4.7

The Bodhicaryāvatāra of Śāntideva

Contents

Front Image: Evelyn De Morgan, *Night and Sleep*, detail.

Module compiled by Vadanya

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 text on which Sangharakshita led study after founding the Western Buddhist Order, and he has always held it up as one of Triratna's core texts. In the original mitra study course it was envisaged that all mitras would study the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* in addition to Sangharakshita's lecture series.

Śāntideva and the origins of the text

Śāntideva lived in northern India around 800CE. When he composed the text he was a monk at the great monastic university of Nālanda. In factual terms we do not 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, *Śikṣāsamuccaya*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1922, 1971). Whereas the Bodhicaryāvatāra was written in verse, the *Śikṣā Samuccaya* is a prose guide to the path which incorporates quotations from a large number of Mahāyāna sūtras, many of which are now lost, or exist only in Chinese or Tibetan translations. We know that Śāntideva was a devotee of Mañjughoṣa, which is in keeping with his extensive scholarship.

There is a standard mythological version of Śāntideva's life, which is described in Kulananda's book, *Teachers of Enlightenment* (Windhorse Publications, Birmingham 2000). According to this, Śāntideva was regarded as a lazy, ignorant monk by his fellows, because he slept all day; but he practised all night, when others were asleep. He was given the nickname 'Monk of the Three Attainments' by the other monks – the Three Attainments being eating, sleeping, and defecating. He was invited to address the assembled monks of Nālanda as a joke, to show him up and humiliate him. But instead of disgracing himself by showing his ignorance, Śāntideva delivered the *Bodhicaryavatara* in beautiful Sanskrit verse from the platform, then rose into the air and vanished. He is said to have then spent the rest of his life living among the poorest and most downtrodden sections of society, teaching and practising the Dharma.

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. Essentially the story is trying to convey that the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* comes from a different level of consciousness, from profound levels of inspiration, and not from mere academic scholarship.

Bodhicaryāvatāra means something like 'Guide to the Path of Wisdom', or 'Guide to the Path of Awakening.' *Bodhi* means awakening, or the wisdom of Enlightenment. *Caryā* means path or way path. *Avatāra* means guide.

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

The Bodhisattva Path

The *Bodhicaryāvatāra* is a guide to the Bodhisattva Path, but we should not 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 practising for the welfare of the world. This is nothing new: if we go back to early Buddhism, the Buddha repeatedly emphasised that we should be practising, "...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 Bodhisattva Path is introduced in different ways in several parts of the Dharma Training Course for Mitras, most notably in the Bodhisattva Ideal module.

The Six Pāramitās and the structure of the text

There are several formulations of the Bodhisattva Path, but the simplest and most widely applicable is that of 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. 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:* Dhyana (meditation).
- *Chapter 9:* Prajñā (wisdom).
- *Chapter 10:* Dedication – not part of the pāramitās structure.

The text is also divided 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 lives.

This course uses a shortened text which covers Śāntideva's main points, clarifies the language of the more scholarly translations, and eliminates repetition. The approach has been to bring out the relevance of the text for present-day practitioners, rather than to treat it as a document of historical or scholarly interest. The text you will be using is based mainly on three translations: Crosby and Skilton, Wallace and Wallace, and Batchelor, and the approach has

been to look for the meaning conveyed by all three and to re-express this in what I hope is accessible English. Headings have been inserted in the text to clarify the structure.

Approach and timetable

The suggested approach to this study is to read the text aloud in short sections during the study session, discussing each section as it comes along. The material for each week includes an introduction, the text itself, and then a section called 'commentary and questions', which breaks the text into bite-sized pieces suitable for reading then discussion, and gives some comments and questions about each section. It is suggested that the group uses this commentary to structure the discussion, reading each of these sections of the text aloud, then discussing the points made in the text, with the aid of the questions where appropriate.

It is also suggested that while you are studying the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* you might take this opportunity to immerse yourself in the text, reading and rereading it as part of your daily practice. You may also want to look at some of the full-length translations of the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, and at some reference material – references are given later – but this is not essential. Your study leader also has access to a *Teachers' Guide* that gives extra information.

The suggested timetable for the module is as follows (although your study leader may find it appropriate to change this):

- 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

References and further reading

The Bodhicaryāvatāra – A Guide to the Buddhist Path to Awakening, Kate Crosby and Andrew Skilton (translators), Windhorse Publications, Birmingham, 2002.
http://www.windhorsepublications.com/product/the-bodhicaryavatara-a-guide-to-the-buddhist-path-of-awakening/

A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life, Steven Batchelor (translator), Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, Dharamsala, 1979.
http://goo.gl/xV8avy

A Guide to the Bodhisattva Way of Life, Vesna Wallace and B. Alan Wallace (translators), Snow Lion Publications, Ithaca, NY, 1997.
http://www.shambhala.com/a-guide-to-the-bodhisattva-way-of-life-2972.html

The Endlessly Fascinating Cry, Sangharakshita. Transcribed study seminar.
https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/texts/seminartexts/SEM063_Endlessly_Fascinating_Cry_-_Complete_Text.pdf

Meaningful to Behold – A commentary to Śāntideva's Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life, Geshe Kelsang Gyatso, Tharpa Publications, London, 1980.
http://tharpa.com/us/meaningful-to-behold.html

Chapter 1: The Benefits of the Bodhicitta

Introduction

The first chapter of the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* 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.

What is the Bodhicitta?

Bodhicitta literally means something like 'wisdom mind' or 'awakening heart'. (Bodhi means the wisdom of Enlightenment, or awakening; citta means heart/mind.) In the Sevenfold Pūjā we translate the term as 'Will to Enlightenment', which brings out its volitional aspect. 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.

The term 'Bodhicitta' does not refer to something new in the Buddhist tradition, which the Mahāyāna invented. As has already been pointed out, the Buddha repeatedly exhorted his followers to practise, "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 relatedness with other beings, so that wisdom and altruism are two sides of the same coin.

As the Bodhicitta is the altruistic aspect of Going for Refuge, it can 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. 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 we might experience the Bodhicitta more as an altruistic, other-regarding motivation to practise the Dharma, and to engage in service to the Dharma and Sangha, rather than as a cosmic will acting through us!

Chapter 1: The Benefits of 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]

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

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]

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]

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 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]

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]

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. From the moment we definitely decide to live and practise for the benefit of all, a continuous stream of merit rains down on us, even when we are asleep or distracted. [17–19]

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. [24–6]

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]

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]

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]

Commentary and Questions

Chapter 1: The Benefits of 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]

Question: Why do you think he starts with 'bowing'?

> This precious opportunity, with the leisure and other conditions needed to practise 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 practise the Dharma and so live meaningfully includes the following:

- Being born as a human being.
- Being healthy enough in body and mind to practise.
- 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.

Question: Do you have a sense of being fortunate to be able to practise 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?

> 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]

Question: How could being more selfless bring us joy?

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

Question: Can you relate to the idea of conditioned existence as a prison? Do you have any sense of longing for release?

> 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]

> 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]

Śāntideva tells us that 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.

Question: Does this image appeal to you?

Question: What does Śāntideva mean by saying that are other good things are like a banana tree?

Question: How might the Bodhicitta protect us 'like a hero'?

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

> 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 practise 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?

> 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. [24–6]

Question: Why might Śāntideva describe the arising of the Bodhicitta as 'a wonder'?

> 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]

Śāntideva tells us that 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'?

> 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]

Introduction
Chapters 2 and 3 of the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* form the basis for our Sevenfold Pūjā. Śāntideva did not invent the sevenfold pūjā – there is a version of it in the (earlier) *Avataṃsaka Sūtra* – but the words we normally use come from a translation of the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*.

In these chapters 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 practising 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.

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.

Text

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]

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]

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 unskilful karma, and in the future I commit no more. [9]

In my mind's 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 cloud-like 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]

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

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]

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, and to the community of Bodhisattvas. [48, 49]

I offer myself to Samantabhadra, I give myself to Mañjughoṣa, 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! [51–3]

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? [54–7]

If I am careful on an ordinary cliff, how much more care should I take at the top of a precipice that drops for huge distances, through great tracts of time? Yet I take my pleasure, while my end gets nearer and nearer. Do I think I will escape death, when nobody else does? 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]

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. [64–6]

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]

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 Conquerors who wish to pass into Nirvāṇa, to please stay here for endless ages, and not to leave this world in darkness. [4, 5]

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 my body to all beings, I give them all my pleasures, and all my merit from the past, present, and future. [6, 10]

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

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]

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]

Today my life has borne fruit. Today I have been born in the family of the Buddha. Today I have become one of the Buddha's sons. 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]

Commentary and Questions

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]

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 practising dāna, giving to them in our imagination.

Question: Do you imagine yourself in the presence of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas when you take part in a pūjā? If so, how do you do this – e.g. do you 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]

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?

> 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 unskilful karma, and in the future I commit no more. [9]

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 unskilful 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.

Question: What is your emotional response to the idea of self-surrender, and why?

Question: What do we normally surrender to – what normally rules our actions and our lives? Might surrendering to the Bodhicitta be an improvement on this?

Question: Can you think of any less emotionally loaded ways of expressing what Śāntideva means by surrender?

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

> In my mind's 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 cloud-like 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 you respond to this imagery?

Question: It could be argued that we all worship something – we all allow certain goals, drives, principles or values to rule our life. What do you worship?

Question: Is there anything you see as higher than yourself, and worthy of worship? If so, do you ever express this? How?

> With as many bodies as there are 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]

Here we move on to 'salutation' – the Sanskrit means something 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?

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 unskilfulness 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 ourselves by our unskilful actions? 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 Mañjughoṣa, 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! [51–3]
>
> 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? [54–7]

Question: 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 more frightening) in the unabridged text. For Śāntideva an awareness of the inevitability of death is an important spur to practise.

Question: Why might mindfulness of death spur us on to practise?

Question: Does it make any difference to the effectiveness of meditating on death 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. [64–6]

Question: How do you respond to the idea of confession?

Question: Do you accept that you have accumulated a lot of unskilful karma?

Question: What is the spiritual value of confession? What attitudes are needed for confession to be effective?

Question: How might we approach confession when we regret a pattern or habit, but know that at the moment we are powerless to commit ourselves never to repeat it?

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 might rejoicing in merit align us with the Bodhicitta?

Question: Do you often rejoice and celebrate? Do you think you are good at it – or do you resist it?

Question: What gets in the way of rejoicing and celebrating?

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 Nirvāṇa, to please stay here for endless ages, and not to leave this world in darkness. [4,5]

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

Question: Who or what do you think we are asking for guidance from here – human beings wiser than ourselves, our own inner wisdom, or Buddhas and Bodhisattvas that exist as forces outside ourselves? Which of these can you relate to?

Question: What conditions or practices help you to be more open to the voice of this 'something' – however you see it? What stops us receiving such guidance?

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]

Question: What is 'merit'? How might worship, confession, rejoicing and so on give us merit?

Question: What is the spiritual significance of transferring this merit to others?

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

Question: How is Enlightenment 'giving away everything? And if that is what it is, do you 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 in this part of the pūjā we are rehearsing an attitude we are not yet fully ready for, in order to prepare the way for it to arise more strongly in the future.

Question: Can you relate to this attitude of giving yourself to all beings – or 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.

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, because it is only relevant if we are in fact ready to take the Bodhisattva vow.

> Today my life has borne 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 provide 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?

❧

A Bodhicaryāvatāra Pūjā

For use with chapters 2 and 3.

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 Mañjughoṣa,
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 saṁsāra.
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.

Introduction
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: *Samprajanyarakṣaṇa* – 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.

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.

These two chapters represent śīla in the structure based on the six pāramitās. 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.

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 practise 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 it's 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.

Text

Chapter 4: Apramāda, or Ethical Vigilance

From promise to practice
After embracing the Bodhicitta in this way, a Son of the Jinas 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]

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]

This precious opportunity
When will an opportunity like this come again: the arising of a Buddha, faith, a human life, the freedom to practise, adequate health, enough food to live, and no major problems? If I can't practise 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 practise. [15, 16, 18–20, 23]

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]

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]

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]

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? [36–8]

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 sun's 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]

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. [45–7]

Chapter 5: Guarding *Samprajanya*, or Continuity of Purpose

The importance of mindfulness
It is just not possible to practise 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]

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]

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]

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]

Many people know the Dharma, have faith, and try hard, but come unstuck because of lack of mindfulness. That band of thieves, the kleśas, searches 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]

Strategies for maintaining mindfulness
Mindfulness comes easily to those who are lucky enough to live with their teacher and practise under their 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]

'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 looks down on or blames others, we should remain like a block of wood. [48–50]

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]

'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 kleśas. [55–8]

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]

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]

Chapter 4: Apramāda, or Ethical Vigilance

From promise to practice

> After embracing the Bodhicitta in this way, a Son of the Jinas 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.

> 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?

This precious opportunity

> When will an opportunity like this come again: the arising of a Buddha, faith, a human life, the freedom to practise, adequate health, enough food to live, and no major problems? If I can't practise 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 practise. [15, 16, 18–20, 23]

We often put off serious, radical practice until sometime 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 practise. 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 fortunate and very precarious, so "If not now, when?"

Question: Have you come across the analogy of the turtle and the floating yoke?

Question: Assuming a belief in rebirth, do you think it is so unlikely to be born a human ? Do you know Sangharakshita's views on this?

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 practising?

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: Have you ever felt as though you were 'under a spell', and not able to put your higher volitions and resolutions into practice?

Question: Śāntideva asks, "What is going on here?" What do you think is going on when we seem to be '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. 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.

> 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]

Śāntideva's approach is very different from the self acceptance advocated by many contemporary therapists, etc. Present day self-help books 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.

Question: Who do you think is right, Śāntideva or the present-day therapists and self-help guides? Do they have the same goal?

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? [36–8]

> 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.

Question: Do you like this approach to the spiritual life, or dislike it? What factors in our past conditioning might have conditioned this reaction?

Question: Are there any dangers in this approach? Are there any dangers in the opposite approach, of being kind to and accepting of our unskilful motivations?

Question: Might there be a middle way?

Question: Are the kleśas really 'parts of ourselves', so that declaring war on them involves being unkind to ourselves?

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 might the kleśas be 'cowed by the glare of wisdom'?

Question: How do you express your warrior energy? How could you 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 practise 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?

> 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]

> 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 Dharma teaching is Śāntideva referring to in the last sentence?

> Many people know the Dharma, have faith, and try hard, but come unstuck because of lack of mindfulness. That band of thieves, the kleśas, searches 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 you think of examples from your own practice where you 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 practise 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]

Question: What helps you to keep mindfulness of your aspiration and practice? Is your present life situation conducive to this? How could you 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 practising śīla is to stop our reactivity, by 'remaining like a block of wood'.

Question: Is remaining like a block of wood 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]

Śāntideva is not above playing for laughs, but 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, the reactive, egocentric mind is ugly and ridiculous. As long as we think that 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 you ever had the experience of seeing your reactive mind as being as ugly and ridiculous as Śāntideva describes?

'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. [55–8]

Mindfulness isn't all about just 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.

Question: 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 your life?

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]

Question: Do you limit your spiritual practice to certain special times or places – for example when you are at the Centre, when you are meditating, or when you are on retreat?

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

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]

Question: If mindfulness is as important as Śāntideva says it is, do you place enough importance on cultivating it? What could you do to cultivate more mindfulness? Could you take a precept to act on this in the week ahead?

Question: What do you do that reduces your mindfulness? Could you do less of those things?

Introduction
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.

Kṣānti is often translated as 'patient forebearance', but this is perhaps suggests a passive attitude, whereas in fact kṣānti is an active quality that requires strength and courage in the face of difficulty. We could define kṣānti as *an attitude of determination to stay in positive mental states even in apparently adverse circumstances*.

What kṣānti is *not* is a passive failure to engage constructively with circumstances, events and people, because of indifference, apathy, timidity, laziness, low self-esteem, victim mentality, martyr mentality, and so on. Nor does kṣānti involve repression or denial of emotions like anger and sadness – rather it involves acknowledging these emotions, but not allowing them to upset our positivity or rule our actions. 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 practise kṣānti, which belongs to a higher stage of the path. Kṣānti is about transcending an already-strong ego; self-expression, assertiveness and so on are about developing a strong ego in the first place.

In talking about kṣānti Śāntideva focuses particularly on not allowing ill will to arise, by not blaming others when things are not as we would like. He focuses on this because it is the most serious breach of the Bodhisattva vow, but he also touches on timidity, weakness and dejection in the face of suffering.

Text

Chapter 6: The Practice of Kṣānti

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]

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]

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]

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]

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 practise 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]

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

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 unskilful acts, and it makes us long for the Buddha. [21]

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]

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]

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]

Learning to tolerate other people: people are deluded – as we are!
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. [35–8]

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]

Causes of resentment: concern for gain and loss
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]

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, 97–9]

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]

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 practise patience, because they help us along the path to Awakening. [65]

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 feet 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]

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 practises kṣānti gets all these even while they are still in Saṃsāra. [133,134]

Commentary and questions

Chapter 6: The Practice of Kṣānti

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. Crosby and Skilton say 'hatred', but this seems too extreme: we probably will not really hate our friend because they forget to do the washing-up, but we may still get quite reactive!)

Question: Why does Śāntideva see ill will as the most destructive state?

Question: "Kṣānti is the best ascetic practice" is a reference back to early Buddhism. Do you know what Śāntideva is quoting from?

> 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. 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]

The point Śāntideva is making is that if we want to practise 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.

> 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 beyond our control, so our choice is between accepting reality gladly, or else making ourselves more unhappy than we need to be.

Question: What might be some of the near-enemies of kṣānti? What is the far enemy?

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 practise 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 our circumstances 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?

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'. Do you believe this?

Question: What unavoidable things do you complain about? Could you undertake to be more equanimous about these things?

> 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 a cowardly approach? [17,18]

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

Question: Are there any activities in which you take part that cause physical discomfort, or even a degree of pain, but which you enjoy? Could you apply the attitude you bring to them to other aspects of life?

> 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 unskilful acts, and it makes us long for the Buddha. [21]

Question: Do you agree that pain and discomfort can have positive results? Can we think of examples from your own life?

Question: Could we grow, develop – or become Enlightened – if we lived a life without suffering?

Having looked at kṣānti as an equanimous, robust attitude to physical suffering, Śāntideva now 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]

> 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]

> 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]

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.

Question: Is it ever right to blame other people for their actions? Are there circumstances in which this is necessary?

Question: What difference would it make to your mental states if you stopped blaming other people for anything, and accepted that we are all deluded, conditioned beings, who are bound to sometimes behave in unwise and even unskilful ways?

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]
>
> 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]

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. When we recognize that we too harm others, we see that we have no right to blame others, because we too act from the same greed, hatred, and delusion that motivates them.

Question: Can you think of examples of 'mad', self-harming behaviour that you see other human beings engaging in? Do you ever behave in a way that harms yourself?

Question: 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 you extend this tolerance more widely?

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

Causes of resentment: concern for gain and loss

For the next few verses 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]

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

Question: To what extent do you go for refuge to money and possessions? (A good guide might be the extent to which you are willing to take risks with your livelihood and financial security.)

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, 97–9]

Question: How do you react to criticism? Could you be more equanimous about it?

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 you care about status – including status in the Sangha or among your peer groups? Are you really as immune to this as many of us 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 practise 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 righteous indignation? What do we get out of it?

Question: Is anger sometimes positive, or necessary? If anger gives us energy to fight wrongs, what are the down-sides of this?

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 feet 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]

> 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]

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 we have no choice but to be ruthless in freeing ourselves from our tendency to ill will.

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 practises kṣānti gets all these even while they are still in Saṃsāra. [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.

Question: Do you agree that kṣānti would give us serenity, health benefits, better relationships, and so on?

Question: Which most disturbs your positive mental states: pain and discomfort, criticism and disapproval, financial loss or insecurity, or loss of status in the eyes of others?

Question: What might we need to beware of when we try to practise kṣānti?

Introduction
Now Śāntideva moves on to the fourth pāramitā, *vīrya*. The word vīrya comes from the same root as our words virtue, vigour, and virility, 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'.

Text

Chapter 7: The Practice of Vīrya

Why is vīrya important and what is it?
As well as cultivating kṣānti we should cultivate vīrya, because Awakening requires that too. We cannot gain merit without vīrya, any more than a boat can sail without wind. [1]

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]

The enemies of vīrya: laziness and attachment to the unskilful

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]

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 for ever! 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]

The enemies of vīrya: discouragement and low self-esteem
We should be freeing ourselves from despair by practising the Dharma, not being defeatist, thinking, "How could I possibly become Awakened?" The Buddha, the Truth-speaker, 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? [17–19]

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 evil, 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 Saṃsāra 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]

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]

1. Skilful Desire ('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]

Suffering, depression, fear and obstacles beset those who act unskilfully. 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 unskilful 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 Dharmachanda, and cultivating it with reverence. Then one should develop skilful pride and self-confidence. [46]

2. 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]

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 can't 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]

3. Joy

We should be completely focused 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. [62–5]

4. 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]

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 restore 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 practise the Dharma. In this way, our spiritual power will grow strong. [75]

Commentary and Questions

Chapter 7: The Practice of Vīrya

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]

Question: Do you agree that spiritual progress is impossible without effort, just as a sailboat cannot move without wind? Is there such a thing as the wrong sort of effort?

> 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]

Question: What do you think is the far enemy of vīrya? What might be some of its near-enemies?

The enemies of vīrya: laziness and attachment to the unskilful

> 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]

Question: "...idleness, indulgence in sensual pleasures, sleeping too much, lounging around..." Does this sound like many people's idea of the proper use of leisure time?

Question: How do you spend your free time? Does this tend to promote vīrya, or undermine it? Could you make more constructive use of your leisure time? How?

Question: Does making good use of leisure time mean constant activity? Can we make a distinction between skilful and unskilful inactivity?

> 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 for ever! 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: Being honest, could it be true that you expect results from the spiritual life without making much effort? How much effort do you put into your practice compared to, say, that

which you put into worldly work, sexual relationships, pursuing various forms of distraction, and so on.

The enemies of vīrya: discouragement and low self-esteem

> We should be freeing ourselves from despair by practising 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.

Question: Do you really believe that you can become enlightened?

Question: Do you have any achievable intermediate goals in your spiritual life, which you can imagine yourself attaining within a reasonable timescale? If so, what are they? If not, what achievable goals could you adopt?

> 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 Saṃsāra 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]

From our present position, 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, then the spiritual life can seem daunting, and perhaps unconsciously we do not really want to make progress.

Question: Do you really want to be more Enlightened? Are there things you are still attached to that you fear you will have to give up in order to move forward?

Question: In your experience, does following the Buddhist path cause more happiness, or more suffering?

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 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]

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.

> Suffering, depression, fear and obstacles beset those who act unskilfully. 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 unskilful 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 unskilful 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.

Question: Do you believe in the law of karma? If so, do you live in a way that reflects this?

Question: Disregarding the question of rebirth, in what ways does unskilfulness lead to unhappiness? In what ways does skilfulness lead to happiness?

Question: Can you imagine how good it would be to be Enlightened? Can you imagine how awful would it be to be trapped in seriously bad mental states, as some people are? (For the latter, you might imagine your own most unpleasant mental states, but amplified by years of reinforcing karma.)

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.

Question: Do you feel that you have the habit of success – or do you tend to doubt that you will accomplish what you set out to achieve, and perhaps sometimes not take things on because of this?

Question: How could you strengthen the habit of success? Are there practical, achievable things that you could take on to do this?

> 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. We

could see it imaginatively as 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 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 can be motivated to be skilful because we have too much positive 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.

Question: What is the difference between skilful and unskilful pride?

Question: Do you feel that you need to increase your sense of self-worth? If so, what could you do, practically, to improve your self-esteem?

The Four Powers: joy

> We should be completely focused 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. [62–5]

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.

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

Question: Are there (reasonably skilful) things that you enjoy which are apparently unconnected with Buddhism? Could you bring these into your Dharma practice? Alternatively, could you identify what it is that you enjoy about them, and pursue aspects of the Dharma life that give something similar?

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.

Question: Do you tend to rest enough – or too much?

> 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 practise the Dharma. In this way, our spiritual power will grow strong. [75]

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.

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

I. Why practise meditation?
Firstly Śāntideva tells us that we need to learn to focus our mind in meditation because the distracted mind is at the mercy of the kleśas. Later in the chapter he gives an even more compelling reason to practise meditation - because śamathā leads to insight, which is the end of suffering.

II. The condition for successful meditation
Śāntideva tells us that the key to successful meditation is a quality called viveka.
Viveka 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

In the text the word is used mainly to mean solitude and non-attachment. These two aspects are referred to as external viveka (solitude), and internal viveka (non- attachment).

Text

Chapter 8: The Practice of Meditation

Why practise meditation?
While practising vīrya we should stabilise our mind in meditation, since if our mind is distracted we are constantly at the mercy of the kleśas. [1]

Conditions needed for success in meditation
We can be free from distraction if we practise external and internal viveka, keeping our body in solitude and our mind in detachment. [2]

Our attachments and our desire for possessions are what stop us experiencing viveka. So anyone with any sense will renounce these things by reflecting like this: "I know that śamathā

leads to insight, and that insight destroys all mental suffering, so the first thing I need to do is to seek the conditions for śamathā, which are solitude and detachment." [3, 4]

Hindrances to viveka: attachment to people

(a) 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 can't 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]

(b) 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]

Hindrances to viveka: desire for wealth and possessions
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]

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]

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 whom 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's 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]

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 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]

The fruits of viveka: śamathā 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 well-being 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. [85–7]

The fruits of viveka: 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?"[94–6]

"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]

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]

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. [136–8]

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]

"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 an important person. 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. [141–54]

In this way we should practise exchanging ourselves with others, seeing ourselves through their eyes, involving ourselves in their suffering, feeling the pain we cause them through our unskilfulness. 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]

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

Commentary and Questions

Chapter 8: The Practice of Meditation

Why practise meditation?

> While practising vīrya we should stabilise our mind in meditation, since if our mind is distracted we are constantly at the mercy of the kleśas. [1]

Question: Do you find that meditation makes you less 'at the mercy of the kleśas'? If so, do you give it enough priority – for example do you take regular meditation retreats and/or solitary retreats?

Conditions needed for success in meditation

> We can be free from distraction if we practise external and internal viveka, keeping our body in solitude and our mind in detachment. [2]
>
> 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 śamathā destroys all mental suffering, so the first thing I need to do is to seek the conditions for śamathā, 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.

Question: Do you agree that solitude and freedom from worldly concerns is necessary for a successful meditation practice?

Question: What does śamathā mean, and what is the relationship between it and vipaśyanā?

Question: 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?

Hindrances to viveka: other people

(a) 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]

Śāntideva is telling us that we need to free ourselves from *sneha* – sticky, egocentric attachment – not genuine mettā. Of course, for people with certain sorts of responsibility the opportunities for solitude may be limited. For those 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). Some people might also have responsibilities like looking after somebody old or infirm. But for those of us with no dependants, the reason we would be reluctant to leave our 'loved ones' to focus on meditation for, say, a year, might have more to do with sneha than with genuine concern for others.

Question: 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 your 'loved one' might get up to?

Question: How do you imagine your partner would respond if you suggested going off for a long retreat? Would their likely response come from maitrī or sneha?

Question: Might your loved one actually benefit from your going – because you would come back a more developed person, and they would develop more resources and robustness in your absence?

Question: 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 in your experience?

(b) 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. 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 practising in order to be able to benefit these very people whose faults Śāntideva is pointing out.

Question: Is there any truth in this caricature of 'worldly people'?

Question: Do your friendships with non-Buddhists hold you back in any way? For example, do they perpetuate unhelpful habits like drinking or drug-taking, or does others' scepticism undermine your śraddhā?

Question: Would your liking for 'worldly company' be an obstacle to taking a long retreat? Would it be a problem for you to do without cafés, clubs, pubs, bars, festivals and parties for a significant period?

Question: Do you think Śāntideva is recommending a hermit's life of meditative solitude, spent completely away from other people?

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]

Question: "Wealth is a misfortune." Is there any truth in this? Does wealth bring happiness?

Question: If wealth does not bring happiness, do you live – and think – as though this were true? For example, do you use a lot of energy worrying about money, planning about money, and making more money than you really need to live a simple life?

Question: Would your job, career or business stop you from going on, say, a year-long retreat? Do you think you have got your 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?

> 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 whom 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 not being misogynistic here – he 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 – of whichever sex – and what it looks like after death, which is a 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 you 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]

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

The fruits of viveka: śamathā 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 well-being 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. [85–7]

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 śamathā and dhyāna we will experience a degree of real enjoyment that we could never get from 'worldly' pleasures.

Question: Have you experienced such positive, happy states while on retreat, or while meditating intensively?

The fruits of śamathā: 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?"[94–6]

"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]

Although śamathā 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 focused 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 selflessness as going hand-in-hand with the development of selfless concern for others. He makes the point that this is a joyful, fulfilling experience, not something we pursue to give ourselves a hard time. He seems to be contrasting this Mahāyāna attitude to what was unfairly 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'?

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.

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?

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. [136–8]

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]

"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. [141–54]

In this way we should practise exchanging ourselves with others, seeing ourselves through their eyes, involving ourselves in their suffering, feeling the pain we cause them through our unskilfulness. 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]

Conclusion

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

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 practise seeing things through others' eyes. Much 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, and so on. We can become wiser by imaginatively expanding our perspective to include the point of view of other people.

Question: 'There is no wisdom in a single point of view'. Is this true? Why, or why not?

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'. 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.

Question: Who do you tend to see as your spiritual inferior? Some examples might include:

- Non-Buddhists
- People who have been practising for less time than you
- 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.

Text

Chapter 9: The Pāramitā of Wisdom

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]

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]

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]

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]

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]

(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 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. [57–9, 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]

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. [70–2]

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 here are the same. [144, 150]

The benefits of a vision of śūnyatā
The concept 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 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. [52–4, 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]

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. [157–61]

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]

Commentary and Questions

Chapter 9: The Pāramitā of Wisdom

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]

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

Question: Do you agree that wisdom is the only ultimate cure for suffering?
Why, or why not?

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]

Question: 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 world-view 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 would imply that everyone's opinions should not carry equal weight. How do you respond to this idea?

Question: Is there anyone that you acknowledge as wiser than yourself? If not, what are the implications of this?

> 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]

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. [57–9, 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]

Question: Do you find these arguments for the lack of separate independent selfhood convincing, or not? Do any of these arguments or images seem particularly powerful to you, or make a particular impression?

Question: Is Śāntideva saying that nothing really exists?

Question: "Therefore sentient beings are by nature liberated." Why does lack of separate independent 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. [70–2]

Question: Have you 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. [52–4, 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]

Question: Do you think that the vision of śūnyatā would have positive effects on our mental states and behaviour? What negative tendencies would it free us from, and which positive qualities would it give us?

Question: Are there any dangers in this way of seeing things? How could we avoid these dangers?

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
You may wish to end your study of the Bodhicaryāvatāra by chanting a shortened version of Śāntideva's final Dedication of Merits along with your mitra group, or incorporating this in a final pūjā.

Text

Chapter 10: Dedication
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. May those who are unskilful see the need to change. May they delight in ending their evil actions, and may they achieve a good rebirth.

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

May the Buddha's 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 Mañjughoṣa, in all my lives may I enter the Sangha, may I find the conditions for meditation, and may I be taught and advised by Mañjughoṣa 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 Buddhas, 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.

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

The Bodhicaryavatara: A Guide to the Buddhist Path of Awakening, translated Kate Crosby and Andrew Skilton. The text used in this module
http://www.windhorsepublications.com/product/the-bodhicaryavatara-a-guide-to-the-buddhist-path-of-awakening/

A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life, translated Stephan Bachelor. An alternative translation of the Bodhicaryāvatāra. Available in PDF.
http://www.abuddhistlibrary.com/Buddhism/A%20-%20Tibetan%20Buddhism/Authors/Shantideva/A%20Guide%20to%20the%20Bodhisattva's%20Way%20of%20Life%20-%20%20Stephen%20Bachelor%20tra/A%20Guide%20to%20the%20Bodhisattva's%20Way%20of%20Life.pdf

The Endlessly Fascinating Cry, Sangharakshita, Seminar on the Bodhicaryāvatāra.
https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/texts/read?num=SEM063

A Talk on the Bodhicaryāvatāra, Vadanya.
https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/audio/details?num=LOC492

A series of six talks by Padmavajra on the Bodhicaryāvatāra:

- *Living From The Brightness.*
  https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/audio/details?num=LOC1099
- *The Highly Potent Elixir.*
  https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/audio/details?num=LOC1100
- *Seizing Hold of The Jewel of The Bodhicitta*
  https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/audio/details?num=LOC1101
- *Finding a Precious Jewel In A Heap of Refuse.*
  https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/audio/details?num=LOC1102
- *The Mystery of Exchanging Self and Other.*
  https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/audio/details?num=LOC1103
- *Living From The Essence of Voidness and Compassion.*
  https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/audio/details?num=LOC1104