



Nalandabodhi Connecticut

Paramita of the Month Newsletter



"Complacent pleasure in the joys of idleness,
A craving for repose and sleep,
No qualms about the sorrows of samsara:
These are the source and nurse of laziness."
-Shantideva, *The Bodhicharyavatara* 7:3

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This month we will examine Shantideva's analysis of the perfection of effort or perseverance as presented in chapter 7 of the Bodhicharyavatara. In this chapter Shantideva warns us of the dangers of laziness and presents the benefits of perseverance. In our opening quote Shantideva reminds us that the source of our laziness is a lack of revulsion for samsara and indulgence in samsara's pleasures.

Next Shantideva provides us with some impetus to fear such laziness. He states:

"Don't you see how one by one
Death comes to claim your fellow men?
And yet you slumber on so soundly,
Like a buffalo beside its butcher."

Here we are reminded that death will come to all of us and that we do not know the time of its approach. If we do not exercise perseverance in our dharma practice then at the time of our deaths we lament, "all that we have not done, all that we have only started ...and the memory of our former sins will torture us."

In verse 14 Shantideva exhorts us to take advantage of the opportunities we have while we have them:

"Take advantage of this human boat;
Free yourself from sorrow's mighty stream!
This vessel will be later hard to find.
The time that you have now, you fool, is not for sleep!"

Shantideva then continues to explain that feeling you are incapable of achieving enlightenment is no excuse to fall into the trap of laziness in this life. He reminds us that we need to "take heart and be the master of ourselves." As the buddhas have proclaimed "if they bring forth the strength of perseverance the very bees and flies ...will find with ease enlightenment so hard to find. "Given a human birth, and our ability to distinguish good from ill, we should not waste the opportunity but should devote ourselves to the training of a bodhisattva.

Such training, which will bring forth the power of bodhicitta, will "totally consume all former sins and gather in merit as vast as the ocean." Shantideva explains that the forces that result from

persevering in bodhicitta allow us to work for the benefit of all beings. Aspiration is described as the root of every virtue. It sustains our sense of perseverance. Aspiration grows and develops from revulsion for samsara's suffering and contemplation of the benefits to be attained. Thus to increase the strength of our perseverance we should contemplate the suffering that is samsara and contemplate the benefits to be attained through persistence in dharma practice.

What are some of these benefits? Besides those mentioned above, Shantideva explains that if all our acts are wholesome, mirroring our minds, then no matter where we turn we will reap the fruit and recompense of merit. However, if we search for happiness but our acts and our minds are consumed by defilements, then "the knives of misery will always cut us down." Shantideva encourages us to aspire and tend to virtue so that through this virtue we may end our suffering and arise and live as the Buddha's heir within the presence of the victorious ones. "Enfeebled by their minds' afflictions worldly folk are helpless to secure their happiness." Through the development of revulsion and perseverance in the practice of dharma we can overcome these afflictions, find peace, and help others to do the same.

Shantideva further warns us to be cautious of arrogance. "When arrogance inflates the mind, it draws us down to states of misery, or else it ruins this human birth." We should not see ourselves as superior to other beings because of our opportunity to practice the dharma. Perseverance in our practice also refers to being diligent in avoiding the trap of arrogance. We should seek to vanquish pride and arrogance. Shantideva states:

"When you are beleaguered by the defilements,
Fight them in a thousand ways.
Do no surrender to the host of afflictions,
Be like a lion in a crowd of foxes."

We must always be vigilant in our fight against ignorance and delusion. As Shantideva states, "Thus in every time and place I will not wander from the wholesome path." In order to practice the paramita of perseverance effectively "we must make mindfulness our constant habit at all times and in any situation." Shantideva states that it is this that will be the cause whereby you will aim to meet with teachers and fulfill the proper tasks to achieve peace and benefit all beings.

In closing, contemplation of the following quote that ends chapter 7 of the Bodhicharyavatara is fitting:

"The lichen hanging in the trees wafts to and fro,
Stirred by every breath of wind;
Likewise, all I do will be achieved,
Enlivened by the movements of a joyful heart."

References:

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