want to get the best thing for yourself, And when you feel the urge to speak, It's then that like a log you should remain."* Khenpo Kunpel says it's like people who trample on everyone else to get a good seat in the temple. When you feel that impulse to be near the Lama, pushing everybody behind you, that's when you should try to be like a log. When you want people serving you. When you want people to look after you. Khenpo Kunpel says, amusingly, when you want people to prepare your bed and tuck you in at night, it's then you should avoid these kinds of dependencies. In fact, in the commentarial tradition, there's a whole list of twenty seven sources of mistaken conduct, which are actually being listed in Shantideva's stanzas even though, put in their poetic form, you don't notice them. You can find them in Khenpo Kunpel's commentary on pg. 178, par. 4 [verse 48].

29. [53] *"Impatience, indolence, faintheartedness, And likewise arrogance and careless speech, Attachment to your side—when these arise, It's then that like a log you should remain. [54] Examine thus yourself from every side. Take note of your defilements and your pointless efforts. For thus the heroes on the Bodhisattva path Seize firmly on such faults with proper remedies. [55] With perfect and unyielding faith, With steadfastness, respect, and courtesy, With conscientiousness and awe, Work calmly for the happiness of others."* Of course, it's not easy. One is surrounded by all sorts of triggers and temptations. One interacts with people who are not interested in the Dharma, who don't know anything about the practice of compassion and the practice of bodhicitta. He says don't be upset by childish people, don't be upset by their endless quarrels. As he said, work calmly for the benefit of others. Try to understand and treat them lovingly.

30. [57] *"When acting irreproachably [acting as if the situation we're in is not our fault], For our sake or the sake of others, Let us always bear in mind the thought That we are self-less, like an apparition."* Here, he's introducing the idea of the emptiness of the three spheres that we mentioned earlier. When you're in a real-life situation, at your job or in your family, these situations come up and you recognize them, and you try to either apply the antidotes, or if you can't then you at least don't react. You try to lighten up and remember that it is a kind of mirage. So you don't get engrossed in the situation, you don't get too upset by what's happening, you don't take yourself too seriously. And then he says, [58] *"This supreme freedom of a human life, So long awaited, now at last attained! Reflecting always thus, maintain your mind As steady as Sumeru, king of mountains."* Sumeru being the central mountain according to the ancient Indian view of the universe.

The separation between mind and body

31. And then he goes on to talk about our own relationship to our own bodies. When you get the idea clearly in your mind that you can remain in a state of self-possession and take control of your mind, then you're in a position to look around and see how you relate to other parts of your being. So here, for the first time, he introduces the idea of the separation between mind and body. On the one hand there is our mind and on the other there is the body. We are conditioned to thinking of the human person as being a single entity. Certainly in the Judeo-Christian way of thinking, the body and soul form an intrinsic entity and death is something unnatural. The separation of the body and soul is a violation of our true nature, and is considered a consequence of the fall from grace on the part of the progenitors of humankind. But at the end of time there is a resurrection of the body and the body and soul will be rejoined again. This is completely foreign to the Buddhist way of looking at things. Also, the Buddhist view of things is quite different from the materialistic point of view, which says that matter is the only thing that exists and that the mind/consciousness is a mental phenomenon caused by the brain.

32. The Buddhist theory of body and mind is not a strictly reasoned out philosophical position. It reflects what our current experience is. We have a body, but it's not our self. We talk about my body. So who is saying, "my"? We can say, of course it's the mind that's speaking—the mind on one side and the body on the other. But you can take it a step further and talk about *my* mind. And in which case, who's talking about my mind? That's another matter, but the point that is being made here is that there is a distinction between mind and body. What Shantideva then goes on to do in this chapter is to question the way in which we are engrossed in our own bodies. We spend an enormous amount of time protecting our bodies, our health and so on, which is important. We get very upset when people criticize our bodies and make references to our appearance. We immediately spring to the defense of our bodies. When the body is hungry we feed it. When it's ill we try to cure it, and so on.

33. When we're talking about our perception of the world, the body seems to be external to the mind, even though it's very intimate. And so we can look at it and analyze it. And Shantideva would say that it's a little bit like what happens in the ephemeral hells. Buddhist teachings about the hells is quite complicated. One of the kinds of hell is a state in which beings identify with a material object, like a door, or a log of wood, or a stove. And they suffer when the stove is hot, or when the door is slammed, or the log is burned. It's not the the log is that person, but the mind has somehow become engrossed in it and identifies it as its own body. This is apparently one of the possible ways in which the mind can evolve (or devolve, depending on your point of view).

34. Shantideva says this body of mine causes me so much trouble. This physical aggregate is like a magnet for suffering. It grows old, it gets weak, it gets sick. I get so unhappy about it. He says it doesn't make sense to exaggerate my concern for it. At least one thing is good about it—it can feed the vultures at its end, so it has one reason for my keeping it. But of course, he's only saying this as a kind of technique to diffuse our exaggerated preoccupation with the body. Because elsewhere he will say this body is a priceless vehicle. It's because of this body that we are able to find the teachings and communicate with others.

35. He says, make this body serve you. [68] *"If servants who cannot be set to work Are not rewarded with supplies and clothing, Why do you sustain with such great pains This body,*

which, though nourished, will abandon you? [69] So pay this body due remuneration, And then be sure to make it work for you. And do not lavish everything On what will not bring perfect benefit.” So the problem with the materialistic attitude of thinking that there is nothing beyond this life, that the body is the only reality, is that it’s actually fundamentally deluded, because the body will vanish, the body will abandon us. He says, [70] *“Regard your body as a vessel, A simple boat for going here and there. Make of it a thing that answers every wish To bring about the benefit of beings.”* So use this life properly. Don’t waste time putting your energies where it doesn’t pay—exaggerated preoccupation with the body. On the contrary the body should be kept healthy because a healthy body will not only last long, but it is a good basis for concentration. We know very well that when we’ve got a headache or when we’re sick, it’s difficult to concentrate. So we should do what we can to maintain a healthy constitution. But that doesn’t mean being completely engrossed in our physical condition.

36. Shantideva then goes on to give various examples and various arguments for how we can best live in our body and how to best gain control of our mind. The point is so that our body can serve the Dharma and therefore be of benefit to others. And then he finishes by saying, [108] *“Examining again and yet again The state and actions of your body and your mind—This alone defines in brief The maintenance of watchful introspection. [109] But all this must be acted out in truth, For what is to be gained by mouthing syllables? What invalid was ever helped By merely reading in the doctor’s treatises?”*

37. So this fourth chapter by Shantideva on the importance of vigilant introspection is not to be just read as a sort of intellectual study or something that is merely interesting. The whole success of the path depends on being able to control the mind, to be in possession of the mind, not let it draw you down into states of suffering, and to enthusiastically exercise, practice, and train in the way of the Bodhisattva.

—Transcribed and Edited by Tenzin Sherab/Christopher Moroney