

TIBETAN BUDDHISM CENTER FOR WORLD PEACE
San Antonio, Texas

Shantideva's *Bodhicharyavata*, The Way of the Bodhisattva
Chapter 6: "Patience"

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, and commentary by His Holiness the Dalai Lama from A Flash of Lightning in the Dark of Night, A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life.

TBCWP Session 5: Sunday, March 19, 2023

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

The problem of anger, and how to deal with it

1. In the sixth chapter on patience, Shantideva talks about the problem of anger, and how to deal with anger. He says that anger is, in fact, our worst enemy because anger is what destroys our positive energy which we call *sonam*, or merit. He says, [1] *"All the good works gathered in a thousand ages, Such as deeds of generosity, And offerings to the Blissful Ones—A single flash of anger shatters them. [2] No evil [extreme negative action] is there similar to anger, No austerity [self-control] to be compared with patience. Steep yourself, therefore, in patience, In various way, insistently."*

2. By anger, Shantideva means the kind of hatred that wishes to destroy. It's not just being annoyed. Being annoyed and being irritated can lead to anger, but the really dangerous defilement is the kind of uncontrollable rage which seeks to destroy its object. We know that a moment of uncontrollable rage, where we lash out at somebody, where we say something cruel, can completely destroy an entire relationship. Even more so, from the Dharma point of view, it destroys all the *sonam* energy we've managed to accumulate. As you know, if you've received teachings on dedication, one of the values of dedicating our *sonam* or merit, is that it's a way of protecting our *sonam* from the ravages of anger.

3. There are two things we should always do in regard to *sonam*. We should always try to protect it by dedicating it, and on the other hand, we should do what we can to avoid anger from arising. And this is the practice of patience, the practice of *zöpa*, in Tibetan. *Zöpa* means the ability to carry something, to bear it. That's what patience is in Buddhism, being able to bear difficult situations.

The three main sections of this chapter

4. This chapter is divided into three main sections. 1) There is a section on the removal of anger—how anger can and should be removed, 2) then there is a very long section on the cultivation of patience, 3) and finally there is a section on the way we should respect beings. He says, [3] *"Those tormented by the pain of anger, Never know tranquility of mind—Strangers they will be to every pleasure; They will neither sleep nor feel secure. [4] Even those dependent on their lord For gracious gifts of honors and of wealth Will rise against and slay A master"*

who is filled with wrath and hate.” A person who is angry, a person who has a mind that is uncontrolled, is a source of suffering to him or herself, and a source of suffering to others. A person who hasn’t controlled their anger will create misery all around them. In a family, for instance, someone who cannot control their anger, intolerance, impatience, and so on, just makes everyone else miserable. That’s something we should bear in mind. If we have a problem with anger, we are creating problems for ourself and we are making everyone around us unhappy, whether it’s in our family, in the office, or somewhere else.

5. Shantideva says, [5] *“His family and friends he grieves, And is not served by those his gifts attract.”* He’s talking about a lord—a sort of mafia boss—who attracts dependents by giving them protection, or by giving them gifts. But if this mafia boss is a really uncontrolled, angry person, even the people he’s attracted will end up killing him. We can well imagine that kind of situation. So he concludes, *“No one is there, all in all, Who, being angry, lives at ease. [6] All these ills are brought about by wrath, Our sorrow-bearing enemy. But those who seize and crush their anger down Will find their joy in this and future lives.”*

The cause of anger

6. What is it that causes anger? Shantideva says, basically it’s discontent—being unhappy. Not getting what you want. When you are unhappy and you meet with situations you don’t want, anger will come up. It’s quite important to know how to be happy—how to create situations of happiness. [7] *“Getting what I do not want, And all that hinders my desire—In discontent my anger finds its fuel. From this it grows and beats me down. [8] Therefore I will utterly destroy The sustenance of this my enemy, My foe who has no other purpose But to hurt and injure me. [9] So come what may, I’ll not upset My cheerful happiness of mind. Dejection never brings me what I want. My virtue will be warped and marred by it. [10] If there’s a remedy when trouble strikes, What reason is there for dejection? And if there is no help for it, What use is there in being glum?”*

The cultivation of patience

7. He’s saying we have to learn how to live skillfully, so we can cope with disappointments without losing a basic cheerfulness which is an essential attitude of the Bodhisattva path. When we’re cultivating patience, we cultivate patience with regard to two things. We cultivate patience with regard to what we *don’t* want, and we cultivate patience with regard to the thing that prevents us from getting what we *do* want. When an unpleasant situation arises, we have to learn patience with regard to that situation. And if we really want something to happen and an obstacle prevents it, we have to cultivate patience with regard to that obstacle.

8. When it comes to cultivating patience with regard to what you do not want, this is divided again into four basic ideas. 1) First of all there is *cultivation of patience towards what brings us suffering*. 2) There’s *cultivation of patience towards people who treat us with scorn and disrespect*. 3) There is *cultivation of patience towards those who ill-treat our loved ones*. 4) And there is *cultivation of patience towards those who help our enemies*. Once again, we’re caught in the problems of translation with the word “patience”. Patience here means knowing how to deal with something, knowing how bear or carry it out of the sphere of influence of our afflictive emotions and to turn it to some good result.

9. When it comes to the first of those four: *knowing how to cultivate patience towards what brings us suffering*, Shantideva thinks about what suffering is, our own suffering. Again, he splits it up into another set of three points. 1) There is the patience of accepting suffering when it happens. 2) There is the patience of certainty regarding the ultimate reality of things—that is to say, an ability to put up with suffering when we understand a little bit more about the reality of phenomena and the nature of phenomena. 3) Then there is the patience of making light of what harms us. Not taking it too seriously. That is also a kind of patience.

The patience of accepting suffering

10. So going back to the first of these three points, the patience of accepting suffering, Shantideva says suffering is not something we can ever escape while we are in samsara, and yet there's a certain good side to suffering, a certain good side to being uncomfortable. He says, [12] *"The cause of happiness is rare, And many are the seeds of suffering!"* In this samsaric situation, suffering on the whole is what happens mostly. What we normally consider happiness is, if you look at it carefully, like a period of calm between storms. And as it is said in Buddhism, what normally people regard as happiness is actually a form of suffering for the simple reason that it doesn't last. That great summer vacation, or the happy friendship, or the loving relationship, the state of health, and so on. They don't last. They eventually go. That introduces the idea that there is something fundamentally unsatisfactory even in what we think of as happiness.

11. He says the seeds of suffering are many and the causes of happiness are rare. Then he says, [12] *"But if I have no pain, I'll never long for freedom."* If we were completely comfortable all the time, like the gods, we would never seek liberation from samsara. This is actually one of the advantages of the human state: we have sufficient happiness, or peace, or good fortune, to have the space to think about the Dharma. If you're in hell and you're being cut up with a chainsaw, you're not going to have much mental space to think about the Dharma. In this human life there are moments when we're not in total suffering, so this gives us a kind of space in which to practice.

12. On the other hand, there is suffering in human life and that has its value, because if we didn't have it, we'd get too comfortable and we'd never seek to get out of samsara. That's the predicament of the beings in the god realms—they never practice because they don't feel the need to, and they don't feel the need to because they never have discomfort, until they reach the end of their life, and then it's too late to practice. So Shantideva says [12] *"Therefore, O my mind, be steadfast!"* Learn how to cope with difficulties, to cope with illness, to cope with weakness, to cope with all sorts of calamities. He says, [14] *"There's nothing that does not grow light Through habit and familiarity. Putting up with little cares I'll train myself to bear with great adversity!"*

13. He says when you have these little irritations that come—maybe a mosquito biting you, or maybe a stupid remark you hear someone make about you—you don't react against these kinds of little irritations, but you get used to putting up with them. Because when you do that—when you get used to bearing with pain, you'll be in a position to cope with it much better. This is actually essential to the Buddhist training. Buddhist training is just a matter of trying to develop

useful habits. With little obstacles that come our way, we use them in order to gradually train in dealing with the much bigger ones.

A Bodhisattva hero conquering afflictive emotions

14. Shantideva has a very aggressive attitude toward his negativities, almost like a soldier. He came from a royal family, which means he came from a caste which included rulers and warriors. So maybe he was genetically primed for this way of looking at things, because it's true that throughout the *Bodhicharyavatara* he often uses images of fighting and conquering. He says, [17] *There are some whose bravery increases At the sight of their own blood...* So he's thinking of the Arnold Schwarzenegger types who, when they get into the heat of battle, when they notice they're wounded it increases their aggression and bravery. [17] *"While some,"* he says, *"lose all their strength and faint When it's another's blood they see!"* Some people get really worked up and their strength increases when they see themselves injured, whereas others completely faint when someone else is injured.

15. He says, [18] *"This results from how the mind is set, In steadfastness or cowardice. And so I'll scorn all injury, And hardships I will disregard! [19] When sorrows fall upon the wise, Their minds should be serene and undisturbed. For in their war against defiled emotion, Many are the hardships, as in every battle. [20] Thinking scorn of every pain, And vanquishing such foes as hatred: These are exploits of victorious warriors. The rest is slaying what is dead already!"* Again, he presents the idea of the Bodhisattva as a hero who conquers the extraordinary enemy of negative emotions. This is something that is truly victorious for us. On the other hand, succumbing to our anger and killing an ordinary enemy is no braver than stabbing someone who is dead already. There is nothing extraordinary about that.

16. Shantideva continues, [21] *Suffering also has its worth. Through sorrow, pride is driven out And pity felt for those who wander in samsara; Evil [extreme negative action] is avoided; goodness seems delightful.* People in the caring professions—nurses, hospice workers—often notice that when somebody is suffering, if they've been badly injured, if they have cancer, they can become quite humble. Their pride is diminished. They realize they're not the wonderful paragon of health that they may have thought they were. They see that their own body has its own weaknesses. Because they see that, they can gain a certain kind of sympathy for other people who are in the same predicament. One of the ways of developing compassion is coming to terms with our own suffering. This shows a value in our own suffering because it makes us sensitive to the sufferings of others.

17. When we experience suffering, we become more humble, we gain a certain empathy towards others, and—remembering the teachings—we realize that our suffering is coming about because of our own previous harmful, mistaken actions. For that reason we avoid doing those actions again in order to avoid their unpleasant consequences. Because of this, even virtue seems delightful, and we gain an interest in positive behavior.

Our enemies are themselves victims of their own afflictive emotions

18. In this chapter on patience, Shantideva uses all sorts of arguments to undermine the feeling of aggression and angry retaliation. He does this by encouraging us to look at what we

think of as the enemy, and appreciate that the enemy is not really an enemy. To appreciate, for instance, that the person who is attacking us is himself the victim of their own afflictive emotions, their own defilements. It's the defilement that is the enemy, not the person. When we see this, we begin to see that the person is not the enemy that we originally thought, and that lightens up the situation considerably.

19. He says, [23] *“Although they are unlooked for, undesired, These ills afflict us all the same. And likewise, though unwanted and unsought, Defilements nonetheless insistently arise. [24] Never thinking, “Now I will be angry,” People are impulsively caught up in anger. Irritation, likewise, comes Though never plans to be experienced! [25] All defilements of whatever kind, The whole variety of evil [extremely negative] deeds Are brought about by circumstances: None are independent, none autonomous. [33] Thus, when enemies or friends Are seen to act improperly, Remain serene and call to mind That everything arises from conditions. [34] If things could be according to their wish, No suffering would ever come To anyone of all embodied beings, For none of them wants pain of any kind.”*

No one wants to suffer

20. If we all had a choice between happiness and suffering, no one would choose suffering, and there would be no suffering in this world. Sentient beings suffer without wanting to because their minds are uncontrolled, and being uncontrolled they are influenced by their afflictive emotions. Shantideva says our enemies are not responsible for what they're doing to us, their negativities are the cause. This is where he uses the image of a weapon. If someone hits us with a stick, we're not angry with the stick, even though it's the stick that has actually hurt us and caused us pain. What we're angry with is the person who's gripping the stick. But that person is actually in the grip of something else, namely his or her negative emotions. In a way, it's as absurd to be angry with the person who is in the grip of their afflictive emotions as it is to be angry with the stick that's in the grip of the person.

21. Shantideva says, [41] *“Although it is their sticks that hurt me, I am angry at the ones who wield them, striking me. But they in turn are driven by their hatred; Therefore with their hatred I should take offense. [42] In just the same way in the past I it was who injured living beings. Therefore it is right that injury Should come to me their torturer. [46] And who indeed should I be angry with? This pain is all my own contriving...”*

22. He says, why is this person injuring me? It's because of karma that I myself have accumulated. As the lojong teachings (aphorisms or slogans that are used for contemplative practice) say so often, when somebody attacks you it's like an echo coming back to you from a cliff. When the echo comes back to you it's because you've originally shouted. So when somebody attacks us, we have to remember that even if it wasn't recently—maybe many lives before—it has come about because of something we did. And then he goes on to say we ought to remember when we become a Bodhisattva, that anyone who attacks a Bodhisattva, who injures a Bodhisattva, because of the merit or *sonam* of the Bodhisattva, and what that Bodhisattva is trying to do, that action becomes even more negative. To attack a Bodhisattva is not like attacking an ordinary person. It's much worse.

The power and seriousness of being a Bodhisattva

23. He says, if we truly have started on the Bodhisattva path, we ourselves have become “perilous objects”. The word in Tibetan is *nyenpo* (powerful; serious; weighty). An object with *nyenpo*, or a perilous object, is something that greatly increases anything positive *or* negative that’s done in relation to it. So if someone attacks a lama, for instance, or a realized master, or a person like His Holiness the Dalai Lama, the consequences are far greater than if one were to attack an ordinary person. Shantideva says that since we have become Bodhisattvas we’ve made ourselves extremely dangerous for other beings.

24. If we, as Bodhisattvas, do things that provoke the anger of those beings, we are doing them a very great disservice. In a situation where somebody attacks us, if we retaliate and make the situation worse, we’re making it far worse for them than it is for us. He says, [47] *Those who harm me rise against me—It’s my karma that has summoned them. And if through this these beings go to hell, Is it not I who bring their ruin?* [48] *Because of them, and through my patience, All my many sins [negative actions] are cleansed and purified. But they will be the ones who, thanks to me, Will have the long-drawn agonies of hell [suffering in lower states of existence].* [49] *Therefore I am their tormentor! Therefore it is they who bring me benefit! Thus with what perversity, pernicious mind, Will you be angry with your enemies?* [50] *If a patient quality of mind is mine, I shall avoid the pains of hell. But though indeed I save myself, What of my foes, what fate’s in store for them?* [51] *If I repay them harm for harm, Indeed they’ll not be saved thereby. My conduct will in turn be marred, Austerity of patience brought to nothing.”*

25. He says they are tormenting me, but in the end I am the one who is tormenting them. Because in this situation if I practice patience I will gain great benefit, but if I respond and provoke further aggression, I am causing them to accumulate much more negativity. So I am *their* tormentor. It’s not they that are tormenting me. So for the Bodhisattva, in that kind of situation it’s essential to diffuse the conflict.

How our enemies are actually valuable to us

28. Then, when he reflects upon the positive qualities of beings, Shantideva says that friends are obviously kind to us, but even enemies are always kind to us. Because they give us the opportunity to practice patience. To the Bodhisattva who is training on this path, enemies are extremely valuable. When somebody is attacking us, we shouldn’t immediately respond with anger and beat them down. We should instead recognize that they are giving us a precious opportunity to develop our patience.

27. In general, Bodhisattvas spend their whole time benefitting beings, so they don’t have many enemies. So when an enemy shows up, it’s a special opportunity. This is actually a good situation for a Bodhisattva. You’ve probably heard His Holiness the Dalai Lama talk about the Chinese. He says they have been a precious opportunity for many Tibetans to progress along the path. It seems a bit far-fetched to say that, but when you look at it in the way that Shantideva explains it, you can see the point. The enemy is actually our teacher. If we consider ourselves a Buddhist Mahayana practitioner, we may well have a feeling sometimes that we’re not doing too badly. But then somebody says or does something that triggers us, and we immediately react with anger—or perhaps, not. And so what the enemy has done is actually show us our own mind

and where we are on the path. If we watch our reactions to the way that people treat us, it will give us a good idea of how much more work we have to do. If we see there's more for us to work on, we learn from it, we pick ourselves up, start again, and renew our determination to continue on the path. This is extremely useful for a Bodhisattva in training.

28. His Holiness the Dalai Lama, in his commentary to Shantideva's *Bodhicharyavatara*, says the mind is not a material thing, so no one can actually harm it. If others say unpleasant things to us or slander us publicly, they're not hurting us physically. If we're secure in our own mind about the path we're on, and confident in the qualities of bodhicitta we have committed to developing, then there is nothing that is hard for us to bear. Shantideva says, [52] *Because the mind is bodiless It cannot be destroyed by anyone. Because of mind's attachment to the body, This body is oppressed by pain.* [53] *Scorn and hostile words, And comments that I do not like to hear—My body is not harmed by them. What reason do you have, O mind, for your resentment?* [54] *The enmity that others show me, Since in this or future lives It cannot actually devour me, Why should I be so averse to it?"*

The eight worldly concerns

29. Here, Shantideva is introducing the sets of attachments and aversions that comprise what are called in Buddhism the eight worldly concerns (or eight worldly dharmas). These are eight attachments and aversions that sentient beings are driven by. They could be called the eight concerns of samsara, or the eight concerns of ego self-grasping. The renowned Buddhist nun Tenzin Palmo calls them the eight "hang-ups". They are: having things and not having things, comfort and discomfort, praise and blame, and good reputation and bad reputation. For the Bodhisattva in training, attachment to a good reputation and aversion to a bad reputation is one of the hardest of the ego's attachments and aversions to let go of. His Holiness says no matter how much fame and praise we get, we can only enjoy it for this life. On the other hand, if we get angry with others, thinking they are damaging our reputation and success in this life, the negative actions we become entangled in and thus accumulate will follow us in our future lives.

30. In the next series of stanzas, Shantideva goes through these eight worldly concerns, with a sharp focus on the worldly concern of good reputation and bad reputation. He says, [62] *"And if, when people slander us, We claim our anger is because they injure others [with their words], How is it we do not resent Their slander when it's aimed at someone else?"* When people say unpleasant things about us, if it's the nasty words in and of themselves that make us angry, then we should get angry when nasty things are said about others as well. But it's only when those nasty words are directed toward us or those who we feel a connection to—*me and mine*—do we get angry. If these words are directed toward someone we don't know or care about, we think it doesn't concern us and we remain indifferent. We can even feel *good* if the slanderous words concern someone we have an active aversion toward.

31. If someone who is influenced by negative emotions says nasty things about us or those we hold close, why do we allow ourselves to get angry? After all, it's the negative emotions, not the people, that are responsible for the attack. And, as His Holiness the Dalai Lama says, if we're not angry when other people are criticized, it follows that we should also tolerate people insulting the Buddha, breaking statues, burning down monasteries, slandering great teachers, and so on. Shantideva says, [64] *"Even those who vilify and undermine The sacred Doctrine, stupas,*

images of holy beings Are not the proper objects of my anger: The Buddhas are not harmed thereby.”

32. We have all been, and are still continuing to go through, endless suffering without deriving any benefit from that suffering whatsoever. Now that we have made the decision to train in the way of a Bodhisattva, we should try not to get angry when others insult us. Being patient might not be easy. It requires considerable concentration and logical thinking. But the result we achieve with our practice of *zöpa*—by bearing or carrying these difficulties out of the sphere of self-grasping and into the sphere of bodhicitta—will be sublime. That is truly something for us to be happy about.

Jealousy as a cause for anger

33. Shantideva continues, [79] *“When praise is heaped upon your qualities, You’re keen that others should be pleased thereby. But when the compliment is paid to others, You feel no inclination to rejoice as well.”* Shantideva’s talking about jealousy here. His Holiness says when people we do not like are praised, we normally become jealous. This is a mistake. When good things are said of others, we should try to join in. Then we too may get a little happiness. So why not rejoice? If we can rejoice and feel a sense of satisfaction when those we dislike are praised, the happiness we have is truly positive and approved by the Buddhas. When we practice like this, even our enemies come to appreciate us. His Holiness says this is one of the best ways of gaining others’ respect.

34. Shantideva says, [80] *“You who want the happiness of beings Have wished to be enlightened for their sake. So why should others irk you when They find some pleasure for themselves?”* If we cannot appreciate and rejoice in the happiness someone else might have in praising or being praised by others, in the end we will be unable to tolerate even the slightest joy in anyone else. We will become stingy, holding back from doing anything that helps others or might please them. If we enjoy being praised, it is wrong for us to be irritated when someone else is praising others and deriving pleasure from doing so.

35. He continues, [83] *“If even this you do not want for beings, How could you want Buddhahood for them? And how can anyone have bodhicitta Who is angry when another prospers?”* Since we have taken the vow to attain Buddhahood for the benefit of all beings, when these same beings have a little happiness on their own account, it makes sense to rejoice rather than to be irritated. If we cannot bear others being happy, how can we pretend to be seeking Buddhahood? And when things are not going well for someone we dislike, what is the point in rejoicing about it? It does not make that being’s present suffering any better or worse, and even if it did, how sad it would be that we should wish such a thing.

The distractions of praise and status

36. He says, [90] *“Veneration, praise, and fame Serve not to increase merit or my span of life, Bestowing neither health nor strength And nothing for the body’s ease. [91] If I am wise in what is good for me, I’ll ask what benefit these bring. For if it’s entertainment I desire, I might as well resort to alcohol and cards!”* Simply being praised is of no substantial help at all: it does not increase anyone’s good fortune, nor does it make anyone live longer. If temporary pleasure is all we want, we might as well drink alcohol, take drugs, play games, and engage in other

diversions to fill our time. Yet many of us will spend huge amounts of money and even deceive our friends about ourselves in order to gain some kind of temporary status. This is not very smart, because status and fame don't really help much in this life and do nothing for future lives. There is no point in being happy because we are famous, or being unhappy because people speak ill of us.

37. Shantideva continues, [98] *“Praise and compliments distract me, sapping my revulsion with samsara. I start to envy others their good qualities And thus all excellence is ruined.”* His Holiness the Dalai Lama says, praise, if you think about it, is actually a distraction. For example, he says, in the beginning one may be a simple, humble monk, content with little. Later on, people may say flattering things like, “He’s a lama,” and one begins to feel a bit more proud and to become self-conscious about how one looks and behaves. Then the eight worldly concerns become stronger. Praise is a distraction and destroys renunciation.

38. His Holiness continues saying, at first when we have little, we do not have much reason for a sense of competition with others. But later, when the “humble monk starts to grow some hair,” he becomes conceited, and as he becomes more influential, he vies with others for important positions. We feel jealous of anyone who has good qualities, and this in the end destroys whatever good qualities we ourselves have. Being praised is not really a good thing, and it can be the source of negative actions.

39. Shantideva says, [99] *“Those who stay close by me, then, To damage my good name and cut me down to size—Are surely there protecting me From falling into realms of grief.”* Our actual goal is enlightenment, so we shouldn't be angry with our enemies, who in fact dispel all the obstacles to our attaining enlightenment. There is a story told that Atisha, when he was embarking on his journey to Tibet, heard that the Tibetans were very pleasant and easy to get along with. Instead of being delighted, he was concerned that he would not have enough negative emotion to work with in his mind training practice. So he brought along his ill-tempered Bengali servant-boy, who would criticize him incessantly and was a real challenge to spend time with. Tibetan teachers then like to joke that after Atisha arrived in Tibet, he realized there was no need for the Bengali servant-boy after all!

As Bodhisattvas, we should appreciate our enemies

40. His Holiness says it is no use excusing ourselves, saying that our enemies are preventing us from practicing and that that is why we get angry. If we truly wish to progress, there is no practice more important than patience. We cannot pretend to be practitioners if we have no patience. How can we practice patience if there are no people to test it by triggering our anger? And how can we call such people obstacles to our practice of patience, which is fundamental to the Mahayana path? We can hardly call a beggar an obstacle to generosity.

41. There are many reasons for generosity; the world is full of beings in need. On the other hand, those who make us angry and test our patience are relatively few, especially if we avoid harming others. So when we encounter these rare enemies we should appreciate them. Shantideva explains, [107] *“So, like a treasure found at home, That I have gained without fatigue, My enemies are helpers in my Bodhisattva work And therefore they should be a joy to me.”*

42. When we have been patient towards enemies, we should dedicate the fruit of this practice to them, because they are the causes of it. They have actually been very kind to us. We might ask, why should they deserve this dedication when they had no intention of making us practice patience? But do objects need to have an intention before they are worthy of our respect? The printed words of the Dharma itself, which point out the cessation of suffering and the cause of happiness, have no intention in themselves of helping us—they're just printed words. Yet they are surely worthy of our respect.

The two fields for accumulating *sonam*

43. We might think, then, that our enemies are undeserving because they actively wish to harm us. But if everyone were kind and well-intentioned how could we ever practice patience? Our enemies are those who intend to harm us, and it is for this reason that we are able to practice patience toward them. Shantideva says, [111] *“Thanks to those whose minds are full of malice I engender patience in myself. They therefore are the causes of my patience, Fit for veneration, like the Dharma. [112] And so the mighty Sage has spoken of the field of beings As well as of the field of Conquerors. Many who brought happiness to beings, Have passed beyond, attaining to perfection. [113] Thus the state of Buddhahood depends On beings and on Buddhas equally. What kind of practice is it then That honors only Buddhas but not beings?”*

44. There are two fields through which we can accumulate merit, or *sonam*: beings and Buddhas. It is with the aid of beings, wretched though they may be, that we can accumulate positive actions, develop bodhicitta, practice the six perfections, and attain the qualities of a Buddha. Without afflicted and suffering beings we'll never grow our compassion, and without compassion we'll never achieve supreme enlightenment. Without compassion, the highest state we can achieve is the extreme of solitary nirvana. So the attainment of supreme enlightenment and the understanding we gain on the path are dependent on sentient beings just as much as on the Buddhas. It is a mistake to separate them, saying the Buddhas are superior and sentient beings are inferior. As they are both equally necessary for our attainment of enlightenment, why do we not respect beings as much as we do Buddhas? Of course they are not equal in their qualities. But in the sense that beings have the potential to assist in our accumulating *sonam* and gaining enlightenment, we can say that they are equal.

45. Shantideva continues, [119] *“The Buddhas are my true, unfailing friends. Boundless are the benefits they bring to me. How else may I repay their goodness But by making living beings happy? [122] Buddhas are made happy by the joy of beings. They sorrow, they lament when beings suffer. By bringing joy to beings, then, I please the Buddhas also; By wounding them, I wound the Buddhas too.*

Respecting the wishes of the Buddhas

46. His Holiness the Dalai Lama says if we really take refuge in the Buddhas, then we should respect their wishes. It is truly sad if, on the one hand, we say that we take refuge with heartfelt devotion in the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, but on the other hand, in our actions we ignore what displeases them. We readily conform to the standards of ordinary people but not to those of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. How miserable! If, for example, a Christian truly loves God,

then she or he should practice love for all their fellow human beings. Otherwise, that Christian is failing to follow their religion: their words and deeds are contradictory.

47. [127] *“Reverence for beings is pleasing to the Buddhas’ hearts And perfectly secures the welfare of myself. This will drive away the sorrow of the world, And therefore it will be my constant work.*

48. His Holiness says the ambassadors of a king or president, for example, have to be respected, however unimpressive they may look, because they represent a whole country. Similarly, all beings, wretched as they may be, are under the protection of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. So by directly harming beings, we indirectly pain the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. This is something we should be very careful about.

49. If we can please beings, it goes without saying that this will contribute toward our attaining omniscience. Even in this life, we will be happy and relaxed, well thought of, and have many friends. In future lives we will have a pleasant appearance, be strong and healthy, and we will be reborn in good states of existence with endowments and freedoms that are the result of positive actions. Under such favorable conditions we will eventually attain enlightenment. So helping others is fundamental on the path to Buddhahood.

Patience is the foundation for meditative concentration

50. This very important sixth chapter, “Patience”, is the foundation for the eighth chapter, “Meditative Concentration”, which shows how we can benefit others through understanding the qualities of altruism and the disadvantages of ego self-grasping. In general it is the very notion of enemies that is the main obstacle to bodhicitta. If we can transform an enemy into someone for whom we feel respect and gratitude, then our practice will naturally progress, like water following a channel cut in the earth.

51. To be patient means not to get angry with those who harm us and instead to have compassion for them. That is not to say that we should condone their harmful behaviour and let them do whatever they like. His Holiness the Dalai Lama says that Tibetans, for example, have undergone great difficulties at the hands of others. But if the Tibetans get angry with them, they can only be the losers. This is why Tibetans practice patience, *zöpa*. But they are not going to let injustice and oppression go unnoticed.

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