



Nalandabodhi Connecticut
Paramita of the Month Newsletter



"Those who wish to keep a rule of life
Must guard their minds in perfect self-possession.
Without this guard upon the mind,
no discipline can ever be maintained."
-Shantideva, Bodhicharyavatara 5:1

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My apologies for the lack of a newsletter last month. Retreat planning here in Connecticut occupied much of my time. This month there will be a double issue. This first issue will address the paramita of discipline. The second issue which will follow later this evening will focus on the discipline of patience. Thank you all very much for your patience and understanding! - KMH

This month we will continue our examination of Shantideva's exposition of the paramitas by examining chapter 5 of the *Bodhicharyavatara* which focusses on discipline or vigilance. With respect to the paramita of discipline we are specifically referring to moral discipline: discipline and vigilance in our interactions with others. This is explained by Shantideva in chapter 5, verse 11 of the *Bodhicharyavatara* :

"Where, indeed, could beings, fishes, and the rest
Be placed to shield them totally from suffering?
Deciding to refrain from harming them
Is said to be the perfection of morality."

Verses 13 and 14 then provide us with some guidance on how to practice this perfection of moral discipline:

"To cover all the earth with sheets of hide-
Where could such amounts of skin be found?
But simply wrap some leather round your feet,
And it's as if the whole earth had been covered!

Likewise, we can never take
And turn aside the outer course of things.
But only seize and discipline the mind itself,
And what is there remaining to be curbed?"

Here Shantideva instructs us that the true practice of moral discipline is to seize our minds and control the "wild elephant" of mind that can "bring upon us such calamities." To truly practice the perfection of moral discipline we must have control of our mind. As Ngolchu Thogme Rinpoche has said in *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."

He further advises in a later verse

"If you can't tend to your needs because you have no moral discipline,
Then intending to take care of the needs of others is simply a joke.
Observe ethical behavior without concern for conventional existence-
This is the practice of a bodhisattva."

In verse 36 Ngolchu Thogme Rinpoche echoes the sentiments of Shantideva when he states:

"In short, in everything you do,
Know what is happening in your mind.
By being constantly present and alert
You bring about what helps others -
This is the practice of a bodhisattva."

Again we are reminded that true practice of moral discipline is a practice of watching our own mind. The moral impact of our actions lies not in the action itself, but within our own mind. Our own motivation and mental state determine to a large degree the moral impact of our actions. Shantideva makes this clear when he states:

"A clear intent can fructify
And bring us birth in lofty Brahma's realm.
The acts of body and speech are less-
They do not generate a like result."

Poorly motivated actions, even though the act itself may be beneficial, can fail to bring us the fruition we seek, or even result in negative consequences. Vigilance in guarding our minds and honestly evaluating the morality of our motivations is critical. As Shantideva states in chapter 5 verse 27 of the *Bodhicharyavatara*:

"Lack of vigilance is like a thief
Who slinks behind when mindfulness abates.
And all the merit we have gathered in
He steals, and down we go to lower realms."

It is important for us to understand that to truly practice moral discipline we need to look not only at our actions but at our mind. Only we can truly know our motivations and only we can truly judge the morality of our actions. In verses 48 to 53 Shantideva provides us with some clues as to what we can look for in our minds to indicate to us that we may be drifting into non-virtuous states. He states:

"When the urge arises in the mind
to feelings of desire or wrathful hate,
Do not act! Be silent, do not speak!
And like a log of wood be sure to stay.

When the mind is wild with mockery
And filled with pride and haughty arrogance,
And when you want to show the hidden faults of others,
To bring up old dissensions or to act deceitfully,

And when you want to fish for praise,
Or criticize and spoil another's name,
Or use harsh language, sparring for a fight,
It's then that like a log you should remain.

And when you want to do another down
And cultivate advantage for yourself,
And when the wish to gossip comes to you,
It's then that like a log you should remain.

Impatience, indolence, faint heartedness,
And likewise haughty speech and insolence,
Attachment to your side - when these arise,
It's then that like a log you should remain."

In closing, we can examine verse 57 of chapter 5 of the *Bodhicharyavatara* where Shantideva gives us some advice on how to maintain a virtuous state of mind in our daily actions:

"When doing virtuous acts, beyond reproach,
To help ourselves, or for the sake of others,
Let us bear in mind the thought
That we are self-less, like an apparition."

Here Shantideva reminds us to maintain mindfulness about the illusion like nature of our sense of self. Doing so can help us to cut through our attachment to our point of view and our ideas. This sentiment is also clearly echoed in the Lojong teachings in the slogan "In post-meditation be a child of illusion." When this is kept in mind we are truly able to see the needs of others and are truly able to do them good.

1. *The Way of the Bodhisattva* (1997) Shambhala Press.

2. *The 37 Practices of a Bodhisattva* <http://unfetteredmind.org/trans/37.php> Translated by Ken McLeod.