

# Triratna Dharma Training Course for Mitras

## Year Four – Teachers’ Notes

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### *Module 6: The Bodhicaryāvatāra of Śāntideva*

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#### **General introduction**

##### *The text*

This study uses a shortened text which covers the main points of Śāntideva’s argument, eliminates repetition, and cuts out some aspects that can obscure the relevance for many Westerners; for example, long passages about the hells and the loathsomeness of the body. The text is based mainly on 3 translations: Crosby and Skilton, Wallace and Wallace, and Batchelor – and the approach has been to look for the meaning conveyed by all three, and then to re-express this in what I hope is accessible and reasonably graceful English. The verse numbers in the original that each section of the shortened text refers to are given in square brackets.

A list of references is given in the introduction to the material available to mitras.

##### *Suggested approach*

The text we are using is short enough to read aloud during the study sessions. I suggest getting the group to read it aloud in the sections indicated in the study leaders’ guides, discussing each part as it comes up. This brings out the structure of the text, makes sure that everyone has registered the main points, and makes for a more satisfying session than a general discussion, which can become rather formless. The study guides provide suggested questions for discussion for each section, plus facts and comments you may want to pass on. You might choose to distribute the study guide to Mitras – there would be no objection to this, and it might be particularly appropriate if you don’t feel comfortable about taking a fairly active role as study leader. Otherwise it might be simpler for you to simply bring up the points and questions raised in the study guide as the group reads through the text, as seems appropriate to you.

It would be good to start each session by getting the group to read the whole edited chapter aloud.

##### *Suggested timetable*

Week 1 – General introduction, plus Chapter 1.

Week 2 – Chapters 2 & 3.

Week 3 – Chapters 2 & 3, plus pūjā.

Week 4 – Chapters 4 & 5.

Week 5 – Chapter 6.

Week 6 – Chapter 7.

Week 7 – Chapter 8.

Week 8 – Chapter 9, plus dedication of merits from Chapter 10.

*An archetypal figure?*

You could adopt an archetypal figure as ‘patron’ for this study, having an image around, and chanting the mantra during pūjās, and maybe at other times, for example to open the study. I would suggest Mañjughoṣa, who was Śāntideva’s yidam and is mentioned a lot in the text. Another possibility of course is Avalokiteśvara.

## ***Week 1: Introductory Remarks About the Whole Text***

It would be appropriate to begin the first session with some general remarks about the Bodhicaryāvatāra, and about Śāntideva. Below is some material you could use if you want to – some of it will already be very familiar to you. Some of it is also included in the introduction to the material available to mitras, which it might be a good idea to read.

### **About the Bodhicaryāvatāra**

The Bodhicaryāvatāra of Śāntideva is one of the most influential Buddhist texts of all time. It describes the approach of what has been called, “The Golden Age of Indian Mahāyāna Buddhism,” and its teachings form the basis for much of Tibetan Buddhism. The Dalai Lama says that it is his main inspiration, and that he reads it every day. The Bodhicaryāvatāra was the first work Sangharakshita led study on after founding Triratna, and he has always emphasised it as one of our core texts. In the original mitra study course it was envisaged that all mitras would study the Bodhicaryāvatāra in addition to the familiar lecture series, but over time this seems to have been forgotten.

### **Śāntideva and the origins of the text**

Śāntideva lived in Northern India around 800CE. When he wrote the text he was a monk at the great monastic university of Nalanda.

In factual terms we don’t know much about his life, except that he wrote at least one other book, the Śikṣā Samuccaya (Compendium of Practice), which is an encyclopaedic work of scholarship. (Trans. Bendall, C, and Rowse W, Siksasamuccaya, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1922, 1971). Whereas the Bodhicaryāvatāra was written in verse, the Śikṣā Samuccaya is a prose guide to the path that incorporates quotations from a large number of Mahāyāna Sutras, many of which are now lost, or exist only in Chinese or Tibetan translations. We know that Śāntideva was a devotee of Mañjuḥṣa, which is in keeping with his extensive scholarship.

There is a standard mythological version of Śāntideva’s life if you want to go into it – see Kulananda’s book, Teachers of Enlightenment. The myth of the apparently lazy monk is a nice story, but in view of the scholarship shown in the Śikṣā Samuccaya it seems unlikely that Śāntideva really ever seemed quite such a dunce! However, you could go into what the story is trying to convey: i.e. that the Bodhicaryāvatāra comes from a different level of consciousness, from profound levels of inspiration, and not from academic scholarship.

### **The title**

***Question:*** Does anyone know what the title, Bodhicaryāvatāra, means?

Bodhicaryāvatāra means something like ‘Guide to the Path of Wisdom’, or ‘Guide to the Path of Awakening.’

## ***Flipchart***

*Bodhi = awakening. Caryā = path. Avatāra = guide.*

In Tibetan circles it is sometimes called the Bodhisattva Caryā Avatāra, and this reflects the way the title is usually translated – as for example the ‘Guide to the Bodhisattva’s Way of Life’. This pretty much describes the text. It is a guide to the path of practice of the trainee Bodhisattva, both in terms of how to cultivate our interior motivations and mental states, and of how to act in everyday life to develop and express these mental states.

## **The Bodhisattva Path**

The text is a guide to the Bodhisattva Path, but we shouldn’t think of this as a new path, or a higher path. The Bodhicaryāvatāra is a restatement of basic Buddhism, in a form that particularly emphasises altruism, concern for others, and practicing for the welfare of the world. This is nothing new: if we go back to early Buddhism, the Buddha constantly emphasised that we should be practicing, “...for the welfare of the many, for the wellbeing of gods and men”, and not just to become happier and more liberated ourselves. This altruistic aspect may have got rather lost sight of for a while after the Buddha’s death, until Mahāyāna Buddhists felt the need to re-emphasise it.

## **The Six Pāramitās and the structure of the text**

***Question:*** *How is the Bodhisattva Path usually described?*

There are several formulations, but the simplest and most widely applicable is that of the Six Pāramitās. The Bodhisattva path and the pāramitās are also dealt with in the Bodhisattva Ideal module – you may want to remind people of this.

***Question:*** *What are the Six Pāramitās?*

According to Conze, ‘pāramitā’ means something like ‘way to the other shore’ or ‘way beyond’. The pāramitās could therefore be called the Six Transcendent Practices, or the six ways to transcend ourselves. For reasons to do with the history of translation they are usually called the Perfections, which is perhaps a bit misleading.

## ***Flipchart***

*The structure of the text can be mapped on to the pāramitās as follows:*

***Chapters 1–3:*** Dāna (generosity) – these chapters are about how we cultivate an overall attitude of generosity; of giving ourselves to the Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, and all beings.

***Chapters 4 & 5:*** Śīla (ethics) – particularly emphasising mindfulness as the basis of ethics.

**Chapter 6:** Kṣānti (patience).

**Chapter 7:** Vīrya (effort, energy).

**Chapter 8:** Samadhi (meditation).

**Chapter 9:** Prajñā (wisdom).

**Chapter 10:** Dedication – not part of the pāramitās structure.

The text also divides into two parts (or three with the dedication).

In chapters 1, 2 and 3 we are led through a progressive series of reflections and meditations that lead us to experience the mindset we need to commit ourselves to the path; an attitude of self-surrender to the Buddhas, and of giving ourselves to all beings. Chapters 2 and 3 form the basis for our Sevenfold Pūjā.

Chapters 4 to 9 look at how we develop and express this mindset through the way we live our life.

## **Chapter 1 – The Benefits of the Bodhicitta**

### ***Title and Purpose***

This chapter is called *Bodhicittanusamsa* or ‘Praising the Bodhicitta’. It is a reflection on just how good it would be to have the attitude that the Bodhisattva path develops and expresses. This is a logical place to start, because the first stage in obtaining anything is to really want it, and the first stage in wanting something is to see its benefits. So this is where Śāntideva starts – by getting us to connect with just how good it would be to have the attitude and spirit which motivates a Bodhisattva – in other words the Bodhicitta.

*Reverently bowing to the Buddhas, to the Dharma, and to the noble sons and daughters of the Sugatas, I shall briefly explain the path of practice of the Buddha’s disciples, according to the scriptures. [1]*

Firstly, Śāntideva tells us the overall purpose of the text, which is to describe the path of practice. This is formulated according to the Bodhisattva path, and has a distinctly Mahāyāna flavour, but the attitudes and practices he described are mostly basic Buddhism, with an emphasis on the altruistic aspect of Going for Refuge.

**Question:** *Why does he start with ‘bowing’?*

Perhaps because a respectful, receptive attitude is necessary if we are to benefit from the text. We need to put the text above us and learn from it, not place ourselves above the text. Some of the teachings we will come across might seem too demanding for us – and when this happens we need to acknowledge that we

are not yet up to the level of the text, rather than criticising the text as though it wasn't up to our own sophisticated level.

*This precious opportunity, with the leisure and other conditions needed to practice the Dharma, is extremely rare. This is what makes life meaningful – if we waste it now, when will it come again? [4]*

To begin firing up our motivation to start serious practice, Śāntideva reminds us that we have 'a precious opportunity'. In contrast to the overwhelming majority of beings in the universe, we have what is needed to do something truly meaningful with our lives. The traditional list of the conditions needed to practice the Dharma and so live meaningfully includes the following:

- Being born as a human being.
- Being healthy enough in body and mind to practice.
- Being born in a civilised land.
- Living in a time and place where a Buddha has appeared, the Dharma is available and a Sangha exists.
- Having enough resources and leisure to be able to devote time and energy to practice.
- Having enough 'merit' to come across the Dharma and Sangha.
- Having enough faith (also due to past merit) to respond positively to the teachings.
- Not having been conditioned to hold wrong views so firmly that we can't accept the Dharma.

***Questions:***

*Do we have a sense of being fortunate to be able to practice the Dharma?*

*In what ways is our present situation fortunate, compared to people living at other times and in other places?*

*Like a flash of lightning on a black stormy night, that gives one instant of clarity, so, by the power of the Buddha, the worldly mind is sometimes lit up for a moment by skilful intentions. But the power of good is weak, while the power of darkness is strong. If it were not for the Bodhicitta, what could conquer this darkness? [5, 6]*

***Question:*** *Is the power of good really weak, and the power of darkness strong?*

How much of the time is our mind caught up with thoughts of our own self-centred agendas – usually related to the Eight Worldly Winds – and all the

craving, anxiety and anger these give rise to? On the other hand, how much of the time are our motives genuinely about others? As our normal ‘worldly’ minds are generally thinking about ourselves, perhaps it takes something from a higher dimension – i.e. the Bodhicitta – to really ‘conquer this darkness’.

*The Buddhas have seen that the Bodhicitta is the one blessing that brings true joy and bliss. Those who want to transcend the sufferings of conditioned existence, those who want to relieve the suffering of others, and those who want to experience joy in their own hearts, should never abandon the Bodhicitta. [7, 8]*

From here on Śāntideva launches into the main goal of this chapter; to give us a burning desire for the Bodhicitta by making us aware of its enormous benefits.

**Question:** *What is the Bodhicitta?*

As the Bodhicitta is the main topic of this chapter, this is the crucial part of the discussion.

### **Flipchart**

*Bodhi = Wisdom, Awakening. Citta = heart/mind.*

So Bodhicitta means something like ‘wisdom mind’ or ‘awakening heart’.

The Bodhicitta is often described as the will to become enlightened for the sake of all beings. It is the spirit, mindset and attitude of the Bodhisattva, and the driving force for following the Bodhisattva path. Sangharakshita talks about it as a transpersonal force that operates in the universe, which no individual can ‘get’ or attain, but which we can open up to, align ourselves with, and allow to act through us.

### **Important points**

- Bodhicitta is not something new, that the Mahāyāna invented. The Buddha frequently exhorted his followers to practice, “...for the welfare of the many.” and exemplified this in his life. Sangharakshita describes the Bodhicitta as the altruistic aspect of Going for Refuge. He says that this aspect is essential, and that, “There is no such thing as an individualistic awakening.” Insight is about seeing absence of separate selfhood, and therefore our interconnectedness with other beings, so wisdom and altruism are two sides of the same coin.
- As the Bodhicitta is the altruistic aspect of Going for Refuge, it can presumably be experienced at different levels, like the other aspects of Going for Refuge. Although Sangharakshita speaks of the full-blown arising of the Bodhicitta as an exalted spiritual experience, we can also experience it at the ‘effective’ and ‘provisional’ level, and gain a correspondingly weaker version of the benefits described in the text. If this

were not the case, the Bodhicaryāvatāra would be aimed at beings on a different plane from ourselves and have no application to our spiritual practice, and there would be little point in us studying it. In fact Śāntideva makes it plain that the text is not just aimed at spiritual superheroes, but also at people who experience many of the same difficulties with the spiritual life that we do. At our level, perhaps we might experience the Bodhicitta more as an altruistic, other-regarding attitude for us to practice, with an emphasis on service and Sangha, rather than as a cosmic will acting through us!

*The moment the Bodhicitta arises in someone, fettered and weak in the jail of cyclic existence, he is instantly hailed as a Son of the Sugatas, and honoured by gods and men. [9]*

The Bodhicitta attitude instantly raises our level of being from the trivial to the noble – it makes us a, “Son [or daughter] of the Buddhas,” a member of a noble, royal family. It, and it alone, makes us truly worthy of respect. This is an example of something Śāntideva does a lot: he turns our worldly motivations into motivation for the path. Everyone would like self-esteem and respect from others – so he shows that following the path, not noble birth or worldly success, is the way to feel good about ourselves, and to be genuinely worthy of respect.

Incidentally, apologies for the non-inclusive language, but constantly referring to ‘son or daughter’, and so on, does get cumbersome. Śāntideva does seem to have said ‘son’, and the words ‘or daughter’ are understood.

*The Bodhicitta is the philosopher’s stone that transmutes the base metal of this body into the gold of the Buddha Jewel. Grasp it tightly, and use it well. [10]*

Once we have adopted the Bodhicitta as our underlying attitude and motivation, it begins to transform us, as the philosopher’s stone of the alchemists was said to transform base metals into gold. So we need to treasure it, guard it, and ‘use it well’.

*Like a banana tree, every other good thing bears fruit for a time, and then dies. But the Bodhicitta does not wither, and continues to bear fruit. It protects us like a great hero. Like a great fire it instantly burns up evil habits and past karma. [12-14]*

**Question:** *Why are other good things like a banana tree?*

Apparently banana trees bear fruit and then die. All worldly benefits are similarly transient – we might get some short-lived pleasure from them, but then this immediately passes away. The same is true even of many spiritual benefits – we may be able to put ourselves in a good state by meditating or going on retreat, but this will be temporary unless it is accompanied by a deep change in our attitudes and reasons for living, so that we switch our emphasis from ourselves to others.

**Question:** *How might the Bodhicitta protect us ‘like a hero’?*

It doesn’t necessarily protect us from ‘bad’ things happening, but it does protect us from negative mental states about what happens to us. If we are focussed on a higher goal, and not on our own wants and anxieties, we will be much more equanimous. Because it is our mental states that really determine our wellbeing, the Bodhicitta does protect us.

**Question:** *Why might the arising of the Bodhicitta burn up bad habits and evil karma?*

Maybe because its arising is a spiritual death and a spiritual rebirth - our old habitual self, based on ego-concern, dies and withers, and when it dies so do the karmic fetters it has created?

*There are two kinds of Bodhicitta: Bodhicitta as an aspiration, and Bodhicitta put into practice. The difference is like that between someone who wants to go travelling, and someone who actually goes. [15, 16]*

*Even to aspire for the Bodhicitta brings great benefits, but nothing like those that come once we begin to act on our aspiration. [17]*

*From the moment we definitely decide to live and practice for the benefit of all, a continuous stream of merit rains down on us, even when we are asleep or distracted. [18]*

**Question:** *Why should just aspiring for the Bodhicitta bring any benefits?*

To will something positive is good karma, even if we don’t have the power to bring it about yet. We find this easier to accept with regard to negative karma – for example, we probably agree that if we wanted to kill someone but didn’t have the courage or strength, our volition alone would be a powerful bad karma; but the same is true of willing something positive but not being able to put it into effect.

However when we do ‘definitely decide to live and practice for the benefit of all’ – when the Bodhicitta arises – from that time on it is as though we have the support of higher forces beyond ourselves, and spiritual energy pours into us.

*This state of mind, in which we care more for others than they care for themselves, is a miraculous jewel, and its arising is a wonder. It is the source of the world’s joy, and the cure for the world’s suffering. There is no way we can fathom the depths of its goodness. [24-26]*

**Question:** *Why is the arising of the Bodhicitta ‘a wonder’?*

As Sangharakshita and Nāgārjuna point out, the Bodhicitta is, “Not included in the skandhas.” It is something transcendental, that comes from outside the realm of our conditioned experience. So its arising is a miracle, and there is no way we can fully understand it.

*Look at most living beings: hoping to escape suffering, they run straight towards it; looking for happiness, in their delusion they destroy their own happiness, as though they were their own enemy. [28]*

**Question:** *How do we 'run straight towards' suffering and destroy our own happiness?*

*But the Bodhicitta gives real happiness, it dispels suffering, and it drives off delusion. It is the best teacher and the best spiritual friend. [29, 30]*

The Bodhicitta attitude, far from being a way to give ourselves a hard time, is in fact the real source of happiness, unlike 'normal' ways of looking for happiness, which in fact bring suffering.

**Question:** *Why might the Bodhicitta 'drive off delusion'?*

Perhaps because our deluded state arises from our ego-centred viewpoint, and from the distortions that our likes, dislikes, wants and fears create in our perception of things. So when we go beyond this ego-centred state we also break free from our delusion.

*I bow down to those in whom this precious jewel of the mind has arisen; I go for refuge to those sources of joy, who bring happiness even to those who harm them. [36]*

## ***Weeks 2 and 3: Chapters 2 (Confession) and 3 (Embracing the Bodhicitta), Sevenfold Pūjā***

These two chapters were originally one, and need to be read together. I suggest devoting two weeks to them, and including a pūjā based on our text, which is supplied.

### **Opening remarks**

Chapters 2 and 3 are the basis for our Sevenfold Pūjā. Śāntideva did not invent the sevenfold pūjā – there is a version of it in the (earlier) *Avatamsaka Sutra* – but the words we normally use come from a translation of the Bodhicaryāvatāra. Śāntideva more or less follows the structure of the sevenfold pūjā, but he doesn't do this strictly – he elaborates on it and sometimes mixes up different stages. For example, confession and going for refuge are very long and mixed up together, and combined with a long reflection on death, while some sections just get a verse or two.

The aim of these two chapters (and of the sevenfold pūjā) is to cultivate a state of mind in which we open ourselves to the Bodhicitta, and commit ourselves to practicing the Bodhisattva Path. In chapter 1 we reflected on how good it would be if we could do this, in order to generate *chanda*, strong desire and enthusiasm. Then, in chapters 2 and 3, Śāntideva takes us through a progressive series of reflections, meditations and spiritual 'moods' designed to lead us towards a wholehearted giving of *ourselves* to the Bodhicitta, to the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, and to all beings. The way in which we act out this supreme act of *dāna* in our lives is then described in chapter 4 onwards.

Chapters 1 to 3 can be seen as representing *dāna* in the Six Pāramitās structure, in that they are about developing an attitude of giving ourselves. We are not ready to do this fully, so the pūjā is a sort of rehearsal, which if we do it often enough and with enough intensity will lead to the real thing.

### **Chapter 2 – Confession**

#### ***Worship, offerings, and prostrations***

*In order to embrace the precious Bodhicitta, the jewel of the mind, I make offerings to the Buddhas, to the sublime Dharma, and to the sons and daughters of the Buddha, who are oceans of excellence. [1]*

#### ***Offerings, or Worship***

First Śāntideva announces the purpose of the next two chapters – which is to help us to open ourselves up to the Bodhicitta, by following a series of mini-meditations which culminate in us dedicating ourselves to the Bodhisattva path. The first stage of this sequence is making offerings – we usually call it 'worship'.

We begin by putting ourselves in the presence of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas in our imagination. Then we express respect, and we start practicing dāna, giving to them in our imagination.

**Questions:**

*Do folk imagine themselves in the presence of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas when they do a pūjā?*

*If so, how do they do this – e.g. do they visualise them, or just try to get a sense of their presence?*

*Conjuring them up in my mind, I offer all the flowers in the world, all the fruits, and all the fragrant herbs. I offer the clear refreshing waters, the crystal mountains, the tranquil forests, and the wild places. I offer vines bright with flowers, I offer trees heavy with fruit, I offer lakes adorned with lotuses, and the haunting cry of the wild geese. [2-6]*

**Offering natural beauty**

As the first stage of making offerings we conjure up in our minds the beauties of nature, and offer these to the Bodhicitta, and to the higher beings who express it.

**Question:** *Why might offering the beauty we see in nature be a good place to start?*

Because many people find being in nature a good way of connecting with a sense of beauty, wonder, and reverence.

It is worth pointing out that it is important to actually conjure up the visual images in our imagination, and not just say the words – the pūjā is a form of visualisation practice.

*I offer myself completely to the Buddhas and their sons. Take possession of me, sublime beings - I reverently devote myself to your service. [8]*

*When you possess me, I am freed from fear. When you possess me, I work for the benefit of all. When you possess me, I am freed from my unskillful karma, and in the future I commit no more. [9]*

**Offering ourselves**

Here Śāntideva moves into a different gear – he offers *himself* to the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, foreshadowing what comes later in the pūjā. He also points out that this giving of ourselves to the Bodhicitta would be the end of our negative mental states based on self-centred craving – he uses fear as an example – and would free us from our unskillful karma.

We could think of ourselves as physically acting out this giving of ourselves when we bow to make offerings to the shrine in the pūjā.

### **Questions:**

*What is our emotional response to the idea of self-surrender, and why?*

*Why might giving ourselves as a servant to the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas free us from fear and other negative mental states?*

Because these negative emotions are the product of our ego and its cravings? Because it represents a change in the principles we use to govern our life, from the Eight Worldly Winds to the Precepts, the wellbeing of others, and the Higher Evolution. It gives us a different ‘centre of gravity’, and a reference point above our own interests which we can use to guide our actions. As such it represents a spiritual death and rebirth, one effect of which is to free us from the negative effects of our past.

### **Dealing with reactions**

Some people may react to the idea of ‘self-surrender’ and the language of being ‘possessed’ by the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. If negative reactions come up, here are some points we could make:

- We are normally ‘possessed’ by greed, hatred, delusion, and by all our other habitual patterns and mental states. Surely it is far better to be ‘possessed’ by the Bodhicitta!
- Self surrender can seem demeaning, but actually it should be a source of pride to be a servant of a higher cause. Isn’t it nobler to serve the highest possible cause than to be a servant of our own wants and fears?
- The language of self-surrender can sound too theistic. But some element of self-surrender to something higher than our present ego seems to be an essential part of the path. Even if we like to think of Buddha Nature as coming from within, our own Buddha Nature will be experienced as something ‘other’, as something higher than our present self that comes from outside.
- One reason for reacting to the idea of self-surrender is simply that it humbles our proud ego – maybe this is a good reason to do it.

*In my minds eye I invite the sages to a fragrant bathing chamber, with jewelled pillars and mosaic floors of clear crystal. While music plays I invite them to bathe in flower-scented water. I dry them with soft cloths, and anoint their bodies, which shine like heated gold. I dress them in richly coloured robes, and adorn them with bright jewels and ornaments. [10-14]*

*I garland them with flowers, envelop them in heady clouds of incense, and offer them many kinds of food and drink. I offer jewelled lamps on golden lotuses, and strew drifts of flowers on the perfumed floor. [16, 17]*

*To those whose very essence is maitrī I offer cloudlike palaces in the sky, to which thrilling music, poems, and songs of worship drift upwards, while flowers rain down incessantly on all shrines and images, and on all the jewels of the true Dharma. [18, 20, 21, 23]*

From offering the beauties of the tangible natural world, we now move to a visionary, archetypal level.

**Question:** *How do people respond to this?*

Some will find this less accessible, because we have largely lost any tradition of imagining a realm beyond our normal sense-experience. But it is worth trying to open up our imagination to this level of experience, either using this traditional Indian imagery, or perhaps developing our own based on Western traditions.

**Questions:**

*How and what do we worship?*

*Is there anything we see as higher than ourselves, and worthy of worship?*

*If so, do we ever express this? How?*

*With bodies as numerous as the atoms in the universe I prostrate to the Buddhas of the past, present and future, to the Dharma, and to the sublime Sangha. I make reverence to all shrines and sacred places. I bow to all teachers, and to all worthy practitioners. [24, 25]*

**Salutation, bowing, or prostration**

We move on to ‘salutation’ – the Sanskrit means something more like bowing or prostration. Traditional commentaries recommend imagining ourselves emanating a vast number of copies of ourselves ‘as numerous as the atoms in the universe’, who all bow down or prostrate to all the manifestations of the Bodhicitta, the Buddhas, and the Bodhisattvas. In this way we identify ourselves with the whole universe, and see the whole universe bowing to the Bodhicitta.

**Question:** *Why is bowing an important practice?*

When we bow we are putting ourselves in an appropriate relationship with the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, acknowledging that they are on a higher level of being than we are. If we see ourselves as their equals – if we lack reverence – we will not be open to their influence.

## **Confession and Going for Refuge**

*Standing with folded hands before the Buddhas in the ten directions, before the Bodhisattvas of great compassion, I acknowledge the harm I have caused, in this life and past ages: the harm to myself, the harm to the Three Jewels, and the harm to other beings. [27-31]*

*How can I escape the results of my karma? O Guides of the World, please grasp me quickly, so that death does not come before it is wiped out. [33]*

Śāntideva points out that even from a self-centred point of view regret about our past unskillfulness is appropriate, because we have stored up a lot of suffering for ourselves. Traditionally this sense of regret is sometimes likened to someone who realises that they have drunk poison. The only real antidote to this poison is the arising of the Bodhicitta – so Śāntideva asks ‘please grasp me quickly, before death hunts me down’.

**Question:** *How might we ‘harm the Three Jewels’?*

*Here and now I go for refuge to the Buddhas who protect the universe. Wholeheartedly I go for refuge to the Dharma they have realised, which destroys the fears of cyclic existence, and to the community of Bodhisattvas. [48, 49]*

*I offer myself to Samantabhadra, I give myself to Mañjuṣṣa, I cry out to the compassionate Avalokiteśvara, asking him to protect me. I bow down to Vajrapāṇi – at the sight of him the messengers of death scatter in all directions! [51-53]*

*I have ignored your advice, O great guides, but now, seeing my danger, I go for refuge, and ask for your protection. Someone afraid of an ordinary illness will take their doctor’s advice. But I have ignored the advice of the all-knowing doctor, about the worst of diseases. Is there no end to my stupidity? [54-57]*

In the Bodhicaryāvatāra the main section on Going for Refuge comes after ‘Confession’, because for Śāntideva regret for past harmful actions seems to be an important motivation for committing to the Three Jewels. In the unabridged text there is just one verse on Going for Refuge before the Confession section. The rest is sandwiched between lengthy passages of confession and reflection on death.

**Questions:**

*What are the connections between Going for Refuge and Confession?*

*Which should come first?*

*If I am careful on an ordinary cliff, how much more care should I take at the top of precipice that drops for huge distances, through great tracts of*

*time? Yet I take my pleasure, thinking, “Death won’t come today,” while my end gets nearer and nearer. Who has made me immune to death? Do I think I will escape it when nobody else does? How can I take my ease? Instead I should keep in mind that unskilfulness always leads to suffering, and that I need to liberate myself from the effects of my karma. [58-60, 63]*

Here we have a meditation on the inevitability and awesomeness of death, which is much longer (and much, much, more frightening) in the unabridged text. For Śāntideva an awareness of the inevitability of death is an important spur to practice.

**Questions:**

*Why might mindfulness of death spur us on to practice?*

*Does it make any difference if we don’t believe in rebirth, as Śāntideva obviously does?*

*Standing with folded hands before the Guides of the World, fearful of the suffering I have stored up for myself, I confess all the unskilfulness I have piled up in my delusion. Prostrating again and again, I ask the leaders to accept my confession. What is not good, O Protectors, I must not do again. [64-66]*

**Questions:**

*How do we respond to the idea of confession?*

*What is unskilful karma?*

*Why might it cause us suffering?*

We could see it as negative patterns in ourselves that we have created and reinforced by our actions. These cause suffering because it is painful to be in negative mental states such as craving, ill will etc.

*Do we accept that we have accumulated a lot of unskilful karma?*

*If not, why aren’t we Enlightened, and why do we experience negative states?*

*What is the spiritual value of confession?*

When we acknowledge our unskilful patterns and express regret rather than defending them, we move towards freeing ourselves from them.

*What elements need to be present for confession to be effective?*

As a minimum:

- a. Regret.
- b. Willingness to undo the effects of the act – for example repaying money obtained unskillfully.
- c. Commitment not to repeat the action – but see the next question.

*What do we do when we regret a pattern or habit, but know that at the moment we are powerless to commit never to repeat it?*

We could commit not to repeat the action for a limited period; a month, a week, or even a day. By connecting with our regret for the unskillful habit, and changing our behaviour even for a limited period, we weaken the saṃskāra. However some deep seated patterns are very difficult to change unless we change our conditions. In this case perhaps all we can do is to recognise this, and Go for Refuge.

### **Chapter 3 – Embracing the Bodhicitta**

#### ***Rejoicing in merit***

*I rejoice with gladness in the good done by all beings, which frees them from the lower states. I rejoice in the release of beings from the sufferings of cyclic existence. I rejoice in the nature of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, and in the teachings of the wise. I rejoice with a heart of gladness in all expressions of the Bodhicitta, the mind that wishes all beings to be happy, and works for the benefit of all. [1-3]*

Here we rejoice in, delight in, celebrate, all expressions of positive spiritual qualities, from the highest, most archetypal levels (e.g. the ‘nature of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas’) through the more concrete ways that these qualities manifest themselves in our lives (e.g. ‘the teachings of the wise’), to the small everyday positive actions of the ordinary beings around us (‘the good done by all beings.’).

***Question:*** *Why does rejoicing in merits align us with the Bodhicitta?*

Here are some suggestions for discussion on this point:

- If we play for or support a team we don’t only rejoice at the goals we ourselves score – because we identify with the team, we rejoice if anyone on our side scores, or plays well. Similarly if we are aligning ourselves with the Bodhicitta, we rejoice in all spiritual qualities, whoever has them, and not just in our own. So rejoicing is joining the Bodhicitta’s team, or at least supporting it, and so becoming, as much as we can, a part of it.
- To the extent that we are aligned with the Bodhicitta, our life and spiritual practice is for everyone, not for ourselves alone. If we practice for the sake of everyone, then any spiritual progress and any positive spiritual quality manifested by anybody is a success for our practice. In contrast, if we practice for ourselves we can only rejoice in our own progress and good qualities, and we might ignore or even resent those of others. So

celebrating others' good qualities is a way of making our practice more about everyone, and less about ourselves.

- Rejoicing in something outside of ourselves is an aspect of going beyond self – the ego-bound person can only rejoice in what they themselves own.
- At a simple practical level, rejoicing in merits counteracts any residual negativity left over from confession, making us aware of the positive aspects of the universe and other people.

### **Questions:**

*How good are we at rejoicing and celebrating?*

*What experience do we have of rejoicing and celebrating?*

*Can we remember times when we have rejoiced?*

*How did we express this?*

*What gets in the way of rejoicing and celebrating?*

- Egotism, “If it’s not mine, it’s nothing to do with me.”
- One-sided focus on negatives, e.g. from Protestant conditioning, with its focus on critical condemnation of oneself and others.
- Fashionable cynicism and irony, “Take cynicism and wring its neck!”

### **Asking for teaching**

*With hands folded in reverence I beg the Buddhas in all directions to shine the light of the Dharma, to light up the world for we who wander, bewildered by darkness. With hands folded in reverence I ask the Jinas, who wish to pass into Nirvana, to please stay here for endless ages, and not to leave this world in darkness. [4,5]*

Entreaty and supplication, or asking for teaching, is an expression of our receptivity and desire to be taught. We are acknowledging our need for guidance from something higher than our present everyday self.

**Questions:** *Who or what are we asking for guidance from here?*

For example, humans wiser than ourselves; our own inner wisdom (Buddha Nature); or the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas seen as forces outside ourselves?

*What conditions or practices help us to be more open to the voice of this ‘something’ – however we see it?*

Possible answers include:

- Meditation.
- Solitude, silence, limited input. Hence solitary retreats.
- Studying the Dharma.
- Contact with nature.
- Contact with people who practice.
- Generally, being ‘in a good state’.
- Accepting that ‘heart knowledge’ – or śraddhā – can be a valid way of knowing.

**Question:** *What stops us receiving such guidance?*

Possible answers include:

- Constant excessive busyness, too much input, anxiety, unskilful states.
- Thinking we already know it all.

### ***Transference of merit and self-surrender***

*May the merit I have gained by these actions relieve the suffering of all beings. With no sense of loss I give myself to all beings, I give them all my pleasures, and all my merit from the past, present, and future. [6, 10]*

### **Questions:**

*What is ‘merit’?*

*How might worship, confession, rejoicing and so on give us merit?*

We could see merit as the positive habits and patterns we build up by skilful action. Performing the pūjā can promote very positive states of mind, so it is a powerful skilful action.

*What is the spiritual significance of transferring this merit to others: how could we understand this, or express it in more contemporary language?*

By giving away our merits we are, in a sense, giving the benefits of our spiritual practice to others. In doing so we are moving away from an individualistic approach to practice, in which we see the spiritual life as about developing positive qualities to make ourselves more happy, to a more expansive view, in which we develop positive qualities to be of more use to other beings and the Three Jewels.

*Enlightenment is giving away everything, and Enlightenment is my heart’s goal. So let me give everything away to sentient beings! [11]*

From giving away our merit we move to giving away everything!

**Questions:** *How is Enlightenment 'giving away everything'?*

Perhaps because it represents the death of our present self, and, as at normal death, we cease to own anything?

*That being so, do we really want it?*

*What positives does it have?*

*I give this body to beings to do with as they please. May I never cause them harm, and may even their anger towards me benefit them. Those who criticise me, those who are unjust to me, those who harm me, those who mock me - may they all share in Enlightenment. [12-16]*

*May I be the doctor and the nurse for all beings, until the world is cured. May I be food for the hungry, and wealth for the poor. May I be a protector for the unprotected, a guide for the lost, and a boat to the other shore. May I be a lamp for those who need light, and a bed for those who need rest. May I be a servant to all beings. [7-9, 17, 18]*

*Just like the earth, water, fire, and air, that are useful in many ways to the beings throughout infinite space, so may I too support the life of all beings, until we are all liberated. [20, 21]*

This attitude of giving ourselves to all beings, which directly precedes making a commitment to follow the Bodhisattva Path, is the goal of the pūjā. Inevitably this attitude is beyond us as we are now, and we will probably want to argue with parts of the text, although other parts may appeal to us. But we need to remember that we are rehearsing an attitude we are not yet fully ready for, in order to strengthen it in ourselves.

**Question:** *Can we relate to this attitude; can we at least get a taste of it?*

This is where our normal Sevenfold Pūjā ends. What comes next is a commitment to follow the Bodhisattva path, to become a 'trainee Bodhisattva' as an expression of this attitude of supreme generosity and concern for others. So...

### **Commitment and celebration**

*Just as the Buddhas before me took up the Bodhicitta, just as they trained in the Six Perfections, so now I too, for the welfare of the world, embrace the Bodhicitta, so now I too will train in the Bodhisattva's Path. [22, 23]*

This is the culmination of Chapters 2 and 3 – the commitment, or vow, to follow the Bodhisattva Path. What follows is then a celebration of the fact that this – far from being a self-punishing act of martyrdom – is in fact the fulfilment of our highest potential, and the answer to our existential problems. This section does not

appear in our usual pūjā, probably because it is only relevant if we are in fact ready to take the Bodhisattva vow.

*Today my life has born fruit. Today I have been born in the family of the Buddha. Today I have become one of the Buddha's sons and daughters. Everything I do from now on should be worthy of this noble family. [25, 26]*

*Just like a blind man, who by chance finds a jewel in a heap of rubbish, so by some chance this precious attitude has arisen in me. [27]*

*This is the elixir of life, that puts an end to death. This is the priceless treasure, that ends all poverty on Earth. This is the supreme medicine, that cures the world's disease. This is the bridge to freedom, that leads from unhappy states. [28-30]*

*This is the moon of the mind, whose light banishes our darkness. This is the brilliant sun, that burns off the mist of delusion. This is the essential butter from churning the milk of the Dharma. [30, 31]*

*For the whole caravan of humanity travelling the roads of existence in search of happiness, this will give them joy. [32]  
Today in the presence of the Buddhas I invite the world to be my guest at a great feast of delight. May humans, gods, and all beings rejoice! [33]*

When we give a feast or a party we lay on something enjoyable for our friends with a sense of joy and celebration. Here Śāntideva compares taking the bodhisattva vow with making such a joyous act of dāna on a huge scale – it is like giving a feast or a party for all beings, inviting them all to come and enjoy themselves.

### **Questions:**

*How might taking the Bodhisattva vow be like:*

- a. *Being born into a noble family?*
- b. *Finding a jewel in a heap of rubbish?*
- c. *The elixir or life?*
- d. *A treasure that ends poverty?*
- e. *The sun, that burns off the mist of delusion.*
- f. *The essential butter from churning the milk of the Dharma?*

## **Pūjā**

It makes sense to conclude the (normally) two sessions on chapters 2 and 3 with a pūjā. Here is an appropriate pūjā that follows the text we have been studying fairly closely, so makes the link between the study material and the practice of pūjā as clear as possible.

### ***A Bodhicaryāvatāra Pūjā***

#### ***Offerings***

In order to adopt the Bodhisattva Spirit  
The sacred Bodhicitta  
The jewel of the mind  
I make offerings to the Buddhas  
I make offerings to the Dharma  
And to the Sons of the Buddha [and/or daughters]  
Who are oceans of excellence.

Conjuring them up in my mind  
I offer all the flowers in the world  
I offer all the fruits  
I offer all the fragrant plants.

I offer the clear refreshing waters  
The crystal mountains  
The tranquil forests  
And the wild places.

I offer vines bright with flowers  
I offer trees heavy with fruit  
I offer lakes adorned with lotuses  
And the haunting cry of the wild geese.

Conjuring these things up in my mind  
I offer them to the sages  
And to their sons [and/or daughters]  
Who are oceans of excellence.

#### ***Salutations***

As many atoms as there are  
In the thousand million worlds  
With so many bodies I bow down  
To all the Buddhas of the Three Eras  
To the true Dharma  
And to the noble Sangha.

I pay homage to all the shrines  
And places in which the Bodhisattvas have been  
I make profound obeisance to the teachers  
And those to whom respectful salutation is due.

I bow down to all those  
Who express the Bodhicitta  
I go for refuge to those  
Who are fountains of joy.

### ***Going for Refuge***

This very day  
I go for my refuge  
To the Buddhas who protect the universe  
To the Dharma they have realised  
And to the community of Bodhisattvas.

I offer myself completely  
To the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas  
Take possession of me  
I am your servant.

When you possess me  
I am freed from my delusions  
When you possess me  
I am freed from my wrongdoings  
When you possess me  
I am freed from fear.

Please possess me  
Most noble beings  
In admiration and devotion  
I give myself to you.

### ***Refuges and Precepts***

#### ***Confession***

Standing with folded hands  
Before the leaders of the world,  
Before the Buddhas in the ten directions  
Before the Bodhisattvas of great compassion,  
I acknowledge the harm I have caused  
In this life and past ages,  
The harm to others,

The harm to myself,  
And the harm to the three jewels.

Standing with folded hands  
Before the guides of the world  
I make this aspiration-  
Such acts in the future  
I will not do.

I have ignored your advice  
Oh great beings.  
How can I escape  
The results of my karma?

I give myself to Mañjuḥṣa,  
I offer myself to Avalokiteśvara,  
I bow down to Vajrapāṇi:  
At the sight of him  
The messengers of death  
Run in all directions.

I offer myself to you  
O great beings,  
Please grasp me quickly,  
Before death hunts me down.

### ***Rejoicing in Merit***

I rejoice with delight  
In the good done by all beings,  
Which frees them from the lower states.  
I rejoice in the release of beings  
From the sufferings of saṃsāra.  
I rejoice in the nature of the Bodhisattvas,  
And in the teachings of the wise.

I rejoice with a heart of gladness  
In all expressions of the Bodhicitta,  
The mind that wishes all beings to be happy,  
And works for the benefit of all.

### ***Entreaty and Supplication***

With hands folded in reverence  
I beg the Buddhas in all directions  
To shine the light of the Dharma,  
To light up this world

For we who wander  
Bewildered by darkness.

With hands folded in reverence  
I beg the Great Beings  
Who wish to pass into Nirvana  
To please stay here for endless ages,  
So that life in this world does not grow dark

### ***Transference of Merit and Self-Surrender***

With no sense of loss  
I give myself to all beings,  
I give my merits  
For the benefit of all.

May I be the doctor,  
May I be the nurse,  
For all beings,  
Until the world is cured.

For those in poverty  
May I be wealth,  
For those in pain  
May I be balm.

May I be a light  
For those who are lost,  
May I be a harbour  
For those that need shelter.

Like the earth and the water,  
Like the fire and the air,  
May I be a servant  
To beings on Earth  
Until the world is whole.

Just as the Buddhas before me  
Took up the Bodhicitta,  
Just as they trained  
In the six perfections,  
So now I too,  
For the welfare of the world,  
Set my mind on enlightenment,  
So now I too,  
For the welfare of the world,  
Will train in the Bodhisattva's path.

Today my life has born fruit,  
Today I have been born  
In the family of the Buddha,  
Today I have become  
One of Buddha's sons. [or clan]

Just like a blind man  
Who finds by chance  
A jewel in a dung-heap,  
So by some chance  
This precious attitude  
Has arisen in me.

This is the elixir of life  
That puts an end to death.  
This is the priceless treasure  
That ends all poverty on earth.

This is the supreme medicine  
That cures the world's disease.  
This is the bridge to freedom  
That leads from unhappy states.

This is the essential butter  
From churning the milk of the Dharma.

For the whole caravan of humanity  
Travelling the roads of existence  
In search of happiness,  
This will give them joy.

Today in the presence of the Buddhas  
I invite the world to be my guest  
At a great feast of delight.  
May humans, gods, and all beings rejoice.

*Week 4, Chapters 4 and 5 – Maintaining Mindfulness of Our Commitment:  
Apramāda and Samprajanya*

**Introduction to chapters 4 and 5**

The Sanskrit titles of these two chapters both relate to mindfulness:

Chapter 4, *Bodhicittapramāda* – ‘*apramāda*’, or ethical vigilance, with regard to the Bodhicitta.

Chapter 5, *Samprajanyaraksana* – guarding ‘*samprajanya*’, or continuity of purpose.

Apramāda and Samprajanya are two of the three main Sanskrit words that are often translated as ‘mindfulness’ – the third being *smṛti*. In the Buddha’s last exhortation – often translated as, “With mindfulness strive on.” – the word used is *apramāda*, which implies clear recollection of our precepts, and close attention to the ethical nature of our acts of body, speech and mind.

Sangharakshita often translates *samprajanya* as ‘continuity of purpose’; one aspect of it is keeping our goals and aims in mind. Bringing out the meaning of *apramāda* and *samprajanya* is important, because it counteracts any one-sided emphasis on mindfulness as just ‘being in the present moment’ – which if it were taken literally would reduce us to the level of a purposeless, mindless animal, at the mercy of present circumstances.

*Apramāda* links our present awareness to the past – especially to the precepts, resolutions and vows we have taken on. *Samprajanya* links our present awareness to the future, as it means we keep our aims for the future in mind, so that our present actions help to bring these goals about. Of course these goals would not be limited to external practical things – they would include our own growth and development, and the growth and development of the Sangha.

***Possible questions:***

You might want to tackle this issue, but it might divert discussion from the text too much right at the beginning of the discussion.

*What are the advantages of ‘being in the present moment’?*

*What are the disadvantages?*

*Why is there such an emphasis on ‘being in the present moment’ in many people’s understanding of mindfulness – and of Buddhism in general?*

Perhaps because modern westerners tend to be neurotically plagued by anxious thoughts about the past and the future, overloaded with input and information, and unaware of their bodies and surroundings, so learning to pay attention to present experience comes as a welcome relief. So learning to pay attention to the present

moment is a positive thing, but it has to go along with a (non-neurotic) recollection of the past, and of our aims for the future. Only in this way can we become integrated beings.

These two chapters seem to represent śīla in the structure based on the 6 pāramitās. The first three chapters seem to represent dāna, as they culminate in us adopting what we might call a life-attitude of generosity, and giving ourselves to all beings. From Chapter 6 each chapter is named after a pāramitā, from kṣānti onwards. Śāntideva seems to think that mindfulness is the basis of ethics, which makes sense when we remember he is talking about apramāda and samprajanya, which both have a strong ethical element, and in view of the fact that just about all the other ethical qualities we might think of are dealt with in other chapters.

## **Chapter 4 – Apramāda (ethical vigilance)**

### ***Introduction to chapter 4***

These two chapters represent a transition in the text: from developing a particular mental attitude and approach to life, to actually putting this into practice; from the path of vision to the path of transformation; from opening up to other-power, to exerting self-power. This is where *we* have to start putting in some effort, where we have to make an act of will, and challenge our habits, where our self power has to kick in and align itself with the other power we were opening up to.

Chapter 3 culminated with the Bodhisattva vow, the vow to practice for all beings, and with an outburst of joy about this. But now we have to put that into practice. This is what Chapter 4 is all about, and to a certain extent Chapter 5. We all know what its like to make a commitment when we're inspired, and then to have to face the reality of everyday life when we're not inspired. We go on retreat, think we'll never be the same again, but by the afternoon of our first Monday back at home our old patterns have taken over. We come up against our habits and our habitual ways of thinking, feeling, speaking, and acting. We realise that it is not quite as easy to change these as we thought. It is going to be hard, it is going to be uncomfortable, we are going to need some warrior spirit. So Chapter 4 emphasises this warrior spirit – in a way that people who want Buddhism to be all about gentle emotions and going with the flow might find very challenging!

### ***From promise to practice***

*After embracing the Bodhicitta in this way, a Son of the Jinās should strive hard to put his resolve into practice. In the case of some decisions, which are rash or not properly thought out, it might be right to have second thoughts. But why should I back out of a commitment that has been thought through and approved by the great wisdom of the Buddhas and their sons – and even by me, for what that's worth! [1-3]*

Śāntideva starts by telling us the purpose of the chapter – we have made the resolve in chapter 3, now we have to consider what's needed to put it into practice.

We have moved from chanda to adhimokṣa – firm decision – and now we need to develop the mindfulness needed to allow our decision to have an impact on our everyday behaviour.

He also tells us that the spiritual life isn't going to be easy. It is important to take this on board, as expecting it to happen effortlessly will eventually lead to disillusion and perhaps blaming others (or 'The Movement') for our discomfort and failure to make progress.

*If going back on even a small generous impulse has bad karmic effects, what would be the effect of backing out of a promise made to the whole world? So I must act firmly on my commitment. Unless I make the effort now, I shall fall to lower and lower states. [5, 6, 8, 12]*

**Question:** *Why does going back on a generous impulse have bad karmic effects?*

Because doing this is a volitional act to identify with and act out of the ungenerous side of our being rather than the generous side. We cannot help experiencing both generous and ungenerous impulses, which are the product of past karma. We do however have a choice about which we act on, and it is this volitional act which creates future karmic propensities.

**Question:** *Why is the commitment made in chapter 3 'a promise made to the whole world'?*

***This precious opportunity***

*When will an opportunity like this come again: the arising of a Buddha, faith, a human life, the freedom to practice, adequate health, enough food to live, and no major problems? If I can't practice now, what will I do when I am stunned by the sufferings of the lower states? In those states it is hard to act skilfully, which is why the Buddha said that being born a human is as unlikely as a turtle in the vast ocean accidentally putting its head through a single floating yoke as it surfaces. After getting such a fleeting opportunity, nothing could be more stupid than not to practice. [15, 16, 18-20, 23]*

We often put off serious, radical practice until some time in the future, when we imagine the situation will be more favourable. Here Śāntideva is pointing out the foolishness of this. Actually our situation right now is likely to be as good as it gets. In the future we may well fall into a 'lower state' in which it is almost impossible to practice. Śāntideva sees this in terms of future rebirths, but we could just as well see it in terms of this life. Our present situation is unbelievably fortunate and very precarious, so, "If not now, when?"

**Questions:** *Do people know the analogy of the turtle and the floating yoke?*

There is a source for this in the Pāli Canon.

[Editor's note: the source is here – <http://tinyurl.com/c5y9hz>]

**Question:** Does Sangharakshita agree that it is *so unlikely to be born a human*?

No, he thinks we would have to fall a very long way to lose our basic humanity. Perhaps we could see the turtle analogy more as an illustration of how unlikely it is to find the circumstances that allow us to be fully human – which will include the possibility of practising the Dharma, and living a free and meaningful life.

**Question:** *What are some circumstances that might well happen in this life that would be the equivalent of being 'stunned by the sufferings of the lower states' and would largely stop us practicing?*

Examples might include: ill health, old age, depression, mental illness, decline in mental faculties, severe stress or anxiety, extreme unhappiness caused by loss or bereavement, resentment due to betrayal, loss of śraddhā, ripening of past karma into unskilful patterns of thought and feeling, loss of contact with the Sangha, decline or breakdown of civil society, etc.

### ***The power of the kleśas***

*But though I have somehow found this unimaginably lucky state, I am somehow led back towards those same old lower states of being. I seem to have no will about this, as though I were under a spell. What is going on here? What is driving me? What is it that lives inside me? [26, 27]*

**Question:** *Can we empathise with this feeling of being 'under a spell', and not able to put our higher volitions and resolutions into practice?*

If not we probably haven't started practicing seriously. This is one of the central problems of the spiritual life, in any tradition. e.g. In the Christian context, St Paul said something like, "The good that I wish to do, that I do not do; the evil that I do not wish to do, that I do."

**Question:** *"What is going on here?"*

We are not integrated beings. We may be in touch with higher parts of ourselves that want to act skilfully, but we also have many unskilful volitions and patterns that are the result of long term past karma, and don't go away just because we decide with our conscious mind to take up the spiritual life. Often these lower volitions are unconscious – we don't even become aware of them until we start trying to act more skilfully. Until they are challenged these slimy bits are quite happy to lurk in the shadows, controlling us in secret. Hence the feeling that we have no will about this, as though we were under a spell.

*Enemies like greed and hate don't have bodies to attack me, they aren't brave or intelligent. How do they make me their slave? But still they strike me down from inside my own mind. Why don't I boil with rage at this? Patience about this is completely out of place! [28, 29]*

Here is one of many examples of Śāntideva using negative emotions for a positive end. Here he uses anger as a source of energy for attacking the kleśas, a theme he elaborates colourfully as we go on. Elsewhere he suggests the same approach with other emotions that are usually seen as negative, such as pride for example.

*Human enemies can't send me to hell. But my mighty enemies the kleśas can send me there in an instant. Human enemies become friends if we treat them kindly. But when we are kind to the kleśas they just cause us even more suffering. [30,33]*

**Question:** *What are the kleśas?*

There are several different lists, so there is no one 'right' answer to this. Basically the kleśas are all the different negative emotions that arise from the three root kleśas: greed, hatred and delusion. For Śāntideva the kleśas are a form of madness that possesses us.

**Questions:**

Śāntideva's approach is very different from the self acceptance advocated by many contemporary therapists, etc. Therapists often advise us to be kind and accepting to all aspects of ourselves. Śāntideva tells us that if we are kind to the kleśas – which we could see as aspects of ourselves – they will just cause us more suffering.

*Who is right, Śāntideva or the therapy writers?*

*Do they have the same goals?*

Maybe one is about transcending normality, the other about adjusting contentedly to normality? We could also point out that 'accepting ourselves' has several meanings. Clearly we need to accept and forgive ourselves for being the conditioned being we are now. But this does not necessarily mean that we accept that we will always stay this way. To change in a positive direction we need to not accept that certain patterns are permanent features of our character.

**Warrior-like determination**

*So I won't rest until these enemies are struck down in front of my eyes. Look at worldly warriors: they are passionate to kill their enemies, they don't count the pain from blows, arrows and spears, they won't give up until they win, and they proudly show off their wounds and scars. Why then, when I'm fighting for the Great Cause, when I'm trying to kill my real enemies, the real cause of all suffering – why do I shy away from a little pain? [36-38]*

*Look even at lowly folk like fishermen and ploughmen: just for the sake of their livelihood they put up with all sorts of discomfort, like the blazing*

*heat and the freezing cold. Why then can't I show some endurance, when it is for the sake of the whole universe? [40]*

*I have promised to free the universe from the kleśas, but I haven't yet freed myself. When I made my commitment to the Bodhicitta I was intoxicated, I wasn't taking my limitations into account. But now I can't turn back from destroying the kleśas. [41,42]*

*I'm going to be bloody-minded about this, and wage a grudge war of vengeance! The only negative emotion I'm going to spare is the desire to murder the kleśas! [43]*

*I don't care if my guts spill out. I don't care if my head falls off. But I'm never going to grovel to my arch-enemies, the kleśas! [44]*

Here Śāntideva gets into his stride, invoking our warrior spirit to help us put our resolve into practice. His approach could be described as tantric – instead of suppressing the warrior energy of aggression, we use it to help us break through our old patterns. Sometimes people think that practicing the Dharma means repressing any lively or coarse energies, but if we go down this road we can make ourselves pale and ineffectual – if very ‘nice’. And repressed energy has a way of coming out in distorted forms – so anger comes out as irritability, carping criticism, resentment, competitiveness, depression, and so on. Most men seem to have warrior energy hard-wired into their being, and need to use it in the spiritual life – if it is repressed it just turns poisonous. I can't speak for women, so I will leave you to speak for yourselves on this one!

### **Questions:**

*Do we like this approach to the spiritual life, or loathe it? (People usually feel one or the other). What factors in our past conditioning might have conditioned this reaction?*

*Are there any dangers in this approach?*

Too extreme and robust an attempt to leaving behind old patterns can cause a reaction, for example.

*Are there any dangers in the opposite approach, of being kind to and accepting of our unskillful motivations?*

We don't change!

*Might there be a middle way?*

*Are the kleśas really ‘parts of ourselves’, so that declaring war on them involves being unkind to ourselves?*

Perhaps the answer to this can be found in the next verse:

*If we defeat a human enemy, they can take refuge in another country and regroup. But where can the kleśas go, if I rout them out of my mind? The kleśas are weaklings, to be cowed by the glare of wisdom. They are just based on illusion. So, heart, free yourself from fear, and devote yourself to striving for wisdom. [45-47]*

**Question:** *Why are the kleśas ‘cowed by the glare of wisdom’?*

One part of the answer is in the text – because they are ‘just based on illusion’. We do not have a fixed self- nature that the kleśas are part of. Our unskillful motivations are just habits we have got into, and can get out of. So declaring war on the kleśas does not involve being unkind to ourselves. This misunderstanding seems to arise:

- Emotionally, from our Northern European tendency to self-condemnation.
- Intellectually, from our tendency to think that the patterns we have got into are somehow intrinsic aspects of our being.

**Question:** *How do we express our warrior energy? How could we bring more of this energy into our spiritual life?*

## **Chapter 5 – Guarding samprajanya, or continuity of purpose**

### ***The importance of mindfulness***

*It is just not possible to practice the Dharma without keeping a careful guard on the mind, which wanders so easily. The wandering mind is like an untamed elephant in rut, and it causes more havoc. Unless we watch it carefully it will plunge us into hell. But if, like an elephant, we tether the mind with the ropes of mindfulness, then we will be safe and happy. [1,2,3]*

In this and all the following chapters Śāntideva starts by telling us why the quality he is describing is absolutely essential for the spiritual life. Here, and in the following verses, he makes the point that we can’t really do any spiritual practice unless we have enough awareness of ourselves and recollection of the teachings and precepts.

*When we tame our mind we tame all threats and problems, because all suffering and fear comes from the mind. This is the Buddha’s teaching. We can’t cover the whole world in leather, but if we put leather on the soles of our feet it has the same effect. [4-6, 13]*

**Question:** *Is it true that if we tame our minds we tame all threats and problems?*

We will not do away with duḥkha duḥkha. But most of our suffering is mind-created, and comes from our reactions to circumstances, rather than from circumstances themselves. The simile of the shoe leather is worth exploring – our usual approach is to try to change the world to suit our likes and dislikes – an

impossible task. Our only hope of contentment is to work on ourselves, so that we change our reactions to the world.

*Just as a wounded man in the middle of a rough crowd guards his wound with great care, we need to guard our mind in bad company. The determined practitioner who keeps this attitude can never be broken, even in the worst company - even among wanton young women! [20, 21]*

Śāntideva is not averse to playing for laughs! Modern Indian audiences often laugh a lot during Dharma talks – the tendency to solemnity is Western.

*If we don't keep our mindfulness, what will happen to all our other vows and precepts? Just as a sick man isn't fit for any work, so a distracted mind can't do anything useful. It is like a leaky jug: nothing that is heard, reflected upon, or developed in meditation stays in it. [16, 17, 24, 25]*

Here is the crux – without mindfulness we will not keep any of our other vows and precepts.

**Question:** *What is he referring to in the last sentence?*

The three levels of wisdom: hearing, reflecting, and meditating. Keeping the Dharma constantly in mind so that it can be reflected and meditated upon is seen as the essential practice for developing insight in Śāntideva's style of classical Mahāyāna, and this is impossible without mindfulness.

*Many people know the Dharma, have faith, and try hard, but come unstuck because of lack of mindfulness. That band of thieves, the kleśas, search for a way through our defences. When they have found one, they rob us of the opportunity for a good life. So always keep the guard of mindfulness at the door of your mind. [26,27,29]*

**Question:** *Can we think of examples from our own practice where we have come unstuck because of lack of mindfulness and long-term continuity of purpose?*

### **Strategies for maintaining mindfulness**

*Mindfulness comes easily to those who are lucky enough to live with their teacher and practice under his guidance, if they have great respect for his good opinion. [30]*

*Those who are not so lucky should remember that the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas see everything that happens everywhere. Everything is laid out in front of them, and before them we stand. Meditating on this, we should keep mindfulness of the presence of the Buddhas at all times, maintaining a sense of shame, respect, and awe. [31, 32]*

*We should also read and recite the scriptures over and over again. Constantly reminding ourselves of the teachings helps us to guard the mind, and to remember to put the teachings into practice. [103-7]*

We need to set up the conditions to allow mindfulness to arise. Śāntideva says the best way is to live with people who are further along than us, and who we respect. Maybe we can get some of the same effect by cultivating a devotional approach, in which we see ourselves as always in the presence of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. Reading and studying the Dharma regularly also helps us to stay inspired and keep the Dharma in mind.

**Question:** *What helps us to keep mindfulness of our aspiration and practice? How could we get more of whatever helps?*

### **‘Negative’ mindfulness – controlling sensory input and our reactions**

*To start with, we should develop a non-reactive state of mind by acting as if we had no senses at all – just like a block of wood. [34]*

*When out and about we shouldn’t look around distractedly. We should stay mindful of our purpose, aware of our body, and should constantly observe our mind. Before moving or speaking we should examine our mind, and then act appropriately and with self-possession. [38, 39, 41, 47]*

*When the mind experiences attraction or aversion, we should neither act nor speak, but remain like a block of wood. When the mind is inflated or critical, full of arrogance, intoxicated, evasive, dishonest, when it puts others down or blames others, we should remain like a block of wood. [48-50]*

Śāntideva says the first step in practicing *śīla* is to stop our reactivity, by ‘remaining like a block of wood’.

**Question:** *Is this really necessary for our practice? Do you think Śāntideva might be exaggerating for effect, but still making a valid point?*

*The reactive mind is greedy for possessions, respect, fame, and status, or just wants the attention of an audience. It longs to hold forth, it cares nothing for the good of others, it is always seeking its own advantage, and longing for an opportunity to preach its opinions. It is intolerant, idle, cowardly, disrespectful, foul-mouthed, and biased in its own favour. So we should remain like a block of wood. [51, 52, 53]*

Here is Śāntideva playing for laughs again, but again he is also making an important point. The reactive mind isn’t just a bit naughty, and in need of a little tidying up. Seen in a true light, as we sometimes do when we are on solitary retreat for example, the reactive, egocentric mind is ugly and ridiculous. Seeing this truth is an important landmark in our spiritual progress. As long as we think

our usual mind only needs a bit of sprucing up to be acceptable, we will just be tinkering at the edges in our spiritual life.

**Question:** *Have we ever had the experience of seeing our reactive mind like this?*

### **‘Positive’ mindfulness**

*Having mastered our lower nature in this way, we should give up frowning and always have a smiling face, being the first to greet and talk to others, a friend to the universe. We should speak kindly and look straight at people’s faces, as if drinking them in with our eyes. [71, 80]*

*Our mind should serve our will and other beings, unshakeable as a great mountain, knowing the world to be like a magical display, full of serene confidence, calm, eager to help others, unwearied by the conflicting desires of the spiritually immature, knowing that they are like this because they are possessed by the defilements. [55-58]*

Mindfulness isn’t all just about stopping our reactivity. It is also about bearing in mind (and acting according to) the Dharma, which will transform the way we speak, act, and live our life. In the first of these two verses Śāntideva focuses on recollecting our practice of mettā/compassion; in the second he focuses on wisdom.

### **Questions:**

*What would it be like to keep the teachings contained in these two verses in our mind at all times?*

*What difference would it make to our lives?*

### **Using all situations as practice**

*Whatever situation we are in, we should make it a part of our training. Every activity is a spiritual practice for the person who acts like this. [99, 100]*

### **Questions:**

*Do we limit our spiritual practice to certain special times or places – for example when we are at the centre, when we are meditating, or when we are on retreat?*

*Are there some situations that we think are somehow outside the scope of our spiritual practice? How could we make more of our everyday life, with all its trials and tribulations, a part of our practice?*

Obviously making more effort to maintain mindfulness is one answer.

## **Conclusion**

*In brief, mindfulness means observing the body and the mind at every moment. We need to actually put this into practice, and not just talk about it. When we are sick, what use is it just to read a medical textbook?  
[108,109]*

Mindfulness is something we need to actually do.

### **Questions:**

*If mindfulness is as important as Śāntideva says it is, do we place enough importance on cultivating it?*

*What could we do to cultivate more mindfulness?*

We could: go on retreat, meditate more, cultivate body awareness through yoga or Tai Chi etc, practice walking mindfully, spend more time in nature and less in front of the TV or computer etc, consciously practice looking at our surroundings. We could also remember the hints Śāntideva gives – spend time around those we respect, and make time to read and study the Dharma.

*What do we do that has the effect of reducing mindfulness?*

*How could we cut back on these?*

Examples might include: excessive hurry and over-activity, excessive input from the media and internet etc., mindless distractions of all sorts, as well as the usual intoxicants.

## *Week 5, Chapter 6: The Practice of Kṣānti*

### **Introduction**

N.B. Discuss these issues before discussing the text verse by verse.

### *The place of the chapter in the text*

Having dealt with dāna and śīla, Śāntideva now moves on to the third of the pāramitās, or ways of self-transcendence. From here on each chapter is named for a pāramitā, until the last chapter, which is an extended dedication of merits.

### *What is kṣānti?*

There isn't an English word that means exactly the same as kṣānti, so before discussing the text it is worth exploring what the word really does mean. Getting clear about what it does not mean might help to prevent reactions to the text. In particular, kṣānti is not a limp, passive quality, and it does not mean indifference, apathy, or timidity. Below is a suggestion for how this might be tackled.

### *Flipchart exercises*

- *What are some English words that mean something like kṣānti?*  
e.g. Patience, forbearance, non-reactivity, fortitude, endurance, stoicism, perhaps positivity.
- *What are some opposites of kṣānti?*  
e.g. Ill-will, hatred, resentment, blaming, irritation, anger, reactivity, perhaps disappointment, dejection, and depression.
- *What are some near-enemies of kṣānti?*  
e.g. Indifference, passivity, apathy, timidity, repression, denial of feelings.

### **Summary**

### *Suggested definition*

*“An attitude of determination to stay in positive mental states even in apparently adverse circumstances.”*

Kṣānti is an active quality that requires strength and courage in the face of difficulty. ‘Patience’ is too passive to convey this.

## ***Far enemy***

*Allowing events and circumstances to put us in negative states.*

Śāntideva focuses particularly on allowing ill will to arise because we blame others when things are not as we would like, because this is the most serious breach of the Bodhisattva vow, but he also touches on timidity, weakness and dejection in the face of suffering. So we could use ‘hatred’, ‘anger’ or ‘ill will’ as shorthand for the opposite of kṣānti, but none of these covers the full territory.

## ***Near enemies***

- a. ***Passivity***: failing to engage constructively with circumstances, events and people because of *indifference, apathy, timidity, laziness, low self-esteem, victim mentality, martyr mentality, etc.*
- b. ***Repression/denial*** of emotions like anger and sadness.

To work creatively with difficult emotions we first need to own up to them and be aware of them. People who repress and/or deny difficult emotions may need to learn to experience and express their feelings before they can practice kṣānti, which belongs to a higher stage of the path. Kṣānti is about transcending an already-strong ego; self-expression, assertiveness etc. are about developing a strong ego in the first place.

For people who are prone to any of these near enemies, a false practice of kṣānti could be a way of avoiding what they need to work on, such as a necessary assertiveness, creative engagement with the world, or awareness of feelings. Such people may either latch onto kṣānti as a way of being falsely spiritual and ‘good’ while actually avoiding change, or get reactive to the text because they know that this is not the right practice for them at the moment.

It is worth getting all this clear at the start, because otherwise the study may be constantly derailed by people’s reactions. We may well need to remind people of what kṣānti means several times. The message for those who continue to react to the text should probably be something like, “Ok, we’ve already seen that some people need to develop assertiveness and so on before they can practice kṣānti, but if we stick at the path we will all need to work on our reactivity at some stage, so this is useful stuff for the future, if nothing else.”

Then look at the text....

## ***The benefits of kṣānti, and the harmfulness of its opposite***

*Ill will and resentment destroy all the benefits of spiritual practice. Ill will is the most destructive state, and kṣānti is the best ascetic practice. So we should develop kṣānti in every way we can, and with all the effort we can muster. [1, 2]*

For each pāramitā, Śāntideva starts by telling us why this is a completely essential practice if we want to progress on the Path. Here he identifies ill-will as the opposite of kṣānti, and says it is the most spiritually destructive state. (Most translations say ‘anger’, but this opens up a debate about whether anger can sometimes be positive – more on this later. Crosby and Skilton say ‘hatred’, but this seems too extreme: we probably won’t really hate our friend because they forget to do the washing-up, but we may still get quite reactive!)

**Question:** *Why is ill-will the most destructive state?*

It cuts us off from all positive states; it cuts us off from other people, and therefore is the complete antithesis of the Bodhicitta, and the greatest downfall for an aspiring Bodhisattva.

**Question:** *‘Kṣānti is the best ascetic practice’ is a reference back to early Buddhism. Does anyone know what Śāntideva is quoting from?*

The Dhammapada says ‘patient forbearance is the foremost ascetic practice’. Against the background of the ascetic practices around at the time of the Buddha, the Dhammapada makes the point that everyday life involves quite enough duḥkha for us to work with, without inventing any more. Kṣānti means making the effort to be non-reactive in the face of the duḥkha in everyday life, and this is enough of an ascetic practice for anyone!

*When the thorn of ill-will is stuck in our heart, our mind can’t find peace, we can’t enjoy anything, and we sleep badly. If we are twisted by ill-will, even those who depend on us will want to bring us down. Even our friends won’t want to know us. We can be as generous as we like, but no-one will like us. To be blunt, there is just no way that an angry and resentful person can be happy. But the man who defeats anger will be happy, both in this life and the next. [3-6]*

Śāntideva makes the point that kṣānti isn’t only a spiritual practice, it is also the key to worldly happiness – ‘in this life’, as well as the next. Negative emotions like resentment and ill-will are painful, and they poison our relationships with others. We cannot be happy if we harbour them.

**Freeing ourselves from dependence on outer events**

*We feed ill-will by allowing ourselves to become unhappy when events do not go according to our likes and dislikes. So I shall starve this con-man rather than feeding him as my guest, knowing that his only purpose is to harm me. [7, 8]*

We experience ill-will and other negative emotions because we make our happiness conditional on external circumstances being the way we want them to be, and when they aren’t we feel disappointed and look for someone to blame. Unfortunately neither the inanimate world nor other people will fit themselves to our likes and dislikes, so by expecting the impossible we condemn ourselves to

unhappiness. The point Śāntideva is making is that if we want to practice kṣānti and go beyond ill-will, we need first to stop making our happiness dependent on getting what we like and avoiding what we don't like.

One way to approach this is to get more perspective on the triviality and deluded nature of most of our likes, dislikes, and expectations. Most of the things we get upset about don't really affect our essential wellbeing (observe children, who take their likes and dislikes even more seriously than we do, and so get upset about what to us looks like trivia; that is probably how we look to a more developed being). Another approach is to reflect on the impossibility of always getting what we like and avoiding what we don't like.

*Whatever happens to us, even if we fall into adversity, we should not allow this to disturb our happy state of mind. When we allow ourselves to be made unhappy by events nothing is enjoyable, and we fall into unskilful states. Why be unhappy if we can do something about it? And what's the use of being unhappy about something we can't do anything about? [9, 10]*

Kṣānti is not passivity – if it is possible and worthwhile to do something about the situation, then we should do so. But often circumstances are completely beyond our control, so our choice is between accepting reality gladly, or else making ourselves more unhappy than we need to be.

### ***Learning to endure pain and discomfort***

*With practice anything becomes easy. So, by learning to tolerate slight discomforts, even great pain becomes bearable. So we should practice seeing the discomfort caused by bugs, fleas and mosquitoes, hunger and thirst, or itches and rashes as nothing to bother about. Then we will be able to graduate to the suffering caused by cold and heat, rain and wind, travelling, illness, and eventually even imprisonment and beatings. If we don't learn to tolerate these things, our mental distress will just make us suffer even more. [14-16]*

Here Śāntideva starts analysing kṣānti according to the things in the environment that we allow to cause negative mental states. He starts with the inevitable pain and discomfort that we experience by virtue of having a human body.

***Question:*** *Is it true that with practice we can learn to be more tolerant of discomfort and pain?*

Yes, clearly. People who live pampered lives tend to become upset at minor discomforts, while those who take on challenges become more robust.

***Question:*** *What does he mean by saying 'If we don't learn to tolerate these things, our mental distress will just make us suffer even more'.*

Everyone is bound to experience some pain and discomfort by virtue of having a fragile human body. If we don't learn to tolerate this we simply add a second mental suffering to the first.

**Questions:**

*What unavoidable things do we complain about?*

*Can people think of an unavoidable discomfort or problem that they currently complain about, which they could undertake to be more equanimous about, as a way of practicing kṣānti?*

*In battle some people are spurred on by the sight of their own blood, while others faint if they see someone else's. The difference is entirely in the mental attitude – do we have a courageous or cowardly approach? [17,18]*

**Question:** *Can we think of other examples where our mental attitude determines the way we experience pain or discomfort?*

Examples include: Childbirth – usually seen as an occasion for rejoicing, although it is very painful; physical exercise, where some discomfort is welcomed as part of the experience; challenging pursuits like mountaineering, where extreme conditions are an exhilarating part of the challenge; sports like football, rugby etc, where occasional physical pain is accepted as a normal part of an enjoyable experience, etc.

**Questions:**

*What is our attitude to physical pain and discomfort?*

*Are there circumstances where we don't mind it, and others where we could consciously take a more courageous attitude?*

*In fact it is good that we have to suffer some pain and discomfort. Suffering reduces our arrogance and intoxication, it helps us develop compassion for others, it promotes a fear of unskillful acts, and it makes us long for the Buddha. [21]*

**Questions:**

*Do we agree that pain and discomfort can have positive results?*

*Can we think of examples from our own lives?*

*Could we grow, develop – or become Enlightened – if we lived life without suffering?*

Without some duḥkha we would not make spiritual progress. Duḥkha is the first step on the spiral path. If we face duḥkha, we can move up the spiral; if we try to distract ourselves from duḥkha, we go back round the Wheel.

Having looked at kṣānti as an equanimous, robust attitude to physical suffering, Śāntideva moves on to the biggest source of our reactions, frustrations, and negative mental states – other people.

***Learning to tolerate other people: people are driven by conditions***

*We don't get angry at an attack of indigestion or nausea, even though it causes suffering. So why do we get angry at sentient beings? Their unskilfulness is just as much the product of conditions. Nothing arises independently. Everything is dependent on other things, and these other things are dependent on other things again. So why should we get angry at phenomena that are not autonomous, but exist like the things we see in a magical illusion? [22, 25, 31]*

Here Śāntideva points out that, in view of the Buddhist idea of conditionality, it is absurd to blame or get annoyed at people for their actions. The last pāramitā, wisdom, underlies all the others. If the others are practiced without the wisdom perspective, they are not pāramitās – they are not ways of self-transcendence. In this chapter Śāntideva focuses on the conditionality aspect of wisdom, and the ways in which reflecting on conditioned co-production helps us to practice kṣānti. Elsewhere in the Bodhicaryāvatāra he also focuses on lack of self-nature and interconnectedness. He points out that because people are the product of conditions they are not really autonomous, so that to blame them or hold them responsible for their actions is as absurd as blaming inanimate objects.

*If someone hits me with a stick, I don't blame the stick. But the person is wielded by ill-will, just as the stick is wielded by the person. [41]*

*So, if we see a friend or an enemy behaving badly, we should remember that their behaviour is caused by conditions, and not allow it to disturb our happy state of mind. [35]*

***Question:*** *Is it ever right to blame other people for their actions?*

Maybe you could suggest that there is a difference between, on the one hand, areas like the law, and the need to hold politicians and civil servants accountable, and on the other hand the way we need to work with our minds to have an effective spiritual practice. If we are a magistrate or manager we may have a duty to hold people accountable for their actions, for the good of others. But for most of us, most of our blaming can't be justified in this way. We like our indignation, and want to defend it!

***Question:*** *What difference would it make to your mental states if you stopped blaming other people (or 'them') for anything, and accepted that we are all*

*deluded, conditioned beings, who are bound to behave in unwise and even unskilful ways?*

*It is just as deluded to get angry at someone who acts unskilfully as it is for them to do the unskilful act in the first place. Understanding this, we should do our best to act in a way that causes everyone to develop maitrī towards each other. [66, 67, 69]*

This is the point: blaming others just causes more negative states in ourselves, so that we become part of the negative cycle. The way to stop unskilfulness is not to blame others for their part in it, but to break the cycle in ourselves, and instead cultivate positive states, so that we begin to have a positive effect on others.

***Learning to tolerate other people: people are deluded – as are we!***

*People cause themselves all sorts of sufferings, refusing to eat because of anger, or because of their obsessions, for example with women they cannot have. They are driven to commit suicide, or to harm themselves by taking poisonous intoxicants, by eating unhealthy food, and by doing all sorts of unskilful things. Driven by the kleśas in this way, they harm even their own dear selves, so how can you expect them not to harm others as well? They are like madmen, driven insane by the kleśas. The only sensible response is compassion, not anger. [35-38]*

An aspect of the wisdom perspective is seeing that all unenlightened beings – including ourselves – are a bit mad. We all harm ourselves, and we all harm others. Maybe the first step to wisdom is seeing this about ourselves, and therefore not taking our own reactions too seriously, while at the same time forgiving others for theirs.

***Questions:***

*Can people think of examples of ‘mad’, self-harming behaviour that human beings regularly engage in?*

*If a friend was temporarily insane for some reason - perhaps a disease, the effects of poison, or a blow on the head - would we feel ill-will towards them for their behaviour, or compassion?*

*Assuming the latter, could we extend this tolerance more widely?*

In fact this harmful madness masks their real nature. In essence, beings are good. To get angry at them is ridiculous. And we should remember that we too behave in the same way that they do – we too cause pain to other living beings. [40, 42]

Surely this is an unanswerable argument – we have no right to blame others, because we too act from the same greed, hate, and delusion that motivates them.

We all harm others, and if some people do more harm by their actions than we do, it is probably just because they have more power!

**Question:** *Is it true that we all cause pain to other living beings? Can we think of examples of the way quite ordinary people (like us) routinely cause harm to other beings?*

Eating them, killing them so they don't eat our food (e.g. 'pests' on crops); exploiting them by choosing cheap goods over expensive; squandering the worlds' resources while others lack the basics; and just constantly prioritising our wants and needs over the wants and needs of others – these are a few of the numerous examples.

**Question:** *What does Śāntideva mean by saying 'In essence, beings are good?'*

### ***Causes of resentment: concern for gain and loss***

Here Śāntideva analyses kṣānti in terms of the Eight Worldly Winds, but omitting the pleasure/pain duo, which has already been dealt with in an earlier section.

*If we feel resentful about harm to our prosperity or possessions, we should remember that our money and goods will last for just this one life, whereas the results of our karma will affect us for many lifetimes. Even if we get rich and have many pleasures for many years, when we die we will be left empty-handed and naked, like someone who has been robbed. What is the point of living for something that comes to nothing in the end, especially if this means a life of ugly deeds and ugly mental states? [55, 59]*

Money, possessions, and financial security are the great gods of our society. It might be worth starting a discussion about the extent to which people go for refuge to these – a good guide might be the extent to which we are willing to take risks with our livelihood and financial security.

**Question:** *How do we feel when we lose some money, or a possession gets broken or spoiled? When this happens to someone else, does it seem so serious?*

### ***Causes of resentment: concern for praise and blame***

*Criticism, harsh words, and humiliation do not cause us any physical pain. So why do we get so angry about them? We feel delighted when anyone praises us, and pained when anybody criticises us, which is simply the absurd behaviour of a child. In fact praise just makes us feel more comfortable with ourselves as we are, and destroys any urgency about our will to progress. Those who criticise us are in fact doing us a favour. [53, 97-99]*

Anger and/or pain about criticism is a common negative emotion. It might be worth discussing how much people are prone to this, and what they could do to be more equanimous.

## ***Causes of resentment: concern for status and fame***

*Respect, fame and status don't give us merit or a long life, they don't make us healthy or immune to disease, and they don't bring any physical pleasure. Yet people deprive themselves of real benefits just for the sake of a big name and reputation, even driving themselves to an early death. [90, 92]*

*When our reputation or status is attacked our mind howls like a child whose sandcastle has been knocked down. But the chains of reputation and status have no place on someone who is looking for liberation. Why should we resent those who free us from this bondage? [93,100]*

*When our qualities are praised we want everyone to be pleased, but when someone else's talents are praised we are jealous. We are supposed to have aroused the Bodhicitta, wanting happiness for every living being, yet we burn inside on seeing someone honoured! How can we be resentful at someone else's happiness? We should be wishing all people as much of every sort of happiness as is possible for them! [79, 80, 81, 83]*

**Question:** *How much do we care about status – including status in the Sangha or among our peer groups. Are we really as immune to this as we may think?*

## ***Righteous indignation***

*We are not even justified in feeling anger or resentment towards those who damage rūpas and shrines, or who criticise the Dharma. After all, the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas hardly get angry about such actions! Nor should we get angry when someone hinders our altruistic actions. There is no spiritual practice equal to kṣānti. [64,102]*

*When people harm our teachers, our relatives, or those dear to us, we should see that this has come about because of conditions, and rein in our anger. In fact we should treasure someone who gives us the opportunity to practice patience, because they help us along the path to Awakening. [65]*

Righteous indignation is often the last refuge for our ill-will, and we can be very unwilling to let go of it.

**Question:** *Is it possible that we sometimes **like** feeling angry at others? What do we get out of it?*

A sense of justification and rightness; an excuse for not taking responsibility for our mental states; a distraction from our duḥkha, etc.

**Question:** *Is anger sometimes positive, or necessary?*

Some people will argue this quite strongly, saying that anger at injustice and so on has been a positive force in the world. On the other hand, anger almost always

comes with an element of ill-will, and as we know from the Dhammapada, hatred never ceases by hatred. People can be very effective without relying on the energy of anger – the Buddha is one example. Anger usually polarises people and invites an angry reaction, whereas a more mettā-ful approach encourages cooperation, compromise, and sympathy with others' point of view.

### ***The devotional perspective***

*How can I be resentful or arrogant towards those beings who my masters, the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, place above themselves, at whose happiness they are joyful, and at whose sufferings they grieve? To satisfy sentient beings is to satisfy the Lords of the Sages, and to offend them is to offend the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. [121,122]*

*Right now, to worship the Tathāgatas, with my entire being I offer myself as a servant to the world. Let streams of beings put their foot on my head. Those whose very nature is compassion see this whole world as identical with themselves, so in fact they appear in the form of these good people! These very people around me are the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas! How can I be resentful towards them? [125,126]*

Here Śāntideva reminds us of Chapters 2 and 3, in which we offered ourselves to the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, and to all beings. If we meant what we said at that time, if we truly want to be a vehicle for the Bodhicitta, then we have no choice but to take the practice of kṣānti very seriously; and in particular we have no choice but to be ruthless in dissociating ourselves from every aspect of our conditioned tendency to ill-will.

*This attitude, and this alone, is the worship of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. This alone is the fulfilment of my goal. This alone cures the suffering of the world. Let this alone be my practice. [127]*

### ***Conclusion***

*Never mind about serving other beings as the way to Buddhahood! Don't you see that it is also the way to good fortune, fame, and happiness right here and now? Serenity, health, joy, and long life, along with the happiness and riches of a king – the person who practices kṣānti gets all these even while they are still in Samsāra. [133,134]*

To finish off, Śāntideva returns to a theme from the beginning of the chapter – that kṣānti is not just an essential spiritual practice, it is also the key to ordinary worldly happiness.

### ***Questions:***

*Do we agree that Kṣānti would give us serenity, health benefits, better relationships, and so on?*

*If so, why don't we start practicing it very seriously indeed, right now?*

*Where would each member of the group start – what circumstances or events cause them most anger, dejection, or other negative states?*

## Week 6, Chapter 7: The Practice of Vīrya

Now Śāntideva moves on to the fourth pāramitā, vīrya. As with kṣānti, it might be worth spending a bit of time at the start exploring what vīrya means, and what it doesn't.

### Definition

Apparently the word vīrya comes from the same root as our words virtue, vigour, and virility – perhaps write these on the flipchart, underlining the vi portion. So it has connotations both of energy and of ethical excellence. Hence it is sometimes defined as 'energy in pursuit of the good', or 'skilful effort'.

### Flipchart exercises

- *What are some opposites to vīrya?*

Laziness, sloth, torpor are the obvious far-enemies.

- *What are some of the near-enemies of vīrya?*

The near enemies of vīrya have to do with energy that is not in pursuit of the good, or which is in fact neurotic. They might include worldly busy-ness, constant hurry, workaholism, constant activity with no higher purpose, the whole cycle of 'getting and spending' by which 'we lay waste our powers'. It might be worth quoting Gampopa to the effect that normal worldly activity is in fact the greatest form of laziness, because it avoids the effort involved in tackling the one big issue that makes life meaningful – spiritual progress.

### Why is vīrya important, and what is it?

*As well as cultivating kṣānti we should cultivate vīrya, because Awakening requires that too. We can't gain merit without vīrya, any more than a boat can sail without wind. [1]*

With each pāramitā, Śāntideva starts by telling us why it is essential for the spiritual life. Spiritual growth comes from ethical actions, and at our stage of the path skilful actions require effort, because they go against the grain of our egocentric nature. So without effort there is no merit-making, and no progress. Effort is the driving force of the spiritual life, just as the wind is the driving force for a sailing-boat. Without effort we won't practice any of the other perfections with enough vigour to have any real effect.

### Questions:

*Do we agree that spiritual progress is impossible without effort, just as a sailing-boat cannot move without wind?*

*If we do agree, do we live and act in a way that takes account of this truth?*

Some people may raise the need for receptivity and the danger of wilful effort at this point, as an argument for not making too much effort in the spiritual life. It might be worth pointing out that:

- a. Yes, there is such a thing as wilful effort, but the solution to this problem is to change wilful effort into skilful effort, not to avoid making any effort at all. According to Sangharakshita, most of us don't make anything like enough effort.
- b. Yes, for an advanced practitioner ethical action, meditation etc. may be effortless, and the spiritual life may be a life of spontaneity. Unfortunately we are not at that stage yet, and the teachings that recommend an effortless approach are aimed at people who are more advanced than we are.

**Question:** *In what way is effort necessary to practice dāna, śīla, kṣānti, meditation, and wisdom?*

*So what is vīrya? It is making an energetic effort to cultivate what is skilful. What are its enemies? Laziness, attachment to what is unskilful, discouragement, and low self-esteem. [2]*

This verse connects up with the introductory discussion about what vīrya is, and its far and near enemies. Here, however, Śāntideva seems to mean attitudes or qualities that are 'enemies' of vīrya in the sense that they undermine it, as well as those that are its opposite.

### **The enemies of vīrya: laziness and attachment to the unskilful**

Śāntideva now looks at what stops us having vīrya, according to the fourfold breakdown in the previous verse. In the first verse he seems to combine laziness and attachment to what is unskilful, looking at the two as aspects of each other.

*Laziness arises from idleness, indulgence in sensual pleasures, sleeping too much, lounging around, wanting to lean on others, and from apathy about the sufferings of saṃsāra. [3]*

Hmm, sounds like many people's idea of the proper use of leisure time!

### **Questions:**

*Do we spend our free time in a way that undermines vīrya, perhaps only making any energetic effort at work, when we are being paid for it?*

*How do we use our leisure time?*

*What effects does this have on our mental states?*

*Could we make more constructive use of our leisure time?*

*What sort of things could we do?*

Of course we all need time for reflection, introspection, reading and study, meditation, aesthetic enjoyment, and so on. But many people's use of leisure time centres on sensual pleasures and other distractions rather than on any of these valuable uses of time. If we are honest, the distractions and aimless lounging around we hope will recharge our batteries often make us feel stagnant and lethargic, rather than energised.

**Questions:**

*Being honest, how much do we suffer from attachment to what is unskilful?*

*Are there factors in our lives that we know are unskilful or unhelpful, but that we are unwilling to change? What are they?*

Someone has said that the reason we aren't enlightened is because we don't want to be – we are the way we are because we want to be that way.

*If we could take a pill that would make us enlightened right now, would we take it?*

Knowing that there are many things we currently enjoy that we would leave behind if we were enlightened, we might not really want awakening!

*When death is sizing us up at every turn, why do we distract ourselves with food, sleep and sex? [6]*

*Hey you, expecting results without effort! So delicate! So sensitive! Caught in the clutches of death, and acting as though you were going to live forever! Why are you creating so much future suffering for yourself? Why are you destroying yourself? Now that you have managed to get onto the ferry of human life, cross over the mighty river of suffering. You idiot! Don't go to sleep! You'll have to wait a long time to catch this ferry again. [13, 14]*

Śāntideva's wake-up alarm call!

**Question:** *Could it be that we expect results with no effort – if we are honest?*

**The enemies of vīrya: discouragement and low self-esteem**

*We should be freeing ourselves from despair by practicing the Dharma, not being defeatist, thinking, "How could I possibly become Awakened?" The Buddha, whose words are truth, has said that even those who in past lives were gnats, mosquitoes, wasps and worms, have reached Awakening by making the effort. So why shouldn't I, a human being who can tell the difference between the skilful and the unskilful, attain Awakening? [17-19]*

One reason we don't make much effort is because we don't believe we can really make progress. Enlightenment can seem just too far away – so maybe we need some intermediate goals that we can see *are* achievable. Perhaps also, for some of us, we aren't in the habit of succeeding at anything very much, so we don't really believe we can succeed in the spiritual life. Again the solution to this could be to have some achievable goals, and to get into the habit of achieving them. It might be worth introducing the parable of the magic city from the Lotus Sutra to illustrate the need for intermediate, achievable goals.

**Questions:**

*Do you really believe that you can become enlightened?*

*Do you have any achievable intermediate goals in your spiritual life? What are they?*

Good examples might include: leaving behind a particular habit of unskilful behaviour, establishing a particular good habit, establishing or improving a meditation practice, improving a particular relationship, getting ordained – or even stream entry. Aiming for ordination can function as a particularly good intermediate goal, because it forces us to raise our game in certain well-defined areas, gives us support and feedback from others, and we know if we have achieved it; people often make a lot of progress in the immediate run-up to ordination.

*But we may still be held back by fearful thoughts, like: "I'll have to make sacrifices, like giving up a hand or a foot, or something. I'll suffer for aeons, and what will I get for it? Still no Awakening!" [21]*

*But the modest suffering caused by following the Path is like having a tooth out to get rid of toothache. We might have to put up with some slight suffering to put an end to suffering. [22, 23]*

*Sometimes a doctor has to give a cure that hurts. But it is not like that with the best doctor of all. For those with the greatest illness, he prescribes the sweet medicine of the Bodhisattva training. [24]*

*Our path of generosity starts in ways that don't hurt at all – at first we just give away small things, like vegetables! Later, gradually, we might reach the point where we can happily give away our own flesh. [25]*

*With Insight this becomes easy. And we don't suffer from giving up unskilfulness, or become mentally ill by becoming wise. In fact skilful actions give us physical pleasure, and wisdom delights the mind. What can possibly weary the compassionate being who stays in Samsāra for the good of others? Wiping out his past unskilfulness, gathering oceans of merit, proceeding from happiness to happiness, why would any intelligent person feel discouraged after boarding the vehicle of the Bodhicitta, which dispels all weariness and sadness? [26-30]*

If we imagine what it might be like to be a more advanced practitioner, who has gone forth from things we are still very attached to, the spiritual life can seem daunting, and perhaps unconsciously we do not really want to make progress. However Śāntideva makes the point that this is a gradual path – when we are further on, things that now seem impossible or unattractive to us will seem perfectly natural, while on the other hand we will experience sources of joy and happiness that we cannot imagine at the moment. To illustrate this, we might think of what adulthood looks like to a child: if a child were told he will have to give up sweets and toys he would see adulthood as a terrible punishment. But to an adult it doesn't look like that at all, because he or she doesn't want the sweets or toys any more, as he has reached a more mature level of being at which there are new sources of satisfaction that the child is not aware of.

### **What promotes vīrya? (The Four Powers)**

*The powers of skilful desire, of self-confidence, of joy, and of letting go, all serve the needs of living beings. So, meditating on the benefits of following the path, we should summon up enthusiastic desire for what is wholesome. [31]*

Śāntideva now looks at a traditional list of the factors that lead to vīrya, sometimes called the Four Powers:

1. Skilful desire (dharmachanda).
2. Self-confidence (sthāma).
3. Joy (rati).
4. Letting go, or rest (mukti).

### ***The Four Powers: skilful desire, or dharmachanda***

*Because in the past I lacked dharmachanda – enthusiastic desire for the good – I find myself in saṃsāra now. Śākyamuni has sung that dharmachanda is the root of all virtue, and the root of dharmachanda is reflecting on the results of karma. [39, 40]*

Firstly Śāntideva looks at skilful desire, or dharmachanda. To succeed at the spiritual life we have to want this as much as we might want a wonderful job, material success, a dream partner, exam success, or any of the other goals people pursue with all their vigour. So Śāntideva tells us we need to develop dharmachanda, desire for what is skilful, as a prerequisite to having vīrya, and to making the effort we need to succeed. He tells us that seeing the truth of the law of karma is the key to developing this desire for the skilful, because if we see this law clearly we will see that skilfulness is the way to true happiness, while unskilfulness leads to suffering – a point he expands and illustrates in the next few verses.

*Suffering, depression, fear and obstacles beset those who act unskillfully. But the heart of the man who does good brims over with joy, and he is welcomed wherever he goes. The man who does evil also craves appreciation, but wherever he goes his vices destroy his happiness. [41, 42]*

*The skilful man will dwell in the heart of an expansive, fragrant, cool Lotus, his vitality and splendour nourished by the sweet voice of the Buddha. His beautiful body, born with the other Bodhisattvas in the presence of the Sugata, will unfold amid the light of the Sage. [44]*

*The unskillful man will scream in agony as his skin is torn away by the Lord of Death. His body is immersed in molten copper, chunks of his flesh are hacked away by blazing swords, and again and again he falls onto the red-hot pavement of iron. [45]*

*So meditate on this carefully, nurturing desire for the Dharma, and cultivating this desire with reverence. Then one should develop skilful pride and self-confidence. [46]*

To nurture our dharmachanda, Śāntideva points out that a skilful life conduces to happiness, while an unskillful life is a life of suffering, and creates even more suffering for the future. To illustrate this he contrasts a traditional description of a Pure Land with that of a Hell, and asks us to reflect deeply on these points, so that they really sink in.

The hell/pure land contrast probably doesn't mean much to many westerners, so it might be worth discussing what benefits we see from the spiritual life, and what the disadvantages are of living an unskillful life. In particular it might be worth discussing the law of karma – how does it work, and do we believe in it strongly enough to be motivated to practice?

***Questions:***

*Do we believe in the law of karma?*

*Even disregarding the question of rebirth, in what ways does unskillfulness lead to unhappiness in the future?*

*In what ways does skilfulness lead to happiness?*

*How wonderful would it be to be enlightened?*

*How awful would it be to be trapped in seriously bad mental states, as some people are? Imagine one of your own worse traits, and how serious it could become if it was indulged and made very powerful.*

## ***The Four Powers: self-confidence and skilful pride***

*Before taking on any task, practice, or responsibility, we should first think carefully about the implications, then either commit firmly to it, or not take it on. Not starting is better than turning back. Otherwise the habit of giving up is established, and continues even into the next life, causing much suffering and failure. [47, 48]*

This is Śāntideva's advice for developing self-confidence and the habit of success; it is particularly important for those who do not really believe they can succeed at the spiritual life, or at anything else.

**Question:** *Do the members of the group feel they could usefully strengthen the habit of success?*

You might want to encourage people to think of practical, achievable goals they could take on to begin to develop this habit.

*A crow acts like an eagle when attacking a dead snake. If our mind is weak, even small difficulties bring it down. Defeatism makes us passive, and then it is easy for difficulties to overwhelm us. But if we are vigorous and energetic, even catastrophes cannot bring us down. [52, 53]*

*So we should firm up our minds, and make it difficult for difficulties to beat us. As long as difficulties beat us, our wish to beat Saṃsāra is a joke. We must be the ones who conquer problems and defilements, not letting anything conquer us. This skilful pride should be embedded in our heart, because we are sons and daughters of the Buddha, the lion-like conqueror. [54, 55]*

*Those who are conquered by arrogance have no real pride at all. A person who has skilful pride is never enslaved, but arrogant folk are enslaved by their enemy, unskilful pride. [56]*

*Those who, though mocked and tortured by the arrogant, remain upright, sustained by skilful pride, they are the heroes, they win a victory over unskilful pride, and give away the fruits of victory to all beings. [58, 59]*

*Surrounded and mocked by the defilements, we should be a thousand times more hotly proud, like a lion in a herd of deer. [60]*

*Sthāma* – here translated as self-confidence or skilful pride – means literally 'seat', or 'station'. It has implications of strength and self-respect, and chivalric connotations of nobility. Maybe it is related to the chivalric idea of one's seat or throne in the hall among the nobles. It is a noble, upright quality, which also includes plain self-confidence.

Śāntideva is making the point that, while some forms of pride are unskilful, this sort of pride is a necessary quality for the spiritual life. We are skilful because we

have too much nobility and self-esteem to be unskilful, as a medieval knight might be too proud to behave in a low, base way.

Here is another example of Śāntideva encouraging us to transform what could be negative qualities into positive energies that move us towards enlightenment.

**Questions:**

*What is the difference between skilful and unskilful pride?*

*Do the members of the group feel they need to increase their sense of self-worth? If so, what could we do, practically, to improve our self-esteem?*

Acting ethically, altruistically or with courage is itself the royal road to self-esteem. We are unlikely to improve our self-esteem by purely psychological means – if we are just out for ourselves we are unlikely to feel good about ourselves.

**The Four Powers: joy**

*We should be completely focussed on the task in hand, intoxicated by it, thirsting for it, like someone making love, or trying to win a game. Ordinary folk can't get enough of sensual pleasures, which are like honey on a razor's edge. How can we get enough of honeyed acts of merit, which bring such a sweet result? So, as soon as we finish one task, we should plunge into the next, like an elephant, scorched by the midday sun, plunging into a pool. [62-65]*

We have plenty of energy for what we enjoy, so one trick of the spiritual life is to enjoy our practice as much as we can, and to link the more 'worldly' things we enjoy with our practice of the Dharma.

**Questions:**

*What aspects of your Dharma practice do you really enjoy? How could you get more of this enjoyment?*

*What do you really enjoy in your life that is apparently unconnected with Buddhism? Are there any ways you could bring this activity into your Dharma practice, or something like it that involves similar qualities?*

**The Four Powers: letting go, or rest**

*When our energy begins to flag, we should put our task aside, in order to re-engage with it later. When the job is completely finished, we should leave it and look eagerly for the next, and then the next. [66]*

This is just realistic – part of the secret of having energy is knowing when to rest.

## **Conclusion: vigorous mindfulness**

*We should always be on the lookout for attacks from the kleśas, and attack them back fiercely, as if we were in a duel with a well-trained enemy. If ever we drop our sword, we must pick it up again quickly. [67, 68]*

*Someone who has undertaken the Bodhisattva Vow should be like someone carrying a jar of oil, watched by a swordsman who will kill him if he spills a drop. If we feel ourselves getting lazy or lethargic we should act at once to renew our alertness, as we would jump up if a snake slid into our lap. [70, 71]*

*As cotton is blown about by the wind, we should be blown along by our enthusiastic desire to practice the Dharma. In this way, our spiritual power will grow strong. [75]*

This is quite a strong final image. If we can develop enough dharmachanda and joy in our practice, then it will seem as though we make progress without effort – as though we were being blown along by an external force - because we will be doing what we want most.

## ***Week 7, Chapter 8: The Practice of Meditation***

Now Śāntideva moves on to the penultimate pāramitā – dhyāna, or meditation. The chapter is structured as follows:

*Why practice meditation?*

Because the distracted mind is at the mercy of the kleśas; and (later in the chapter) because śamatha leads to insight, which is the end of suffering.

*The condition for successful meditation*

A quality called viveka, which means both solitude and non-attachment. Perhaps the link between these two apparently different meanings is separateness – if we are in solitude we are separated from others, and non-attachment implies mental detachment, distance or separation from what we are normally attached to. These are referred to in the text as external viveka (solitude), and internal viveka (non-attachment).

*What stops us experiencing viveka?*

1. Attachment to people.
  - Loved ones
  - Worldly company
2. Attachment to wealth and possessions.
3. Attachment to sense pleasures.

*The fruits of viveka*

1. The beauty of śamatha.
2. Vipāśyanā and Bodhicitta.

*Practical insight*

Exchanging self for others to expand awareness beyond the limited personal perspective.

**Why practice meditation?**

*While practicing vīrya we should stabilise our mind in meditation, since if our mind is distracted we are constantly at the mercy of the kleśas. {1}*

### **Questions:**

*Do the people in the group find that meditation makes them less 'at the mercy of the kleśas'?*

*If so, do we give it enough priority – for example do we take regular meditation retreats and/or solitary retreats?*

### **Conditions needed for success in meditation**

*We can be free from distraction if we practice external and internal viveka, keeping our body in solitude and our mind in detachment. [2]*

### **Question: What is viveka?**

It is one of those untranslatable Sanskrit words that doesn't map onto any one English word. It means isolation, solitude, and non-attachment, with overtones of renunciation. Traditionally there are said to be three types of viveka:

1. *Kāya-viveka*: Isolation of the body, or physical solitude.
2. *Citta-viveka*: Isolation of the mind, or mental detachment.
3. *Upādhi viveka*: Withdrawal or detachment from conditioned existence.

*Our attachments are what stop us experiencing viveka. So anyone with any sense will renounce what they are attached to by reflecting like this, "I know that someone who develops insight on the basis of śamatha destroys all mental suffering, so the first thing I need to do is to seek the conditions for śamatha, which are solitude and detachment." [3, 4]*

Śāntideva is saying that we won't get far with meditation unless we are able to happily spend some reasonable periods in solitude, with a mind free from worldly distractions. So we need to think about what would stop us doing this.

### **Questions:**

*Why is viveka necessary for a successful meditation practice?*

*What does śamatha mean, and what is the relationship between it and vipaśyanā?*

*What attachments would stop you going off for, say, a year, to one of our isolated retreat centres, for example in Spain, to really get into your meditation practice?*

*Does Śāntideva touch on anything that might stop you doing this in the following verses?*

## **Hindrances to viveka: other people**

### ***Attachment to loved ones***

*Does it make any sense for me, an impermanent being, to be attached to other impermanent people, knowing I may not see them again for thousands of lifetimes? When a loved one is away, we feel sad and cannot concentrate in meditation. When they are with us, this doesn't make us happy. Because of attachment to a transient loved one our life swiftly passes in vain, and we lose our opportunity to practise the enduring Dharma. [5, 6, 8]*

Some reactions are likely! We might need to stress that Śāntideva is talking about the need to free ourselves from *sneha* – sticky, egocentric attachment – and not genuine *mettā*. We need to concede that for folk with children, long periods spent mediating in solitude might not be possible or responsible (which is why, traditionally family life was often seen as ruling out a full spiritual life). A few people might also have responsibilities like looking after someone old or infirm. But for people with no dependents, the reason we would be reluctant to leave our 'loved ones' to focus on meditation for, say, a year, almost certainly has a lot more to do with *sneha* than with genuine concern for others.

***Suggestion:*** *Read out the last sentence and discuss?!*

### ***Questions:***

*Would your sexual relationship or other close partnership stop you going off for a year's retreat?*

*How would you feel at the prospect? Sad? Lonely? Jealous and insecure about what they might get up to?*

*How do you imagine your partner would respond if you suggested going off for a long retreat – perhaps six months or a year?*

*Would their likely response come from *maitrī* or *sneha*?*

*Might they not actually benefit from your going – because you would come back a more advanced person, and they would be required to develop more resources and robustness in your absence?*

*Śāntideva says that when we are away from our loved one we feel sad, but when we are with them this doesn't make us happy. Is this true?*

### ***Attachment to worldly company***

*If we act in the same way as foolish worldly people we will go to a bad re-becoming, and if we are different from them they hate us. One moment they are friends, the next they are enemies. They get angry when they are given*

*good advice, and they get angry when we don't take their bad advice.  
There is no pleasing foolish worldly people. [9-11]*

*They are jealous of their superiors, competitive with their peers, and arrogant towards their inferiors. Praise makes them puffed up, and criticism makes them angry. They are always complaining, trying to make themselves look good, or trying to get their own way. A worldly fool can't be a friend to anyone, because he is only happy when he is getting what he wants for himself. [12, 13, 24]*

*Contact with worldly people is harmful, so we should be happy to spend time alone, with an untroubled mind. We should be pleasant and helpful to worldly folk, kind but detached, and not get too involved with them. [14, 15]*

Śāntideva sometimes seems to exaggerate for humorous effect, and this may be an example. I can imagine his audience getting a good laugh at this caricature – but still recognising that there is some truth in what he is saying.

These verses could sound arrogant and contemptuous, but we need to remember that we too are 'foolish worldly people', and share their faults. So he is advising us to separate ourselves from 'foolish worldly people' in order to become less foolish ourselves, and so to be able to help them to become less foolish in turn. The whole background to the text is the Bodhisattva ideal – the trainee is practicing in order to be able to benefit these very people whose faults Śāntideva is pointing out.

**Questions:** *Is there any truth in this caricature?*

Surely we can all think of examples of normal 'worldly people':

- a. Hating those who are different from themselves.
- b. Being jealous or competitive.
- c. Complaining.
- d. Trying to make themselves look good.
- e. Trying to get their own way?

We probably all do at least some of these things ourselves.

*Do your friendships with non-Buddhists hold you back in any way?*

E.g. Do they perpetuate unhelpful habits like drinking or drug-taking, or does others' scepticism undermine your śraddhā?

*Would your liking for 'worldly company' be an obstacle to taking a long retreat of maybe a year?*

*Would it be a problem for you to do without cafes, clubs, pubs, bars, festivals and parties for such a period?*

**Important question:** *Do you think Śāntideva is recommending a hermits life of meditative solitude, spent completely away from other people?*

No, but he is recommending that we spend periods away from others in order to practice meditation. Śāntideva himself lived at Nālandā, a large monastic university, but even at Nālandā it is likely that monks were recommended to spend periods in isolation to develop their meditation practice, and probably there were retreat huts for this purpose, as there were in large Tibetan monasteries. Śāntideva is encouraging his readers to spend periods in solitude or retreat, not to spend their whole life this way. But even to do this we need to get beyond the attachments to normal worldly life that stop us being able to happily spend periods in retreat.

It might be worth reminding people that the Triratna approach is mainly one of mixing periods of retreat with periods of engagement with the world, which seems the most balanced approach, leading to more all-round progress than either extreme alone. A few Order members do spend long periods in retreat, but most try to fit periods of retreat within an otherwise fairly active year. Sangharakshita has recommended that all Order members working in Centres should take three months retreat a year, of which one month should be spent in solitude. The hypothetical year-long retreat we have encouraged people to imagine is just for the purpose of making them acutely aware of the attachments that would stop them doing this – which would probably be just as much a problem in a shorter retreat – rather than as a serious suggestion for mitras.

### **Hindrances to viveka: desire for wealth and status**

*We might think, “I am rich and respected, and people like me.” But this won’t do us any good when death arrives. Many have become wealthy and famous, but where have they gone with their wealth and fame? [20]*

*Wealth is a misfortune, because of the trouble it takes to earn it, the anxiety of protecting it, and the misery of losing it. Those whose minds are attached to wealth are always distracted, and they have no opportunity for liberation from saṃsāra. [79]*

### **Questions:**

*“Wealth is a misfortune.” Is there any truth in this?*

*Does wealth bring happiness?*

*If so, what are we doing here studying the Dharma when we could be out there getting and spending?*

*If not, do we live – and think – as though this were true? For example, do we use a lot of energy worrying about money, planning about money, and making more money than we really need to live a simple life?*

*Would peoples' job, career or business stop them from going on, say, a year-long retreat? Do the members of the group believe they have got their priorities right in this area?*

### **Hindrances to viveka: desire for sensory pleasures – especially sex**

*Whenever the mind is deluded about the source of happiness and looks for it in sensory pleasures, what we get is suffering. So a wise person does not desire sensory pleasure. Desire for pleasure creates fear and anxiety, but the sensations we crave pass in an instant and are gone. [18, 19]*

**Question:** *Śāntideva says that when we look for our happiness from passing sensory pleasures, what we in fact get is suffering. Is this true in your experience?*

The most obvious illustration of this is addiction. The fact that addiction to drugs, alcohol, comfort food, or even sex brings only very transient relief from duḥkha, and creates much more duḥkha in the end, is obvious. This truth is maybe less obvious with our more moderate attempts to get happiness from passing pleasures, but the principle is the same.

*She you schemed to meet up with over and over again, willing to be unskilful, to make a fool of yourself, and to waste your wealth, she who you embrace with the utmost pleasure, her body is just a bundle of bones, tied together by sinews, and plastered with flesh like a statue plastered with clay. Why don't you cuddle up to some bones instead? [43, 52]*

*That face you longed so much to see when it was bashfully lowered or covered by a veil, why don't you want to see it when its real nature is unveiled by the vultures? But of course it is not surprising that you refuse to see the truth about her body, when you won't even face the truth about your own. In fact the only point of this body is the pure lotus that grows out of the muck to blossom in the cloudless sun. [44, 45, 56, 57]*

Śāntideva is writing for male monks, so his text is slanted towards helping them deal with their desires for women and female bodies. The unshortened text contains a long contemplation on the loathsomeness of the body, and what it looks like after death, which is a thoroughly traditional meditation.

**Question:** *'...the only point of this body is the pure lotus that grows out of the muck to blossom in the cloudless sun.'* What does this mean? Do folk agree?

*Deluded by sensory desires, people sell themselves into slavery, spending their whole lives working for others, collapsing each evening exhausted by a hard day's work. They get much pain and little enjoyment, like a beast that gets to chew a bit of grass while pulling a wagon, and the enjoyment*

*they do get is the sort that even an animal can get easily. They spend their youth and prime earning money – and then what can an old man do with the pleasures of the flesh? In this way they waste this precious opportunity. They could gain Buddhahood with just a fraction of the effort. [72, 75, 80, 81, 83]*

### **Questions:**

*Is there any truth in this description of a normal ‘worldly’ life, spent seeking to make money to spend on various forms of enjoyment?*

*Would the prospect of a simple life, with simple food, and no alcohol, drugs or sex, stop the members of the group going on a long retreat?*

This might be a good place to discuss what Sangharakshita has to say about disillusionment versus disgruntlement. Śāntideva’s whole discussion of viveka is geared to dispelling our illusions about different aspects of worldly life – especially the illusion that these can make us really happy. Sangharakshita has pointed out that successful Buddhists are dis-illusioned, in the sense that they no longer have the normal illusions about these things. ‘Normal’ people, in contrast, he describes as disgruntled, because they still hope to get lasting happiness from these sources, but are constantly disappointed. So an important part of our practice is to move towards being more disillusioned and less disgruntled.

### **The fruits of viveka: śamatha meditation**

*So we should recoil from sensual desires, and cultivate delight in detachment and solitude. We should join the fortunate ones who pace slowly over pleasant flat rock surfaces, spacious as palaces, under the cool rays of the moon, caressed by gentle forest breezes, meditating for the wellbeing of others. Passing the time as they please, sleeping in an empty house, at the foot of a tree, or in a cave, free from the exhaustion of looking after a household, free of care, not tied down by anything, they taste a joy and contentment that is hard to find, even for a king. [85-87]*

Having encouraged us to see through our attachments to worldly life, Śāntideva makes the point that the simple life he has been advocating is not a way of punishing ourselves – if we can develop śamatha and dhyāna we will experience a degree of real enjoyment that we could never get from ‘worldly’ pleasures.

**Question:** *Have the people in the group experienced such positive, happy states while on retreat or meditating intensively?*

### **The fruits of śamatha: insight into non-selfhood**

*When we have calmed our distracted minds by detachment from worldly desires and the experience of solitude, we should then meditate to develop the Bodhicitta. First we should meditate intently on the equality of self and others, thinking, “We are all the same, we all feel the same suffering and*

*happiness, so I should look after others as I look after myself. Just as I love and cherish my body, which is divided into many limbs, so I should love and cherish this whole world, which is divided into many beings.” [89-91]*

*“I should dispel the suffering of others, because it is suffering like my own suffering. I should help others because they are living beings, as I am a living being. When we all want happiness, and all fear suffering, what is so special about me, that I only look after myself?” [94-96]*

Although śamatha meditation leads to very pleasant states of mind, its main purpose is to allow us to experience vipaśyanā, or Insight. One traditional way of doing this is to reflect on verbal, conceptual formulations of the Dharma while in a focussed state, and this is what Śāntideva is recommending here. For Śāntideva the development of Insight and the arising of the Bodhicitta are two sides of the same coin, and he sees the realisation of self-less-ness as going hand-in-hand with the development of selfless concern for others.

*“This stream of mental moments I call my mind, these ever-changing elements I call my body, are not some separate thing that exists in its own right. So who is this separate person, that someone’s suffering belongs to? Suffering is just suffering, it has no owner. I should relieve it, just because it is suffering.” [101,102]*

*Those who have developed their mind in this way, who feel this joy in releasing others, they are the ones who are truly fulfilled. What is the point in some cold liberation, just for oneself alone? [107, 108,]*

Śāntideva makes the point that realising our interconnectedness with other beings and the world around us is a joyful, fulfilling experience, not something we pursue to give ourselves a hard time. He seems to be contrasting the Mahāyāna attitude to what was perceived as the Hīnayāna goal – a ‘cold liberation, just for oneself alone’.

**Question:** *Do you think it is possible to have a ‘cold liberation, just for yourself alone’?*

Sangharakshita has said that an individualistic enlightenment is a contradiction in terms.

*Whoever longs to quickly save themselves and others should practise this supreme mystery: exchanging self and other. All the suffering in the world comes from obsession with ourselves. All the joy in the world comes from wanting others to be happy. Why say more? The fool looks out for his own benefit. The sage acts for the benefit of all. Just look at the difference between them! [120,129,130]*

This is perhaps the most famous verse in the whole Bodhicaryāvatāra, often quoted by Tibetan Buddhists.

**Question:** *Is it true that all the suffering in the world comes from our obsession with ourselves, and that the joy in the world comes from escaping from this obsession?*

This is the message of the Four Noble Truths, which can be seen as the most fundamental teaching of the Buddha: suffering arises from selfish craving; the way beyond suffering is to follow a path of practice that takes us beyond our egocentric worldview.

*So, to cure my own suffering, as well as the suffering of others, I devote myself to others, and will see them as myself. From now onwards the welfare of all beings is my concern. These limbs and this body belong to all beings. It would be wrong to use them just for myself. [136-138]*

The vipaśyanā reflections in Śāntideva's verse here aim for a very concrete effect – we not only liberate ourselves by seeing through our egotism, we actively devote ourselves to the wellbeing of others.

### **Practical insight: exchanging self and other**

*Having devoted ourselves to others in this way, we should meditate on putting ourselves in others' shoes. For example, we might imagine that we are someone who we think is inferior to us, seeing ourselves through their eyes, and experiencing the envy and pride they might experience. [139,140]*

Having led us through some reflections aimed at cultivating insight into non-selfhood, Śāntideva now comes right down to earth – he asks us simply to practice seeing things through others' eyes. At a very practical level, a lot of our lack of wisdom comes from the fact that we see all situations through one pair of eyes, and through lenses formed by our particular ego-concerns, history, conditioning, etc. We can become wiser by imaginatively expanding our perspective to include the point of view of other people.

**Question:** *'There is not wisdom in a single point of view'. Is this true? Why, or why not?*

### **Putting oneself in the shoes of an 'inferior'**

Here Śāntideva takes us through a meditation designed to help us see the world through the eyes of someone who is our spiritual inferior, or at least our inferior in terms of their spiritual 'status'. Śāntideva is writing in the context of a large monastery, where no doubt there were spiritual superstars, who were widely respected, and spiritual 'nobodies'. This would have been a fact of life. In this context, what follows is a way of putting oneself in the shoes of someone who is less respected – and maybe less developed – than oneself, and seeing the world through their eyes. Śāntideva also gives reflections on putting oneself in the shoes of a 'superior' and a competitive equal, but these are not included in this shortened text.

*“He is respected; I’m not. He is wealthy; I’m not. He gets the praise, I get the criticism. He is happy. I suffer. I do the chores while he takes his ease. He, it seems, is really somebody. I, it seems, am inferior. Maybe I have got some failings, but I didn’t make myself the way I am. If he’s so spiritual, he should be trying to help me to develop – I’m up for that, even if it is painful. Instead, see how he looks down his nose at me! He has no compassion for someone threatened with a bad rebirth. He cares more about competing with others like himself, trying to get even more wealth and honour.” We should also extend this exercise of putting ourselves in others’ shoes to people who are seen as our equals and our superiors. [141-154]*

*In this way we should practice exchanging ourselves with others, seeing ourselves through their eyes, involving ourselves in their suffering, feeling the pain we cause them through our unskillfulness. Pull yourself off your pedestal. Point to yourself and say, “Look at him! When does he actually do anything for others? He’s a complete fraud!” [160,161,165]*

**Question:** *Who do the people in the group tend to see as their spiritual inferiors?*

It is very unfashionable to admit that we look down on anyone, but we all do it. Can the people in the group be honest and aware enough to see where they do this? You could try them with the following, or other examples:

- Non-Buddhists?
- People who have been practicing for less time than themselves?
- People who are conventional in dress, lifestyle, and/or views?
- Street drinkers?
- Successful worldly people?
- Unsuccessful poor people?
- Uneducated people?
- Coarse uncultured people?
- ‘Straight’ people?
- People of the other gender?

**Exercise:**

*If you can identify someone who you think of as less developed than yourself, try the exercise of imagining yourself in their shoes as Śāntideva suggests, ideally as part of your mettā bhāvanā practice this week.*

**Conclusion**

*So enough of worldly concerns! I shall follow the sages, concentrating my mind in meditation, tearing down the obscuring veil!*

## ***Week 8, Chapter 9: The Pāramitā of Wisdom (and Chapter 10, Dedication of Merits)***

In its original form a lot of chapter 9 is extremely difficult to understand, so the full text is almost impossible to study with a group of mitras. However there is a lot in the chapter that will make sense to mitras, and in view of Śāntideva's statement in the first verse that wisdom is the pre-eminent pāramitā, it seems a shame to skip it. The condensed text leaves out a lot of abstruse argument, and I hope it is reasonably accessible. It is largely self-explanatory, but it would help if you could explain a little about the philosophical background to Śāntideva's thinking, either from your own knowledge, and/or making use of the brief explanations in this study guide. If you prefer you could just give this guide to the mitras to read in advance.

Śāntideva followed the Madhyamaka (Middle Way) philosophy, which held that everything we experience is śūnya, empty. Things are empty in the sense that they do not have any inherent, independent existence - everything depends on and is inseparable from everything else. The Madhyamikas (or followers of the Madhyamaka) also saw everything as empty in the related sense of indescribable and inconceivable - because nothing has separate selfhood, all our descriptions and concepts based on dividing the universe into separate things and qualities are just a mental construction with no real basis in ultimate reality, although words and concepts are useful for practical purposes.

### **The fundamental importance of wisdom**

*The Buddha taught this whole system of practice to help us develop wisdom. Wisdom is the only ultimate and permanent cure for suffering. [1]*

The other pāramitās are not ends in themselves, they are 'ways to the other shore', the other shore being the liberation of self-transcending Insight.

***Question:*** *How are the other pāramitās related to wisdom, and how might they lead towards wisdom?*

On the one hand they represent an acting-out of wisdom, and on the other they are ways to cultivate the mental states in which wisdom can arise. For example, dāna is a way to act that is in accord with the wisdom of non-self, and as a practice it is also a way of weakening the egocentricity which prevents us seeing the world as it is. Traditionally the other pāramitās were often seen as ways of developing 'merit', which was seen as an essential preparation for wisdom. The way we see the world depends on what we might call our overall level of being, so Insight cannot be cultivated in a vacuum, without also cultivating the other positive qualities it arises from. The idea of 'merit' is partly a shorthand way of getting this across.

***Question:*** *Why is wisdom the only ultimate cure for suffering?*

## Conventional and ultimate truth

*There are two kinds of truth, conventional and ultimate. Ultimate reality is beyond the scope of the intellect. The concepts of the intellect belong to the realm of conventional truth. [2]*

Śāntideva's Madhyamaka philosophy holds that the language we use to describe and think about the world has no basis in ultimate reality. The way we divide the world up into separate things and selves in order to talk and think about it is arbitrary; in reality everything is both composed of smaller parts and is part of larger systems; everything is part of the seamless process of conditioned co-production, and is kept in existence by an infinite network of conditions, so that nothing exists in its own right, in the sense of existing inherently and independently.

However, the Madhyamikas (those belonging to the Madhyamaka school) also hold that so-called conventional reality – the reality we describe in language and think about with our discursive minds, is necessary and, in a way, 'true', at its own level. So we can continue to think and talk about human beings as though they had separate existence, and for practical purposes we must do this, or we would have no Dharma to practice, and no basis for compassionate activity. But, having said that, the world of discourse and ideas we normally inhabit is just based on 'play words', and ultimate reality cannot be realised in this way.

### **Questions:**

*What is the difference between conventional and ultimate truth?*

*Why is conventional truth important in the cultivation of wisdom?*

*In the light of this we can see that there are two types of people: the spiritually developed, who have some direct insight into ultimate reality, and the spiritually undeveloped, whose opinions are entirely based on conventional truth. The opinions and worldview of the spiritually undeveloped are superseded by those of the spiritually developed. [3]*

*Even the views of the spiritually developed are superseded by the vision of those at a higher level. The only way that those at a higher spiritual level can communicate their vision of reality to someone at a lower level is by the use of analogies. [4]*

**Question:** *This Buddhist view of a hierarchy of vision into the nature of reality has several implications that challenge contemporary ways of thinking. What are some of these implications?*

For example:

- Everyone's opinions do not carry equal weight.

- There are others whose views are more valid than our own, because of their depth of spiritual practice, and we would benefit from listening to them.
- The views about the Dharma of what Sangharakshita calls ‘mere scholars’, if they approach the Dharma solely with the rational discursive mind, do not carry the same weight as those whose vision is based on intuitive spiritual Insight acquired through practice; the concepts and reasoning of the analytical mind relate only to conventional truth, no matter how well-informed or clever they may be.

*Ordinary people imagine that the things they see around them have innate intrinsic existence, rather than seeing them as illusions. This is the fundamental difference between ordinary folk and the spiritually developed. [5]*

*Even the objects of direct perception, such as visible forms, are only held to exist as entities in their own right by popular consensus, and not by any valid means of knowing. In fact this popular consensus is wrong, like the popular consensus that sees many undesirable things as desirable. [6]*

In the following verses Śāntideva illustrates the fact that the things and selves of our experience do not exist as entities in their own right. He uses both the ‘spatio-analytical’ and ‘dynamic-synthetical’ methods of understanding the true nature of phenomena that Sangharakshita refers to in ‘The Survey of Buddhism’, chapter 1 part 12.

### **Lack of self-nature in beings**

*Just as the trunk of a banana tree is shown to be empty of real existence when it is broken down into its separate parts, in the same way we see that the ‘I’ is not a real entity when we hunt for it by analysis. [74]*

Banana trees have no real trunk; what looks like a trunk is just a bundle of separate leaf-sheaths, which vanishes when we break it down into its parts.

#### **a. The body**

*The teeth, hair or nails are not ‘I’, nor are the bones, blood, mucus, pus or lymph. Marrow is not ‘I’, not are the sweat, fat, entrails, excrement or urine. The flesh is not ‘I’, nor the sinews, nor any of the changing elements that make up in the body. Even these constituents can be analysed down to atoms, then these atoms too can be broken down, until we are just left with empty space. [57-59,86]*

*The body is not in its parts, nor does it exist separately from its parts. Who, analysing the body like this, would take delight in a form that is like a dream? [86,87]*

## **b. The mind**

*The sense fields are not 'I', nor is the ego consciousness. Sense impressions are dependent on the objects that cause them, and the ego consciousness depends on sense impressions. [59-62]*

*The past mind and the future mind can't be 'I', because they don't exist. But if the present mind is 'I', then the so-called 'self' vanishes as soon as the present moment of consciousness has passed. In fact the sense of a continuous self is an illusion caused by memory – what happened earlier in time is remembered by what arose later, but this does not mean that the earlier and later 'selves' are the same. [73,100]*

*The mind is not located in the sense faculties, nor in the objects it perceives, nor in between them. It is not found inside the body, nor outside it, nor anywhere else. The mind is nothing. Therefore sentient beings are by nature liberated. [102,103]*

### **Questions:**

*Do folk find these arguments for the lack of separate independent existence convincing, or not?*

*Are there any arguments or images that seemed particularly powerful, or made a particular impression?*

*Does what Śāntideva is saying mean that nothing really exists?*

No, it just means that nothing exists in quite the way we usually imagine, as a separate, independent entity. An analogy that may be useful is the way eddies or whirlpools exist in a stream or river – the eddies do have an existence, but this is constantly changing, and is inseparable from the existence of all the other eddies around them, and from the water in general.

*'Therefore sentient beings are by nature liberated'. Why does lack of separate selfhood mean we are liberated?*

### **Objections to lack of self-nature in beings**

*Some people might argue that if a sentient being is like an illusion, lacking self-nature, then the idea of rebirth does not make sense. But an illusion lasts for as long as the concurrence of conditions that keep it in existence. Just because the continuum of mental states that we call a person lasts a long time, this does not mean that this person has an independent, inherent existence. [9, 10]*

*Again, some people argue that if there is no 'self' then the law of karma is invalidated, because the doer of an action and the experiencer of the result are not the same 'self'. But the one who provides the cause and the one*

*who experiences the results are linked by a continuity of consciousness – there is no need to assume some permanent, independently existing ‘self’ for karma to operate. [70-72]*

Most of the uncut chapter consists of arguments against other non-Madhyamaka worldviews that were apparently around at the time of Śāntideva, and of defences of the Madhyamaka viewpoint against objections. Most of this is pretty much irrelevant or unintelligible to us, but Śāntideva does deal with an apparent contradiction between the Madhyamaka vision and other aspects of the Dharma that is still likely to be raised today - how do we reconcile non-selfhood with the ideas of karma and rebirth? It is interesting that in Śāntideva’s day the sceptics seemed to reason that since karma and rebirth were true, non-selfhood could not be, whereas in our day the objection is likely to be the other way around, that in view of non-selfhood the traditional ideas of karma and rebirth do not make sense.

**Question:** *Have folk ever been puzzled by how anātman fits with ideas of karma and rebirth? Do these verses help to clarify things?*

## Śūnyatā

*The existence of any phenomenon depends on a complex set of causes. Nothing exists separately from its causes, and the constantly changing phenomena of the conditioned world have no continuous identity – the past cause and the future effect are not the same ‘thing’, any more than rice and dung are the same thing. [135,141,142]*

*How can there be real existence in something that is just a temporary artificial construct, like a reflection, which is only seen in dependence on other things, and has no existence of its own? What fools take to be real is in fact an illusion. All the states of conditioned existence are like dreams, having as much reality as the trunk of a banana tree, and the beings who are born and die there are the same. [144,150]*

### **The benefits of a vision of śūnyatā**

*The vision of śūnyatā frees us from bondage to conditioned phenomena, and then we are liberated even from śūnyatā by realising that this itself does not really exist. When the mind grasps at no objects, neither as truly existing entities, nor as non-entities, then it becomes tranquil. Without this vision of śūnyatā the mind is fettered and becomes trapped in cycles of continual re-arising. [32, 34, 48]*

*We are able to remain in saṃsāra for the benefit of suffering beings by freeing ourselves from the two extremes of attachment and fear. This is the fruit of realising śūnyatā. Śūnyatā is the antidote to wrong views, and the antidote to the kleśas. As long as there is an ‘I’, fear is all around us. But when we see that there is no ‘I’, who is there to be afraid? In view of this, there can be no real objection to the vision of śūnyatā. We should meditate on it without doubts or fears. [52-54, 56]*

*Yet my fellow humans do not see that everything is empty and open like space. Mesmerised by conditioned phenomena, one minute they are angry and the next they are celebrating. They are tormented by grief, worry and despair. Constantly seeking their own happiness, they behave in unskilful ways, harming each other, and causing suffering to themselves and others. [154,155]*

### **Questions:**

*Do folk think that the vision of śūnyatā would have positive effects on our mental states and behaviour?*

*Can we think of particular negative tendencies it would free us from, or positive qualities it would give us?*

*Are there any dangers in this way of seeing things?*

There are several dangers, all variants on nihilism. Nāgārjuna said that if we understand these ideas in the wrong, nihilistic way it would completely destroy our spiritual practice.

One danger is that we see the teachings, practices, and concepts of the Dharma as just being based on conventional wisdom and ‘play words’, so that we no longer need to practice ethics or cultivate right view. If we do this we destroy the very raft we need to get us to the other shore – while we are still wrapped up in conventional reality we need a cure that uses conventional reality.

Another danger is that we think that, because we ourselves and other beings do not really exist, there is no point in altruistic activity.

A more general danger is that we use the Madhyamaka ideas to reduce reality to a meaningless nothingness, in which all spiritual values and ideas are mere illusions. The point of the Madhyamaka reasoning is to clear away our usual conditioned ideas about reality, so that we can begin to experience the mysterious, radiant spiritual reality which they obscure, not to leave us adrift in a meaningless universe

### **Longing for the Unconditioned – for self and others**

*Reality could not be like this. Here, strength is meagre, and life is short. Here, because of concerns for livelihood and health, we pass our time in hunger, fatigue, and endless troubles. Here, life passes quickly and pointlessly, solitude is hard to find, and distraction is unavoidable. Here, there are many false paths, and doubt is hard to overcome. [157-161]*

*Oh the miserable condition of beings who stay in this ocean of suffering, but do not even see their own wretched state! Like someone who dowses himself with water over and over again, in order to enter a fire over and*

*over again, they think they are happy, when really they are suffering.  
[163,164]*

*How soon will I be able to give some relief to these beings? How soon will I be able to teach śūnyatā and the accumulation of merit, both by means of conventional truth and ultimate truth, to these beings whose views are based on illusions? [166,167]*

## **Chapter 10 – Dedication**

Chapter 10 is a dedication of merits which is additional to the structure of the text based on the Pāramitās, so there is no need to study it unless you want to. However chanting a shortened version of the dedication in call and response makes an excellent way of bringing the module to a close. I have indicated the suggested line breaks for chanting with double line breaks here.

By the virtue I have gained  
through turning my mind to the Bodhicaryāvatāra,  
may all people  
set foot on the path to Awakening.

Through my merit  
may all beings who are suffering,  
in body or mind,  
all find happiness.

May the fearful find courage,  
may the anxious be calmed,  
and may those in sorrow find joy.  
May the sick be well,  
and the weak be strong.  
May all beings have a tender mind towards each other.

May Gods protect the young and the old,  
the intoxicated, the foolish,  
and all those in danger.

May the rains come at the proper time,  
and the crops flourish.

May the people prosper,  
and may the rulers be virtuous.

May the monasteries be well appointed,  
humming with mantras and study.

May the Sangha stay united,  
and succeed in its purpose.

May practitioners find solitude for meditation,  
and take pleasure in their precepts.

May their minds be undistracted,  
and may they experience the bliss of the dhyānas.

May the ethics of the Sangha be unbroken,  
and those who are unskilful  
see the need to change.

May they delight in ending their evil actions,  
and achieve a good rebirth.

May the Sangha be learned and cultured,  
and receive support and donations.

May the Buddhas dispensation long endure,  
this only cure for the illness of the world,  
this jewel mine of happiness and success,  
and may it be supported and honoured.

Through my connection with Mañjuḥoṣa,  
in all my lives may I enter the Sangha,  
may I find the conditions for meditation,  
and may I be taught and advised  
by Mañjuḥoṣa himself.

May I emulate Mañjuśrī,  
who works for the welfare of all beings.

As long as space abides  
and as long as the world abides,  
so long may I abide,  
destroying the sufferings of the world.

By the merit I have gained,  
may all beings desist from evil deeds,  
and all act skilfully.  
May they always be possessed by the Bodhicitta,  
treading the path to awakening.  
May they be adopted by the Buddha's,  
may they find the Sangha,  
and may they be immune to Mara's tricks.

May all beings have infinite life.  
May every place become a place of delight,  
made of jewels and light,  
with gardens of magical trees,  
teeming with Buddhas.  
May the enthralling sound of the Dharma  
be sung by the birds in the air,  
by every tree,/ by every ray of light,  
and by the blue dome of the sky.  
May the world be a great mandala of Bodhisattvas,  
each illuminating the world  
with their own radiant colour.

May the universe attain Buddhahood in a single, divine body.

### ***Pause***

I bow down to Mañjuḥṣa,  
the supreme spiritual friend,  
through whose inspiration my mind turns to the good/ and becomes strong.

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## **Feedback on the Dharma Training Course**

Once you've finished the module, please consider leaving feedback on the DTC on-line forum – a dedicated place for Mitra group leaders to make comments, suggestions, and corrections to the new course. This will have two big benefits:

1. It collects ideas and information needed to improve the course over time
2. It will also be a place where group leaders can find out how others have led or approached a particular module, share good ideas, and so on.

Each group leader needs to get their own username and password to access the forum. If you are a Mitra group leader and would like to participate, please e-mail Vajrashura (who has kindly set up the forum) and he'll set up an account for you, usually within a day or two. His e-mail is: [vajrashura@gmail.com](mailto:vajrashura@gmail.com), and the URL of the forum is: [www.dublinbuddhistcentre.org/DTCforum](http://www.dublinbuddhistcentre.org/DTCforum).