



Nalandabodhi Connecticut  
Paramita of the Month Newsletter



"Good works gathered in a thousand ages,  
Such deeds of generosity,  
Or offerings to the blissful ones-  
A single flash of anger shatters them."  
-Shantideva, *The Bodhicharyavatara* 6:1

Volume 2 Number 3

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In our second issue for this month we will continue our examination of Shantideva's presentation of the paramitas in the *Bodhicharyavatara* by examining the discussion of the paramita of patience in chapter 6. In our opening quote this month Shantideva warns us of the damage to be done by not practicing patience. When we lose our patience in dealing with the challenges of life we develop a sense of anger. That anger can in one instant destroy all the good created through years of good deeds such as generosity. In verse 2 Shantideva begins his discussion of the benefits of patience saying:

"No evil is there similar to anger,  
No austerity to be compared with patience.  
Steep yourself, therefore, in patience-  
In all ways, urgently, with zeal."

Here Shantideva tells us that patience is the antidote to anger. It is the shield that guards our minds against the loss of all our virtue. In verse 3 he further states that

"Those tormented by the pain of anger,  
will never know tranquility of mind-  
Stangers will they be to every pleasure;  
Sleep departs them, they can never rest."

Here Shantideva relates an experience that we all have shared. When we are agitated and angry our minds are restless. We can not calm ourselves, and even lose sleep. If we allow ourselves to be ruled by this anger others will not trust us. People will seek to attack us, and our family and friends will shun us. All of these ills are brought about by anger. Shantideva explains that our anger springs from our own desires, from getting the things we do not want. He directs us to vanquish this foe; our selfish desire. Shantideva directs us to be steadfast in our work towards this goal, saying:

"The cause of happiness comes rarely,  
And many are the seeds of suffering! ....  
Therefore, O my mind, be steadfast!"

Later in this same chapter Shantideva gives us some advice on how to avoid anger and practice patience towards other sentient beings. He explains to us how to view the actions of other beings saying:

"For when affliction seizes them,  
They kill themselves, the selves they love so much.  
So how could they not be the cause  
Of pain and suffering for others?

And when as victims of defilement,  
Beings cause even their own destruction,  
Even if compassion does not rise in us,  
We can at least refrain from being angry.

If those who are like wanton children  
Are by nature prone to injure others,  
What point in being angry-  
Like resenting fire for its heat?"

Here Shantideva explains that it is in the nature of those who suffer from the afflictions to harm others. They are victims of their own defilements. What point is there in being angry at this person who is a victim? Instead we should have compassion for these beings. Shantideva points out that being angry with these beings is like being angry at the stick that strikes you, instead of the person bearing it. It is like being angry at fire for being hot, or the sky for having clouds. From a slightly different point of view Shantideva reminds us that these pains we suffer are merely contrivances of our own mind when he says "Who indeed should I be angry with? This pain is all my own contriving." Here we are reminded that all of the occurrences we see as sources of suffering are only thus because our mental state makes them so. It is our own point of view that creates the pain, not the events themselves. From this point of view it is fruitless to become angry at the events or persons who cause us pain since the source of that pain truly lies within our own thoughts. We should thus diligently seek to gain control over our minds if we wish to alleviate that pain. Shantideva reminds us again and again that attacking others outwardly will only increase our suffering, not alleviate it.

In closing we can examine Shantideva's advice on how to look on others who may cause us pain. In verse 48 of the *Bodhicharyavatara* Shantideva states:

"Because of them, and through the exercise of patience,  
My many sins are cleansed and purified.  
But they will be the ones who, thanks to me,  
Will have the long-drawn agonies of hell."

Here we are reminded that by providing us with the opportunity to practice patience, those who cause us suffering are actually allowing us to cleanse the karma of our many negative actions. As Shantideva says in verse 49 "For if a patient quality of mind is mine, I shall avoid the pains of hell." But what of our foes? Though they have given us the means to save ourselves their fate is uncertain. As Shantideva states "Thus, with what perversity, pernicious mind, will you be angry with your enemies?" Instead we should view them with a compassionate mind. "If we repay them harm for harm, they will not be saved thereby."

Practicing patience and maintaining a calm mind in the face of obstacles and suffering can bring us great benefit at the time of our death. In closing it would perhaps be helpful to contemplate the following verses from Shantideva:

"One man dreams he lives a hundred years  
Of happiness, but then he wakes.  
Another dreams an instant's joy,  
But then he, likewise, wakes.

And when they wake the happiness of both  
Is finished never to return.  
Likewise when the hour of death comes round,  
Our lives are over, whether brief or long."

Perhaps suffering and obstacles cause anger to arise in us because they hinder us from having what we want. But, as Shantideva says, at the time of our death "all our property we'll leave behind, while sins will keep us steady company." At the time of our death all the material things we strive for in this life will be left behind, but our mind will stay with us. Thus practicing patience and learning to maintain a calm mind in the face of adversity can be very powerful for us. For as The Dzogchen Ponlop Rinpoche related in his recent teachings in Hartford: Death is an experience we get to have only once in our lifetime. It is a once in a lifetime chance to experience the true nature of our mind. We should do all we can to prepare for it so that we do it right.

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References:

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