

TIBETAN BUDDHISM CENTER FOR WORLD PEACE
San Antonio, Texas

Shantideva's *Bodhicharyavatara*, The Way of the Bodhisattva
Chapter 7: "Diligence/Heroic Perseverance"

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 6: Sunday, April 2, 2023

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

Review of the sections of the text covered so far
Causing bodhicitta to arise

1. We've been studying the text of Shantideva's *Bodhicharyavatara*, *The Way of the Bodhisattva*. Nine of the ten chapters of Shantideva's text correspond to what are called the six perfections, or six *paramitas*, which are related to the stages or levels of attainment that are perfected as one progresses on the Bodhisattva path. Traditional commentaries of the *Bodhicharyavatara* also divide the text into three main sections that are related to the arising, stabilization, and increase of bodhicitta. Bodhicitta is the desire, and in fact, the decision to attain enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings. The first of the three main sections of the text focuses on understanding bodhicitta and how to generate enthusiasm for it. This is discussed in the first three chapters: "The Excellence of Bodhicitta", "Confession", and "Taking Hold of Bodhicitta". These first three chapters also correspond to the first of the six perfections, the perfection of *generosity*. There can be no more perfect generosity than becoming a Buddha in order to free all sentient beings from the suffering of samsara and to bring them to the complete happiness of enlightenment.

Not letting bodhicitta decline

2 Given that the awakening mind of bodhicitta is itself a fragile thing and can be easily lost if we don't take steps to protect it, in the second main section Shantideva talks about the importance of not letting it degenerate, not losing it once it has arisen. This section of the text is discussed in the second three chapters: "Carefulness" and "Vigilant Introspection", both of which correspond to the second perfection of *ethical discipline*, and "Patience", which corresponds to the third perfection of *patience*.

Increasing bodhicitta

3. Now we're moving on to the third main section, which discusses how we can increase and intensify our bodhicitta once we have taken hold of it. In order to place others in the state of the perfect happiness of enlightenment, we need to have attained that state ourselves. Bodhisattvas aim to accomplish Buddhahood in order to be able to help other beings achieve enlightenment for themselves. The three chapters that make up the third main section are: "Diligence/Heroic Perseverance", which corresponds to the fourth perfection of *enthusiastic effort*, "Meditative

Concentration” which corresponds to the fifth perfection of *meditative concentration*, and “Wisdom”, which corresponds to the sixth perfection of *wisdom*. In the Wisdom chapter Shantideva talks about the doctrine of emptiness as it is presented according to the Madhyamaka, or Middle Way, tradition of Buddhist tenets.

4. Last time we finished discussing the chapter on “Patience” and the importance of learning how to deal with anger. To recap, Shantideva says that the greatest enemy of the entire path is uncontrolled anger, which can potentially destroy all the benefit and good qualities that are gained on the Bodhisattva path in an instant. And so it is extremely important to know where anger comes from and how to prevent it from arising. Shantideva says that it comes from being unhappy and discontented. So the question then is, how can we preserve our happiness and contentment even in the face of conflict or hostile forces, people who attack us, and suffering of every kind? He lays out in the “Patience” chapter various ways of reflecting in order to diffuse situations of conflict with enemies.

How diligence and heroic perseverance are related

1. Now we move on to the chapter on “Diligence” or “Heroic Perseverance”. Shantideva’s original text was written down in the 8th century in Sanskrit and then was meticulously translated into Tibetan during that century. “Diligence” is the translation from the Tibetan text of the word *tsöndrū*, which is related to the ideas of zeal and enthusiastic effort, and “Heroic Perseverance” is the translation from the Sanskrit text of the word *virya*, which is associated with heroism and energy. So the Tibetan and Sanskrit words refer to basically the same thing: a capacity to enthusiastically carry on in the face of difficulties, not to turn back. This is where the whole notion of heroism comes into *The Way of the Bodhisattva*. Someone who is fearless. This brings the idea of bravery and courage into the path.

The problems of laziness and *dunzi*

2. Shantideva defines diligence in the second stanza of Chapter 7, by saying, [2] “*Diligence means joy in virtuous ways.*” He’s talking about the kind of enthusiasm and interest one might have in the Dharma; finding joy in doing good and helping others to practice the path. To do that, it is necessary to remove anything that counteracts that, especially laziness. The main obstacle to diligence is laziness. Laziness has three aspects: 1) having no wish to do good, 2) being distracted by non-virtuous activities, and 3) underestimating oneself by doubting one’s ability. Related to these are taking too much pleasure in idleness and sleep and being indifferent to the suffering of samsara. As Shantideva says, [2] “*An inclination for unwholesomeness, Defeatism and self-contempt.* [3] *A taste for idle pleasure And a craving for repose and sleep, No qualms about the sorrows of samsara: Laziness indeed is born from these.*” So, an inclination to sleep, to laze around, to do non-virtuous things, and an inclination toward defeatism and lack of self-worth all contribute to laziness.

3. Additionally, laziness is connected with another Tibetan term, *dunzi*. *Dunzi* is a desire to be busy—an inability to just sit still. It’s a craving to be entertained all the time. *Dunzi* means distraction. The American Buddhist nun Pema Chödrön says we can waste our whole life in *dunzi*—in a lifestyle that’s sort of like flipping through magazines all the time. She says for instance, when we get on an airplane and we realize we don’t have a book to read, or we don’t have anything to do, we can get kind of panicky. All we have to do is sit there—we could actually

meditate. But we're constantly trying to occupy ourselves with things to take up our attention, to distract ourselves.

4. In our own experience we find this kind of laziness when we feel we ought to do some kind of sitting meditation practice. We get everything arranged, but as the moment for the session gets closer, we think of all sorts of things to do rather than sit down on the cushion. We need to make ourself some coffee, or tea, or let the dog out, or feed the cats, or let the dog back in—all kinds of things keep coming up. And slowly, the time for practice gets eaten away. That's laziness, that's *dunzi*. We can be very busy in being lazy.

Generating a sense of urgency

5. Shantideva then addresses the problem of habitual laziness. He says the way to deal with this is to generate a sense of urgency. We don't have a great deal of time, and death will soon be upon us. There are lots of eloquent images to be found in the teachings that refer to this. There is one which describes sitting on the front porch of your house in the sun with the mountains far off in the west. As the sun moves toward the west, the shadow of the mountains slowly creeps closer and closer towards you. Suddenly you realize that the shadow of the mountain is actually right there on your porch, and you haven't done anything. So one's whole life can be taken up in planning to practice, or thinking how good it would be to someday start meditating regularly.

6. So Shantideva says, [4] *"Snared by the trapper of defiled emotion, Enmeshed and taken in by the toils of birth. Again you've strayed into the maw of Death. What is it? Have you still not understood?"* We've strayed into the mouth of death. Just by being born, we are fully qualified to die. We can die as soon as we are born, and we can die anytime afterwards. In order to die, all we need to do is be born. He says, [5] *"Don't you see how, one by one, Death has come for all your kind? And yet you slumber on so soundly, Like a buffalo beside its butcher."* Before cows are taken to the slaughter house, they don't realize what is waiting for them. All they do is lie around in the sun, yet they're lying quite close to the person who is actually going to lead them away to be killed.

7. [6] *"All the paths of flight are blocked, The Lord of Death now has you in his sights. How can you take such pleasure in your food, And how can you delight to rest and sleep?"* What Shantideva's trying to do is make us feel uneasy. It's like somebody who is being stalked by a serial killer, and the serial killer is watching them, tracking them, looking at them through the sights of his rifle. In other words, our death is coming for us—no doubt about it—and it could happen at any time for any reason, but we're completely unaware of it. If you really take this idea on board, *dunzi* distractions will dissolve all by themselves.

8. [7] *"Death will swoop on you so swiftly. Gather merit till that moment comes! For even if you then throw off your indolence, What will you do when there is no more time?"* If you attend people who are on their deathbed, it's very interesting to see the difference between a person who has spent a good deal of their time in helping people—they're much more serene than people who have been busy all the time and have never done any kind of spiritual training. A person like that is always afraid, terrified. Many people die in confusion and fear, whether they're actually killed or whether they're at the end of a long agony. The only way for us to

prevent that from happening to ourselves is to do something about it now while there's still time.

9. Then Shantideva mentions this lazy attitude of busyness: [8] “*This I have not done, and this I'm only starting. And this—I'm only halfway through...*” Then is the sudden coming of the Lord of Death, And oh, the thought ‘Alas, I'm finished!’ [9] You'll look upon the faces of your hopeless friends, Their tearstained cheeks, their red and swollen eyes (For such will be the depths of their distress), And then you'll see the heralds of the Deadly Lord. [10] The memory of former sins [negative actions] will torture you, The screams and din of hell [lower states of existence] break on your ears. With very terror you will foul yourself. What will you do in such delirium? [11] If, like a living fish that twists and writhes, You are so terrified while still alive, What need to speak of pain unbearable In hells [lower states of existence] created by past evil deeds [extreme negative actions]?

10. So, that's actually the technique—that's what we must do if we find that we can't actually put our behind down on the cushion and do the practice. We have to tell ourself that there isn't much time and to get on with it. We might find many of the things that Shantideva says a bit crude, a bit too strong, a bit medieval, or foreign, or not sophisticated. But it's very important in texts like this, and in Buddhist teachings generally, to take things at their face value—not to try to dumb them down or dilute them with new-agey explanations. It's useful to take Shantideva at his word and actually try to do what he says.

Distraction and defeatism

11. Shantideva talks about our inclination towards distraction, and he gives just one stanza about this. He says, [15] “*You turn your back upon the Sacred Doctrine, Supreme joy and boundless source of bliss. Why delight in mere excitement, In distractions that will cause you misery?*” He's contrasting the teachings of the Dharma, whatever they may be—this precious human life, compassion, refuge, bodhicitta, all the tantric practices that one might learn about—with how we turn our backs on those teachings for the excitement of mere distractions. What often happens is we get very enthusiastic about receiving teachings, about going to see this or that Lama, about getting an empowerment, and so on. But actually, we don't do much about it. We can receive an empowerment, and one empowerment is enough to take us all the way to Buddhahood. But what we often do is just collect them like badges, and we don't actually implement the teachings, which is a pity. There's a Tibetan proverb which says, *the Indians receive one empowerment and attain Buddhahood, the Tibetans receive a hundred empowerments and don't get anywhere*. This is because the Tibetan Dharma is so rich, there are so many lineages, there is so much that is so interesting, and so on, that one tends to get very interested, but in fact misses the point.

12. Then Shantideva goes on to talk about defeatism, this feeling that *I can't do it*. Remember, this is a very common experience for most of us. We read about these incredible educational programs that they have in the monasteries, people learn how to debate for hours and hours, memorize huge texts, they study from 13 to 25 years to become either khenpos and khenmos, or geshe and geshemas. Or you read the stories of the yogis who go off to the mountains and endure all sorts of hardships, have incredible diligence, and you feel, *this is completely out of my league, I'll never be able to do anything like that*. And the result is that we actually don't do

anything—we don’t do what we’re able to do, which is often quite a lot in a given situation. Shantideva says we mustn’t sink into that kind of laziness, the feeling that we can’t do it—a kind of disempowerment of ourselves.

13. He says, [16] *“Do not be downcast, but marshal all your powers; Make an effort; be the master of yourself! Practice the equality of self and other; Practice the exchange of self and other.”* This is the first time in the text that he mentions these two practices, which are actually the main practices of relative or conventional bodhicitta. He goes into them in much greater detail in the following chapter, but he just mentions them briefly here. He then goes on, [17] *“Oh, but how could I become enlightened?” Don’t excuse yourself with such despondency! The Buddha, who declares the truth, Has truly spoken and proclaimed [18] That if they bring forth strength of perseverance, Even bees and flies And gnats and grubs will gain Supreme enlightenment so hard to find. [19] And if, by birth and lineage of human kind, I’m able to distinguish good from ill And do not leave aside the Bodhisattva deeds, Why should I not attain the state of Buddhahood?”*

14. That’s something that we should also reflect upon and remind ourselves of. We already have a great deal going for us. We have attained this human existence, where we are able to have intelligence and discernment. We have the capacity to receive teachings and implement them. We already have learned a lot about the Dharma. Most of us sitting here have met qualified teachers. We’re relatively free—we’re living in a country where we can still do what we like, for the most part. We’re not in constant threat of being bombed or murdered. We’re not living in extreme poverty. We’ve got many advantages that even most humans in the world don’t have. So, we should think of that and think, *so many good things have already happened to me, all I need to do is put the teachings into practice!*

15. And Shantideva says it’s not so difficult. He says, [20] *“That I must give away my life and limbs Alarms and frightens me’* [referring to some of the ‘loss of life and limb’ stories of the great Bodhisattvas]—*if so you say, Your terror is misplaced. Confused, You fail to see what’s hard and what is easy. [21] For myriads of ages, measureless, uncounted, Your body has been cut, impaled, Burned, torn—for times past numbering! Yet none of this has brought you Buddhahood.”* There’s a passage in Pema Chödrön’s commentary on this text where she says if austerities were all that were needed, if hardships were all that were necessary—because we’ve have so many of them—we’d all be Buddhas already.

16. He goes on, [22] *“The hardships suffered on the path to Buddhahood Are limited in their extent And likened to the pain of an incision Made to cure the harms of inward ills. [23] And all our doctors cure disease By means of bitter remedies. Likewise, to destroy a vast amount of pain, We should be patient with our little hurts.”* Think of all these amazing athletes that torture themselves to get in shape and reach their goal—with all their enthusiasm and constancy—if we practiced like that, we’d have been enlightened long ago. It doesn’t even take years of practice actually, if you meet the right teacher and adopt the right methods.

17. And so he says, [24] *“And yet the Supreme Healer does not use, Like them, these common remedies. With ways of extreme tenderness He soothes away intense and boundless suffering. [25] Our guide instructs us to begin By giving vegetable greens or other little things, That*

later, step-by-step, the habit once acquired, We may be able to donate our very flesh. [26] For when we truly feel Our bodies are no different from the given herbs, What hardship can there be In giving up, relinquishing, our very flesh?"

The Bodhisattva's approach to mind and body

18. Basically, Shantideva is saying here that the essence of the Bodhisattva path is gradual training, step-by-step, as it explicitly says in the Bodhisattva vow. He's already previously mentioned the way in which Buddhism distinguishes mind from body, and how one can adopt an attitude towards the body which is realistic in the sense that it's important to use one's body as a vehicle for practice. And according to Buddhism, the mind—which is non-physical conscious awareness—is intimately connected to the physical body-brain complex and works in close conjunction with it. But one's mind, one's conscious awareness, can also come to regard the body as a very useful tool and as a means to an end, which in the final analysis of the highest Prasangika-Madhyamaka view is no *more* real than a piece of cabbage or lettuce that a Bodhisattva might give to some hungry being to eat. Of course, this view can only be realized after a long period of training and repeated meditation. But from the Buddhist perspective, the fact is that when death happens, the body is what is put in the ground or cremated, whereas the mindstream—the moment-to-moment continuum of non-physical conscious awareness—is what keeps evolving.

19. Shantideva tends to give us difficult messages, and then contrasts them by saying things to encourage us and to keep us moving along. Having talked about the training not being as bad as we might think, he goes on to say, in the case of the body, [28] *"Merit is the true cause of the body's ease, While happiness of mind is had through understanding. What can sadden those who have compassion, Who remain within samsara for the sake of beings?"* He's saying that the *body's* ease—the fact that one has a certain kind of birth, the fact that one has physical health and strength—is a result of merit, or *sonam*, which we talked about before. *Sonam* is a particular kind of positive energy and potential which comes from virtuous, positive actions and practices. And the happiness of one's *mind* is brought about through wisdom, through understanding. So he asks, what can sadden those who are following the Bodhisattva path? What can sadden those who have compassion, who remain within samsara for the sake of beings?

20. This goes back to the idea that for someone who has really trained in bodhicitta, for whom the most important task is to protect beings, to relieve their suffering, to guide them towards happiness—they themselves become quite indifferent to their own physical condition. They're quite prepared to undergo all sorts of hardships in order to help beings. There's a wonderful image in another chapter where Shantideva says Bodhisattvas can plunge into the depths of hell with the same joy that a swan sweeps down onto a lotus lake.

21. The question of whether a realized bodhisattva actually feels pain is an interesting one. There's no clear answer about that, but what seems to happen is that when somebody has followed that path, they can endure suffering in quite a different way than we do. Of course there is pain, but they don't identify with it because they recognize the dreamlike quality of experience. And so their minds remain serene.

22. There's a story told by Dzigar Kongtrul Rinpoche about visiting a yogi who was a great practitioner in the mountains somewhere. This yogi was suffering from a terrible disease that affected his legs, which were badly ulcerated and, no doubt, extremely painful. Dzigar Kongtrul Rinpoche greeted him and asked, "How are you?" The yogi laughed and said, "Well, this old body is having a few problems, but actually it's fine. I'm quite happy." He wasn't overwhelmed by his physical condition. That's something we can also acquire, maybe not to that extent.

23. Pain is an interesting phenomenon actually when you have it—to work with it and look at it, to ask yourself *where is it?* A corpse doesn't feel pain. Pain only happens when a conscious mind is present. Is the pain in the mind, then? If it's in the mind, why do I feel it in my leg, or my toe? We can do all sorts of interesting thought experiments. Actually, we can sort of detach from it. In England there are pain clinics that specialize in how to manage pain. There is only so much that can be done with pain killers. People who have chronic injuries or terrible back problems and things like that, are in pain almost constantly. So in these clinics, all medical orthodoxy is dropped and they're ready to try anything—even meditation, they say.

The four forces we need on the Bodhisattva path

24. Shantideva then says, [30] "*Mounted on the horse of bodhicitta, Which puts to flight all mournful weariness, What lucid person could be in despair Proceeding in this way from joy to joy?*" He's talking about the Bodhisattvas who take delight in relieving others. [31] "*The forces that secure the good of beings, Are aspiration, self-confidence*, moderation*, and joy.*" He's now going to talk about these four forces that strengthen one's feeling of diligence and heroic perseverance. "*Aspiration grows through fear of suffering And contemplation of the benefits to be attained. [32] Therefore leaving everything that is adverse to it, I'll labor to increase my diligence, Through aspiration and self-confidence, moderation and joy, By strength of earnest application and exertion of control.*"

*In the various editions of *The Way of the Bodhisattva* by the Padmakara Translation Group, *self-confidence* is translated as either "firmness", "steadfastness", or "self-confidence", and *moderation* is translated as either "relinquishment" or "moderation".

Aspiration

25. His Holiness the Dalai Lama, in his commentary to this text, says that to generate enthusiastic diligence and heroic perseverance on the Bodhisattva path, we need these four forces or supports: *aspiration, self-confidence, joy, and moderation*. He says that *aspiration* is developed by reflecting on karma, on cause and effect. As we know, a good result comes from a positive action and a bad result from a negative action. So for us to have the *aspiration* to generate bodhicitta and walk the Bodhisattva path, step by step, until we attain the state of a Buddha, completely free of all defects and endowed with all good qualities, it will be necessary for us to accumulate vast amounts of positive potential (*sonam*) and purify vast amounts of obscurations over a period of many lifetimes. So when we think of how little inclined we are, in this short life, to engage in only positive actions and to purify all our obscurations, we should spur ourselves on to make an effort!

Self-confidence

26. Shantideva says that to train in the force of *self-confidence* not only do we need to have the inclination and aspiration to follow the path, but we need to cultivate a kind of constancy, a steadfastness—a sort of staying power. Often that has to do with being realistic about our own

current capacity. What can happen in Dharma centers is that people get an unrealistic idea of what they're able to do. They want to be like the Lama, or they want to go off and be like Milarepa or something. Of course it's too difficult. But they try, and then they lose heart, and then they drop it. It's far better to have a realistic, but low-key and modest attitude towards what one is able to do, and then do it and try to keep going.

27. So Shantideva uses several images to increase this idea. *The Way of the Bodhisattva* has quite a lot of images of fighting, being a soldier, being a hero: *I won't give up until I see my enemy dead on the ground in front of me; I must be like someone who drops their sword in a fight and gets it back as quickly as possible before the opponent can strike*. Since Shantideva is supposed to have been from the Indian *Kshatriyas* caste that included rulers, administrators, and warriors, he may well have had a militaristic view of things. There actually are stories about him where he went off to be a king's guard, wielding only a wooden sword and using his *siddhis*—his paranormal abilities—to subdue and pacify his enemies.

28. He says it's important to have healthy pride, to have the feeling of self-worth. This kind of pride is not the same as ordinary arrogant pride, where we look down on others and think we're special. He says this pride is the feeling, *I can do it*—a feeling of inner strength. It's a good kind of pride. It's not something we should try to get rid of. Perhaps *self-confidence* is a more appropriate term, but either way, this feeling of self-worth is an important feature of the path because it gives us strength—a courageous kind of strength that is essential to the path. The *Sutra of the Vajra Banner* speaks about *self-confidence*, or healthy pride, in these terms: “When the sun rises, it shines over the whole world, regardless of people's blindness or mountain shadows. Likewise, when Bodhisattvas manifest for the sake of others, they bring beings to liberation, regardless of their obstacles.”

29. Shantideva continues, [47] “*Let me first consider my reserves—To start or not to start accordingly. It might be better not to start, But once begun, I should not then withdraw*. [48] *For if I do such things, the pattern will return In later lives, and sin [negative action] and pain will grow. And other actions will be left undone Or else will bear a meager fruit*.” His Holiness the Dalai Lama says that before we do anything, we should always ask ourselves whether we will be able to do it properly and complete it. If the answer is no, we should not start. Leaving tasks uncompleted creates the habitual propensity for doing that in the future. So once we have begun something, we should be sure not to go back on our decision.

30. [49] “*Action, the afflictions, and ability: Three things to which my pride should be directed. 'I will do this, I myself, alone!' These words define my pride of action*.” Ordinary beings are prepared to exert a lot of effort to achieve relatively insignificant ends. A Bodhisattva is someone who has promised to work for the immensely important goal of liberating all beings from suffering, so we should cultivate great self-confidence, thinking, *Even if I am the only one to do so, I will benefit all beings*.

31. He says, [52] “*When they find a dying serpent, Even crows behave like soaring eagles. Therefore if I'm weak and feeble-hearted, Even little faults will strike and injure me*.” Crows wouldn't dare approach a healthy and powerful serpent, but if they find a dying one they'll come and peck at it, because they know it can't retaliate. Shantideva is saying here that in a similar

way, our own attitude of healthy self-confidence and self-worth is also a powerful protection against the little faults we may be inclined toward: petty remarks, criticizing others, or sneaky, deceitful behavior—little things like that. It's not worthy of us. A healthy pride in ourselves is a way of protecting us from our own little faults that could otherwise strike and injure us.

32. [53] *“But if, depressed, I give up trying, How can I gain freedom from my abject state? But if I stand my ground with proud resolve, It will be hard for even great faults to attack me. [54] Therefore with a steadfast heart I’ll get the better of my weaknesses. But if my failings get the upper hand, My wish to overcome the triple world is laughable indeed.”* So, there's no need to even talk about being a Bodhisattva and overcoming samsara's “triple world” of the desire, form, and formless realms to benefit all sentient beings, if we're continually falling victim to our own petty little afflictive behavior patterns. As Shantideva says, it's laughable.

33. [55] *“I will be victor over all, And nothing shall prevail and bring me down!’ The offspring of the Lion, the Conqueror, Should constantly abide in this self-confidence.* When you fully understand the Bodhisattva vow, and take that vow from your heart, it is said you become the offspring, or child, of the Buddhas. From that moment on, you should always have a sense of self-confidence and healthy pride. His Holiness the Dalai Lama says this is the sort of pride we need—the self-confidence that refuses to accept the domination of the negative emotions and does everything to destroy them. The heroism of the Bodhisattva lies in this use of self-confidence to confront the negative emotions and conquer arrogant pride. People who don't have this kind of self-assurance allow themselves to be overtaken by arrogance and the other afflictive emotions at the slightest provocation. His Holiness says there is nothing heroic about that. Even if it were to cost us our lives, we should never let ourselves be influenced by these emotions.

Joy

34. As regards the force of joy, His Holiness says that once we have generated bodhicitta, we should take up the activities of a Bodhisattva with joy and delight. The more we practice in this way the greater our desire will be to make further progress. Shantideva says, [64] *“People labor hard to gain contentment Though success is very far from sure. But how can they be happy if they do not do Those deeds that are the source of joy to them? [65] And since they never have enough of pleasure, Honey on the razor’s edge, How could they have enough of merit, Fruits of which are happiness and peace?”*

35. The kind of happiness and pleasure that the self-grasping ego pursues in samsara never brings fulfillment because it's based on a completely delusional view of reality. Because of this fundamentally mistaken view, no matter how many pleasurable experiences our needy egos grasp at, those experiences never result in lasting happiness. They only result in levels of disappointment, and wanting more, needing more, never having enough. Like a honey-covered razor blade, the objects of our desire entice us to pursue them, yet they only harm us because they serve as the cause for us to be dominated by our afflictive emotions. This causes a decrease in our merit or positive potential—our *sonam*—and an increase in our negative karma.

36. His Holiness says there has been nothing to show for all the efforts we have made to be happy and avoid suffering in samsara. Now that we have started on the path of the Bodhisattva,

we should practice with *joy* and not be disheartened by the few difficulties that are bound to occur in the beginning. Our efforts will definitely bear fruit.

Moderation

37. Shantideva continues: [66] *“The elephant, tormented by the noonday sun, Will dive into the waters of a lake, And likewise I must plunge into my work That I might bring it to completion. [67] “If impaired by weakness or fatigue, I’ll lay the work aside, the better to resume. And I will leave the task when it’s complete, All avid for the work that’s next to come.”*

38. The last of the four forces, *moderation*, is to be applied when we become physically and mentally exhausted and are unable to continue, however much we try. At those times, we shouldn’t force ourselves, but we should stop and rest so that later whatever we do will be done properly and completely.

Mindfulness and attentiveness

39. His Holiness the Dalai Lama says when we have overcome our laziness and have generated enthusiasm through the four forces of our *aspiration, self-confidence, joy, and moderation*, we should practice with enthusiastic effort by applying mindfulness and attentiveness. Mindfulness and attentiveness make us careful to repel the attacks of negative emotions and help us put an end to these enemies.

40. Shantideva says, [69] *“If, in the fray, the soldier drops his sword, In fright, he swiftly takes it up again. So likewise, if the arm of mindfulness is lost, In fear of hell [lower states of existence], I’ll quickly get it back!”* It’s important not to let small faults remain in the mind, because [70] *“Just as poison fills the body, Borne on the current of the blood, Likewise evil, when it finds its chance Will spread and permeate the mind.”* So even little things, if we neglect them, can become big problems. If we can manage to catch the defilement right at the beginning when it’s weak, it’s easy to do something about it. Whereas, when we’re completely overwhelmed by aggression or desire it’s quite difficult to oppose or resist it.

41. [74] *“At all times and in any situation, How can I make mindfulness my constant habit? Thinking thus I will desire To meet with teachers and fulfill the proper tasks.”* Once we are able to practice mindfulness and attentiveness in all we do, we will never become tired or disheartened. We will always be prepared to continue. [76] *“Just as flaxen threads waft to and fro, Impelled by every breath of wind, So all I do will be achieved, Controlled by movements of a joyful heart.”* As His Holiness the Dalai Lama says, “Spiritual practice is difficult in the beginning. You wonder how on earth you can ever do it. But as you get used to it, the practice gradually becomes easier. Don’t be too stubborn or push yourself too hard. If you practice according to your own capacity, little by little you will find more pleasure and joy in it. As you gain inner strength, your positive actions will gain in profundity and scope.”

Compiled and edited by Tenzin Sherab/Christopher Moroney