



Nalandabodhi Connecticut
Paramita of the Month Newsletter



"Those who wish to overcome the sorrows of their lives,
And put flight to the pain and suffering of beings,
Those who wish to win such great beatitude,
Should never turn their back on bodhicitta."
Shantideva, Bodhicharyavatara 1,8

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This month we begin our second cycle of the six paramitas for this year. Our first set of six newsletters was based upon the teachings found in the *Jewel Ornament of Liberation* by Gampopa. This month we will shift our attention to the teachings of Shantideva found in the *Bodhicharyavatara* and to *The 37 Practices of a Bodhisattva* composed by Ngolchu Thogme Rinpoche. The *Bodhicharyavatara* was composed by the bodhisattva Shantideva in the 8th century CE while a member of the monastic university at Nalanda. Ngolchu Thogme Rinpoche composed *The 37 Practices of a Bodhisattva* during a retreat in a cave near the town of Ngulchu Rinchen in the 13th century CE.

We begin our second cycle of the paramitas by revisiting the paramita of generosity. Shantideva extols the merits of generosity in chapter 1, verses 21 and 22 of the *Bodhicharyavatara* where he states:

"If with kindly generosity
One merely wishes to soothe
The aching heads of other beings,
Such merit knows no bounds.

No need to speak, then, of the wish
To drive away the endless pain
Of each and every living being,
Bringing them unbounded virtues."

Here Shantideva reminds us of the boundless virtue to be gained from driving away the pain of other beings. In verse 11 of *The 37 practices of a Bodhisattva* Thogme Rinpoche shares a similar reflection with us:

"All suffering comes from wanting your own happiness.
Complete awakening arises from the intention to help others.
So, exchange completely your happiness
For the suffering of others - this is the practice of a bodhisattva."

Both authors point out the idea that as long as we are focussed on our own happiness, our pain will no no end. True liberation, that which Thogme Rinpoche calls "the highest level of freedom, one that never changes", requires us to abandon our own selfish desires and seek the benefit of others. It is with this mindset, without concern for ourselves or our own

happiness, that we should practice acts of generosity for the benefit of others.

The authors of these two documents offer us several pieces of advice on how we may practice such generosity in our lives. In verses 12-17 Thogme Rinpoche provides us with some practical advice:

"If someone driven by desperate want,
Steals everything you own,
Dedicate to him your body, your wealth, and all the good you've ever done or will do.

If you have done nothing wrong at all,
And someone still tries to take your head off,
Spurred by compassion, take all his or her evil into you.

If someone broadcasts slanderous and ugly rumours about you,
In return, with an open and caring heart, praise his or her abilities.

If someone humiliates and denounces you,
Think of this person as your teacher and humbly honor him.

If a person you have cared for as your own child treats you as his or her worst enemy,
Lavish him or her with loving attention.

If your peers put you down to make themselves look better,
Treat them respectfully as you would your own teacher - put them above you."

Here Thogme Rinpoche describes that we can be of great benefit to beings if our generosity addresses the causes of their negative actions. To those motivated by desperate want, respond with material generosity. To those motivated by hatred and aversion, respond with generous caring and love. To those who show disrespect to you, respond with respect. In brief, cut the cycle of negative karmic actions by responding in a truly selfless and generous way. Shantideva explains further in chapter 1 verse 28-30 of the *Bodhicharyavatara* :

"For beings long to free themselves from misery
But misery itself they follow and pursue.....

But those.....who cut all pain and suffering away
From those weighed down with misery,

Who drive away the darkness of their ignorance-
What virtue could be matched by theirs?"

While many other forms of generosity may be of benefit to others, cutting the veils of their ignorance is by far the greatest generosity that can be offered. While our generosity can take the form of material gifts, protection from harm, or physical shelter, perhaps the greatest gift we can give is to share the wisdom of the dharma when opportunities present themselves. A very effective way to share the dharma with others can be to illustrate its power through our own behaviors. If we act with genuinely selfless generosity and conduct ourselves in a peaceful way, others will seek to follow this example. They will seek the same peacefulness in their own lives. In closing we can consider the following verse from *The 37 Practices of a*

Bodhisattva :

"If you don't subdue the opponent inside, your own anger,
Although you subdue opponents outside, they just keep coming.
Mustering the forces of loving kindness and compassion and subdue your own mind-
This is the practice of a bodhisattva."

Perhaps one of the generousities we can offer to the world is to recognize and battle our own confusion, and thus cut through our pattern of causing pain and suffering for others out of selfish desire.

-My apologies for the late date of this newsletter. I have been travelling and did not have internet access.
KMH

References:

A very nice translation of *The 37 Practices of a Bodhisattva* by Ken McLeod is available online at:
<http://unfetteredmind.org/trans/37.php>

The Way of the Bodhisattva Translated by the Padmakara Translation Group. Shambhala Dragon Edition. Shambhala 1997.