



cultivating the heart
of patience:
lessons from the
bodhicaryavatara

preface

The basis for this text is a seminar, led by Sangharakshita, on the third reunion retreat of the men ordained at Guhyaloka¹ in 2005. This week-long retreat took place at Padmaloka² in June 2008. Sangharakshita chose the topic of study, the sixth chapter of Shantideva's Bodhicaryavatara, on the Perfection of Forbearance (Kshanti).

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editor's note

As in any seminar, the conversations transcribed here were often off-the-cuff, with quotations and references made mostly from memory. We've tried to make sure that any factual inaccuracies which may have arisen as a result are contextualised and, if possible, corrected.

Footnote references for web-linked Wikipedia terms are generally derived from the corresponding Wikipedia entry.

For this abridged version of the seminar transcript, we have focussed on Sangharakshita's direct commentary on the text itself, removing many of the questions and comments of the attendees, along with the conversations that arose from them. We do not identify the speaker of those that remain but simply denote the question or comment with 'Q'.

¹ Guhyaloka ('The Secret Realm') is a retreat centre in Spain specializing in men's long ordination retreats.

² Padmaloka ('The Realm of the Lotus') is a Buddhist retreat centre for men in Norfolk, England.

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Attending with Sangharakshita were: Abhayanaga, Amalavajra, Balajit, Dharmamodana, Dhira, Dhiraka, Dhivan, Gambhiradaka, Jayagupta, Jayarava, Jayasiddhi, Jinapalita, Khemajala, Naganataka, Nityabandhu, Priyadaka, Samudraghosha, and Vidyakaya.

Transcribed by Amalavajra, Aniccaloka, Norfolk, April 2009.

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Translation used: [Oxford University Press](#), trans. Crosby and Skilton, 1995.

Other, free editions available online: [Berzin Archives](#), trans. Dr. Alexander Berzin; [Library of Tibetan Works and Archives](#), trans. Stephen Bachelor, 1979 ([alternative version here](#)); [Lotsawa House](#), trans. Rigpa Lotsawa Team (English, Spanish and Tibetan editions); [Snow Lion Publications](#), trans. Wallace and Wallace, 1997; [Wisdom Library](#), trans. Andreas Kretschmar, 2004; [Asian Classics Input Project](#), trans. Christopher Richardson, 1999 (Tibetan edition); [Bibliotheca India](#) (Sanskrit edition), edited by Vidhushekhara, 1960; [Indica et Buddhica](#), (Sanskrit editions), edited by Richard Mahoney.

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[1] This worship of the Sugatas, generosity, and good conduct performed throughout thousands of aeons - hatred destroys it all.

Of course, [Shantideva](#)³ was a [Mahayana Buddhist](#)⁴ and believed in the [Bodhisattva Ideal](#),⁵ and that meant he saw the Bodhisattva career as extending over many lifetimes. So that is the context of this particular verse. One might consider it rather hyperbolic that a moment of hatred or a moment of anger could destroy the merits that you've heaped up over a long period of time, but we can see that that is the case, even in our ordinary, every day lives, especially in our relations with other people.

If you get angry with others, or even if you feel hatred towards them, you may say something that you may regret for a long time and which may disrupt your relationship with someone for years and years. So therefore you have to be very careful what you say when you are angry or when you entertain feelings of hatred.

³ Shantideva was an 8th-century Indian Buddhist monk and scholar at [Nalanda University](#) and an adherent of the [Madhyamaka](#) philosophy of [Nagarjuna](#). Listen to talks on [Shantideva's life and work](#).

⁴ 'Mahayana' means literally 'Great Vehicle' and is one of the three '[yanas](#)', the great modes or methods of spiritual practice in Buddhism. Listen to [explorations of the Mahayana](#).

⁵ Traditionally, a Bodhisattva is anyone who, motivated by great compassion, has generated [bodhichitta](#), which is a spontaneously arising, sustained wish to attain [Buddhahood](#) for the benefit of all [sentient beings](#). Listen to talks on the [Bodhisattva and the Bodhisattva Ideal](#) as a path of practice.

I remember in this connection there's a very beautiful passage in Coleridge's 'Christabel'.⁶ At the beginning, the lady in the story meets with another lady, and their fathers have been friends, or were friends, in their youth. Coleridge describes very beautifully how they had a quarrel and each spoke very painful and cutting words that resulted in their being separated for the rest of their lives.

Coleridge gives a very beautiful simile, a very beautiful image. He said, it is like when there is some geographical upheaval and the earth divides and there are two cliffs, one on one side, one on the other, confronting each one, separated. So the two erstwhile friends, for the rest of their lives, were like that, permanently separated.⁷

So we know from our own experience that harsh words, or words spoken in anger, or out of hatred even, really do rankle and can lead to an estrangement for years upon years, sometimes to our very great regret. But once we've said something it can't be recalled and its effects remain. So, in this first verse, Shantideva seems to be cautioning us against these sudden outbursts of anger or hatred. We say something which perhaps we do mean at the time but on

⁶ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, English poet, literary critic and philosopher of the 18th/19th C. who, with his friend [William Wordsworth](#), was a founder of the [Romantic Movement](#) in England and a member of the [Lake Poets](#).

⁷ *'Like cliffs which had been rent asunder;
A dreary sea now flows between;—
But neither heat, nor frost, nor thunder,
Shall wholly do away, I ween,
The marks of that which once hath been.'*

reflection we wish we never had said it. So this is one of the reasons why we should be careful to watch our speech.

And it is not a question even of estranging friends but we may have got ourselves into a good mental state, calm and peaceful, which a sudden outburst of anger will destroy and leave us feeling quite uneasy, upset and ashamed of ourselves, maybe for weeks. So all the more reason for being careful. So this is a very important first verse of the chapter, which strikes a very important note.

[2] There is no evil equal to hatred, and no spiritual practice equal to forbearance. Therefore one should develop forbearance by various means, with great effort.

One might think that this a bit of an overstatement. No virtue greater than forbearance... and no non-virtue... no 'evil', no 'papa', greater than hatred. Of course, again, it's the context of the Bodhisattva Ideal and the Bodhisattva has taken out of compassion a vow to help all living beings. So it's not really easy to help them if you keep getting angry with them. It's in the context of the Bodhisattva Ideal that Shantideva is saying that hatred is the greatest of evils and forbearance the greatest of virtues.

Another translation I've been following seems always to translate hatred as *anger*, so maybe we need to bear that in mind. 'Dvesha', can be translated, I suppose, as either 'anger' or as 'hatred'. Anger seems to be the outward expression, especially in speech, and hatred the mental state.

Q: Does forbearance have a high priority In relation to others of the [six paramitas](#)?⁸

I have said, in another context, that there is only one paramita, and that is [prajna](#)⁹, and that the others - [dana](#)¹⁰, [sila](#)¹¹ and even [kshanti](#)¹² - are not really paramitas unless they're conjoined with Wisdom. So clearly when Shantideva is warning us against anger or hatred, he is advising us to cultivate kshanti in the first place as a sort of relative virtue. But if it is conjoined with Wisdom then of course there's no danger, or very little danger, of your falling into that particular unskilful mental state.¹³

I suppose it's part of the Indian way of doing things that each time a particular virtue comes up you give that particular virtue the highest

⁸ 'Paramita' means 'perfection' or 'completeness.' In Buddhism the paramitas refer to the perfection or culmination of certain virtues. These are usually given as lists of six or ten perfections. Listen to [an introduction to the paramitas](#), and explore talks on the [Six Paramitas](#).

⁹ 'Prajna' means 'wisdom' in the sense of having seen deeply and directly the nature of reality. It is part of the [Buddha's Threefold Way](#) of ethics, meditation and wisdom. Listen to [talks on prajna](#).

¹⁰ 'Dana' means 'giving' or 'generosity', a central Buddhist practice to help reduce the sense of separation between 'self' and 'other'. Listen to [evocations of dana](#).

¹¹ 'Sila' (Pali, 'shila' in Sanskrit) is often translated simply as 'ethics', and is the term used for the whole realm of intentional, ethical behaviour in Buddhism. Listen to [perspectives on sila](#).

¹² The Buddhist practice of patience, forbearance, and forgiveness. [Hear more on kshanti](#).

¹³ In [Buddhist ethics](#), the discourse is predominantly around the idea of skilful (kusala) and unskilful (akusala) mental states and actions (skilful conducing to wellbeing, unskilful conducing to suffering). For explorations of this, see [talks on skilfulness](#) and on [unskilfulness](#).

praise, and that when you practise it you should practise it as though that is the best and the highest, in a sense even the only one, for that particular moment.

Q: Do you think that it is significant that he doesn't talk about eliminating anger in this context but actually cultivating forbearance. So he doesn't attack the anger directly, but says cultivate something else.

This goes back to what the Buddha says somewhere in the [Pali Canon](#)¹⁴ about the four ways in which you can deal with unskillful mental states.¹⁵ The first way is simply to be aware of the unskillful mental state. Just look at it as it were, just as you might look at clouds, you know, passing through the sky. And it may be that just as a result of that simple awareness of it, the unskillful mental state disappears.

But then the Buddha says, if that doesn't work there's another method to which you can have recourse and that is cultivating the opposite. So here of course that is what Shantideva is speaking about - cultivating the opposite. You eliminate hatred or anger by making a deliberate practice of cultivating kshanti. But the Buddha goes on to say there's a third way, because even that second method may not

¹⁴ A lot (though by no means all) of the Pali Canon is available for free online at [Access To Insight](#).

¹⁵ Relates to the '[Four Right Efforts](#)'. For more on this, see '[The Conscious Evolution of Man: Right Effort](#)' by Sangharakshita.

work, and the third way is contemplating the evil, even disastrous effects or consequences of your engaging in that unskilful mental state. We can look at anger or hatred from this point of view also, and of course Shantideva does that by pointing out the disastrous consequences in terms of one's relations, say, with other people. So if you become more aware of where your anger or hatred or any other unskilful state is leading to, you'll be less likely to indulge any of it.

But then the Buddha also said that there's a fourth way and that is, if all else fails, you just forcibly suppress the unskilful mental state. Some people believe that you shouldn't suppress anything, but in fact we have to sometimes, that is if we have, maybe momentarily, the urge to murder someone, well that's something we just have to suppress, if that's the only thing we can do. So there are certain very unskilful mental states that can't be dealt with, at least for the time being, in any other way. It's quite legitimate to suppress them forcibly, hold them down.

Some people might say, well if you feel angry with someone or if you really dislike them, you should just express that. Well I think one can't do that in all cases. You have to consider the effect on the other person. Sometimes you can express yourself very strongly, even angrily and get away with it, partly perhaps you know the other person well and you know that, well it's not going to result in a permanent breach in your relationship. But one has to be quite wary, quite careful nonetheless.

So sometimes we have to check and restrain ourselves. In fact, texts like the [Dhammapada](#)¹⁶ are very much concerned with restraint. So once again, as followers of the Buddha we can't always afford to let all our emotions hang out.

[3] One's mind finds no peace, neither enjoys pleasure or delight, nor goes to sleep, nor feels secure while the dart of hatred is stuck in the heart.

Yes, a person of angry temperament never looks happy. They always look unhappy, because anger or hatred isn't a very comfortable mental state. You feel uneasy. You can't enjoy anything. Even if you turn on the most beautiful piece of music, while you're feeling angry you can't enjoy it, because the mental state of anger is so inimical to anything of a pleasurable or blissful nature. So therefore I say the angry person is an unhappy person.

So it's in your own interests not to be angry. If you want to be happy, well you have not to be angry, not to entertain thoughts of hatred. You have to practise and develop forbearance. And also one might say that forbearance is something we have to practise all the time, because all the time things are happening which we don't quite like. There's probably not going to be a day in our lives when nothing happens to displease us, even to a slight extent.

¹⁶ See [Sangharakshita's own translation](#). Also, Padmavajra, 'The Dhammapada - the Buddha's Way of Truth' series of talks.

So forbearance is a virtue that we need to be practising all the time. And we can look at the negative mental state of hatred, or 'dvesha', as having various levels. We could say first of all there comes just annoyance; and then there may be irritation; then there may be dislike; and then of course we've got anger; then we've got hatred; then there's enmity; and then there's malice. So there's a whole range of negative mental states of this kind, and it's very easy to slip from one to another, from a less serious to a more serious one. So we need to be on our guard, and practise the virtue of forbearance.

First annoyance, someone that doesn't wash up his cup and saucer, leaves it dirty - you feel a bit annoyed. But then there's irritation. Perhaps that's when someone does something that annoys you and does it repeatedly. You get irritated, you get a bit irked. And then after that there's dislike, you start disliking that person because that's the way he behaves and it rubs you up the wrong way. And then that dislike, that irritation, can lead to anger and you may express the anger and speak a few harsh words to that person. And if they don't take much notice of you, or they strongly disagree with you, or criticise you in their turn, even enmity may develop between you. And as for malice, I understand malice to be the deliberate harming of others for, so to speak, no reason, simply because you enjoy inflicting pain and suffering on others. That's the worst. But I think that very few people experience that kind of mental state.

Q: Where is metta's place here?

You could say that with regard to metta, kshanti comes before metta. And, of course, metta relates primarily to people, but kshanti can be with regards to impersonal conditions. But as regards people, if they do something that you dislike, or even harm you, perhaps you can't respond immediately with metta, but at least you can respond with kshanti. And to the extent that you're able to respond with kshanti, you may be able gradually to feel metta towards that person. But, as I said, kshanti is also with regard to external conditions like the weather. So in a way kshanti has a wider connotation than metta, which more often than not relates to people. I suppose it's difficult to speak of loving the weather, even good weather, except in the very metaphorical sense.

[4] Those whom one honours with wealth and respect, and also one's dependents, even they long to destroy the master who is disfigured by hatred.

If you're an angry person or a person whose mental state is often one of hatred, members of your family, your companions, your close relations won't like you, even though they are close. Your own children may avoid you if you're a person of angry or hating temperament. A person who is of an angry temperament will rarely be popular - people will tend to avoid him or avoid her.

[5] Even friends shrink from him. He gives, but is not honoured. In short, there is no sense in which someone prone to anger is well off.

Yes, one could say that... it's interesting that the translation uses the expression 'well off', which suggests material wealth, even prosperity. And if you're in business, you have to deal with other people. If you have an angry temperament, it's going to make your business connections more difficult, so you're less likely to be successful as a businessman. I noticed that people who engage in trade or business - having a lot of dealings with other people - speak very sweetly, very charmingly. You might almost say they have an 'oily manner' because they don't want to rub anyone up the wrong way, because that's bad for business.

And some people can practise patience with a view to achieving a particular end for themselves. I think it's important to practise patience without resentment, because you can be outwardly very patient with someone but you can be inwardly full of resentment that you're having to be patient. So the practice of patience must be a real practice, not accompanied by an inward feeling of resentment that you're in that particular position. A merely outward appearance of patience is not the real thing. And we do find quite a few examples of that unreal kind of patience in the world. Throughout Buddhist ethics, throughout Buddhist spiritual life, there is this emphasis on the importance of the inner attitude, the importance of the motive. And more attention has to be given to that than to the merely outward expression.

[6] The person who realises that hatred is an enemy, since it creates such sufferings as these, and who persistently strikes it down, is happy in this world and the next.

Yes, one is happy not only in this life obviously, but in the next. That obviously brings in the question of [rebirth](#).¹⁷

Q: It says 'happiness in this world and in the next' so I guess it's saying if you're an angry person you're destined towards an unfortunate rebirth. Do you literally believe in sort of the hells of Buddhist history? I'm curious about this.

You probably have already found in Shantideva that there's quite a lot about hell, in fact quite a lot about the hells. And there's no doubt, there are references to hell in the Pali scriptures. And when you engage in unskillful activities or unskillful mental states, yes you experience [apaya](#), downfall, and that can be painful. And one might say that the references to hell are a sort of, you know, mythologisation of that experience or state in, as it were, cosmic terms.

So one can take that literally or one can take it more metaphorically, take it more psychologically. But I think Shantideva is in no doubt that if you persistently entertain the unskillful mental state of anger or hatred, you are a very unhappy person, and you may be said even to be in hell. You don't even have to wait to be reborn in a state of suffering you're in one already. So if you are reborn you'll carry your *samskaras* with you, you'll carry your angry or hating temperament

¹⁷ See '[Karma and Rebirth](#)' by Sangharakshita. For other considerations of the traditional Buddhist doctrine of 'rebirth' or 're-becoming', see talks on [karma and rebirth](#) and '[Exploring Karma & Rebirth](#)' by Nagapriya.

with you, so you will continue to be unhappy. You will continue to suffer, you will have 'gone to hell'. So I see it more like that.

[7] Consuming the food of dejection prepared by doing the undesirable and thwarting the desirable, biting hatred strikes me down.

'Eating the food of dejection'. It's a very interesting phrase. Yes, and that food is prepared by unskilful action. So one might say that the person who is prone to anger or prone to hatred is not only an unhappy person, sometimes they give the impression, when they're not actually expressing their anger, of being dejected: not very happy at all, a bit downcast. An angry person can't be a joyful person, can't be a contented person, as well as can't be a happy person.

[8] Therefore I shall destroy the food of this deceiver, since this hatred has no purpose other than my murder.

So if you really engage in anger or hatred, you're killing yourself. You're not really harming another person, you're harming yourself.

Q: We have been talking a lot about kshanti as a practice in small, sort of isolated situations - you know, responding to a particular event or another person. But my experience of kshanti is that very often it's a larger thing: it's developing a patience to accept aspects of the world that I can't change, including myself.

If one has that larger, more philosophical sort of approach to the world, then you're probably less likely to become impatient or angry in

particular situations. Reminds me of an exchange which took place between [Carlyle](#)¹⁸ and the [lady visitor](#) who was a bit of an idealist. This lady said to Carlyle, 'I accept the universe' and Carlyle said 'My God, you'd better'. Meaning you've no choice.

[9] I must not disturb the feeling of sympathetic joy, even at the arrival of something extremely unwelcome. There is nothing desirable in the state of dejection; on the contrary, the skilful is neglected.

Sympathetic joy, that is [mudita](#).¹⁹ Shantideva seems to think that it's important that we are, normally perhaps, in a state of sympathetic joy, mudita. In other words, looking on the bright side of things and therefore consequently feeling joyful — looking, that is, on the bright side of things from a moral or spiritual point of view. And it's important not to allow negative feelings of anger or hatred to disturb that.

We may wonder why he brings in sympathetic joy particularly, rather than say, upeksha, peace of mind. Mudita, like kshanti, is a response to other people, to the good that other people do, to the positive qualities that other people possess, yes. So, at the same time, he says when we're in that state we must be careful, be careful not to allow it to be disturbed by negative feelings like anger or hatred.

¹⁸ Thomas Carlyle, Scottish philosopher and writer of the Victorian period. Read the [works of Carlyle](#). The 'lady visitor' was Margaret Fuller.

¹⁹ 'Mudita' means 'sympathetic joy' and is also one of the Brahmaviharas. Listen to talks about [mudita](#).

Because that will result in a state of dejection. More than neglected, the skilful is forsaken for the sake of something unskilful, which can only result in dejection. So here Shantideva seems to be emphasising the importance of the positive mental state as opposed to emphasising the importance of getting rid of the negative mental state. 'Dejection' is not very positive but it's not as it were actively negative. We might even say in more modern terms, depression. Depression isn't a positive mental state but it's not actively negative, so to speak. It suggests also disappointment, maybe disappointment with oneself, a sense of failure.

Here Shantideva is saying that a mental state of hatred or anger is quite incompatible with positive feelings like sympathetic joy, and if you allow feelings of anger to cloud your mind then correspondingly the feeling of sympathetic joy disappears. It connects a little bit with what we were saying about earlier verses, that the angry man is not a happy man. In the same way that the angry man is not a man who is imbued with sympathetic joy. You can't have both at the same time. One exists at the expense of the other. So, when you get angry you miss out on something. You miss out on the positive mental state which you could have enjoyed, had you not become angry.

***[10] If there is a solution then what is the point of dejection?
What is the point of dejection if there is no solution?***

Shantideva now tries to impale himself on the horns of a dilemma here. If there's no solution to the problem or the trouble or whatever,

why get upset? But if there is a solution, why get upset? You just create the solution. But usually we're not so logical as that.

We find that very often Shantideva's approach is very logical. It's sometimes super-logical. And it's very convincing, but at the same time one suspects that though so logical it doesn't always work, because people aren't logical. In fact far from it. Very often people go on fussing and worrying and complaining, instead of just accepting the situation.

[11] Suffering, humiliation, harsh words, and disgrace: these we desire neither for ourselves nor our loved ones; but for our enemies it is the reverse.

You may not have any actual enemies, that is people that you literally would like to do away with. But it's true we do have definite preferences, and we give the preference usually to those who are very close to us. And we find it much easier to wish them well or to do positive things for them, than we do for other people, not to speak of any enemy we may have. Shantideva is saying we ought to have that attitude of *upeksha*, or even mindedness, towards all beings, regardless of whether we are personally close to them or not, whether they are related to us or not, and so on.

Also with regard to *even-mindedness*, we notice the difference of our attitude towards different people when it comes to the question of indifference. Because we might hear on the radio that so many people have died in an earthquake, and we might say, 'Well that's too bad'.

However we don't feel really very upset or sorry. But if it was someone known to us, or close to us we would feel very upset at the same news. So we do discriminate in this way. And in a sense, from a high spiritual point of view, that's undesirable. But it's very difficult to be even-minded towards all living beings. Very difficult. But then Shantideva's talking about the Bodhisattva. So, we need to have that at least as an ideal, even though it maybe for the present a very remote ideal.

We certainly do discriminate, and we may wish all sorts of good things, for those who are near and dear to us, but we won't have that sort of attitude towards people who we dislike, or about whom we are indifferent. And certainly towards an enemy, if we happen to have one. In fact if there's someone we heartily dislike, if something unfortunate happens to them we might feel secretly pleased.

[12] Happiness is scarce. Suffering persists with no effort; but only through suffering is there escape. Therefore, mind, be strong!

Now he is addressing our existential situation. 'Happiness is scarce'. We may wonder what Shantideva's thinking of. It's as though he's surveying the whole of samsaric existence, and he's saying, 'happiness is scarce'. I suppose that's true, if you think human beings are normally brimming over with happiness? I remember when I used to live in London and used to travel quite a bit on the Underground. I used to notice the faces of the people sitting in the carriage. Very, very

rarely, you saw someone who looked really happy. Often they were tired or worried or strained. And if you look at the animal world, many animals live in fear of being caught, or eaten, or whatever. So Shantideva's probably right in saying 'happiness is scarce'.

On the other hand, you don't have to make an effort to suffer. You need more often to make an effort to be happy, to do something that will make you definitely happy, but suffering will come of its own accord. Nonetheless he says, it's only through suffering that there is escape, presumably from samsara. I suspect that there may be a reference here to the suffering in dependence upon which there arises faith.

Without suffering there would be no faith, because suffering leads to being discontented with [samsara](#)²⁰, discontented with ordinary life. Then you start looking around for something else, something more, and eventually, in one way or another, you encounter the Dharma or encounter the Buddha and faith arises. In that way, in dependence upon suffering faith arises. So there seems to be an allusion to that sort of situation, in this particular verse. Shantideva may not have had that particular teaching in mind, he may not even have known it, but it does seem to be indicated here.

²⁰ In Buddhism, the continual repetitive cycle of birth and death that arises from ordinary beings' grasping and fixating on a self and experiences. Samsara arises out of ignorance ([avidya](#)) and is characterised by [dukkha](#) (suffering, anxiety, dissatisfaction). In the Buddhist view, liberation from samsara is possible by following the Buddhist path in order to see deeply and clearly the nature of reality and freeing oneself from the cycle. See [talks on the nature of samsara](#).

But about this, there is another related teaching that I can think of, which is rather striking. You may or may not have come across it: ‘Hell is the Lama of all the Buddhas’.²¹ Lama in the sense of Guru. So what does that mean? The Guru of all the Buddhas is suffering. It means that it is because of their insight into suffering, even perhaps their experience of suffering, that in the past, beings have become Enlightened, have become Buddhas. So suffering is the Lama of all the Buddhas.

And there’s another saying I’ve been quoting recently. This seems to be more like a Tibetan proverb. It goes something like this: ‘If it isn’t difficult, it isn’t the Dharma’. This suggests that when you practise the Dharma you’re going very much against the grain, at least until you get up to a certain point where there begin to be dividends in the form of very positive mental states.

[13] In Karnata the devotees of Durga willingly endure to no purpose the pain of burns, cuts, and worse. Why then am I a coward when my goal is liberation?

Durga is the same as the Goddess Kali²², and her devotees sometimes deliberately torment themselves, in her honour, so to speak. What Shantideva seems to be saying is that these people willingly suffer out of their wrong views. How is it that he, practising the Dharma, is afraid of a little suffering in the course of his practice? In

²¹ See track 7 of linked talk.

²² Kali is the fierce aspect of the Hindu goddess Durga.

India, even today, you can see people inflicting pain on themselves, out of so-called religious motives. One used to see, I don't know whether one still does, saddhus lying on beds of nails. Of course if the nails are quite close together, it's not so painful as it looks. It's when the nails are really spaced out that you're more likely to feel it.

This is in a way, quite an important point. I think it can be extended to mean that people undergo so much suffering for a bad cause. If only they suffered just a little bit for the sake of the Dharma, they could be so much happier.

[14] There is nothing which remains difficult, if it is practised. So, through practice with minor discomforts, even major discomfort becomes bearable.

Well this applies in all walks of life. The first time we try to do something it's difficult, but with practice it becomes more easy. For example, with weightlifting (I've never tried it myself), you start off with trying to lift a few pounds, and you get up to lifting many more pounds, but you do it gradually. So it's a bit like that in some aspects of the spiritual life. You practise little acts of forbearance first, accustom yourself to those, and then you go on to the more major forms of forbearance. But I don't think that Shantideva is suggesting that you deliberately inflict different levels of forbearance on yourself. I think he's saying that with practice, if you accustom yourself to being forbearing in small instances, gradually you will be able to practise

forbearance in situations where more forbearance is called for. And you will be faced with those sorts of situations, sooner or later.

[15] The irritation of bugs, gnats and mosquitoes, of hunger and thirst, and suffering such as an enormous itch: why do you not see them as insignificant?

Here Shantideva may well be thinking of the life of the wandering monk, and he may well have been a wandering monk himself. In the Pali scriptures, where we get a picture of the life of the Buddha and his disciples as they lived from day to day, there is mention every now and then of the **Bhikkhu**, the monk, being indifferent to the bite of gnats and mosquitoes, and creatures of that kind. Often, if you go to India, even today, you may find that you can get bitten by all sorts of little creatures.

The monks are advised just to be indifferent towards them, although I've been told that **there's a passage** in the Vinaya where the Buddha permits monks to burn or to smoke a rolled up leaf, cigarette-like, to keep away flies and mosquitoes when they're meditating²³. Burmese monks normally **do smoke cheroots**. But really, if we make a big fuss about these little discomforts, what sort of a Bodhisattva will we be? It's difficult to practice, seriously, something like forbearance. But one notices, quite often, that there are people who make a big fuss about very little discomforts and inconveniences, and perhaps in the Western world, with generations of good living, we've become really

²³ Vin.I, 204, as quoted in the linked webpage (unconfirmed).

soft, almost like the princess in the fairy story, who was sleeping on twenty thick mattresses and complained of discomfort and not having a good night because right at the bottom of the pile there was a pea. So we've become a bit like that.

I remember when I was travelling around with one of the **ex-Untouchables**²⁴, years and years ago, happened on one occasion I was given some lunch but the people who were travelling with me were not given any lunch. Maybe, food was in short supply at the place where we were. So I commented on this and I said to someone, I'm sorry that you haven't been given anything to eat, and he said 'Oh don't worry, we people' meaning the Dalits, the Ex-Untouchables, 'we people are accustomed to going without food for two or three days.' He said 'We just tighten our belts'. That was his attitude. Very matter of fact, though that really struck me, with him. 'We people are accustomed to going without food for two or three days.'

We often complain if things aren't 'just right', over some minor inconvenience, so we've become quite soft and self indulgent. This also connects with the whole idea, or ideal, perhaps I should say, of just living more simply. Making do with less. Well it's not really making do, because we can often manage very easily. So this is an aspect of the spiritual life I've been talking quite a bit about in recent years, but it's not the most popular aspect: that of living more simply.

²⁴ Members of the **Dalit** community who have converted to Buddhism to escape the Hindu **caste system**, inspired by the life and memory of their leader **Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar**.

[16] Cold, heat, rain and wind, journeying and sickness, imprisonment and beatings: one should not be too squeamish about them. Otherwise the distress becomes worse.

That's pretty obvious, except perhaps for imprisonment. Shantideva is presumably addressing would-be Bodhisattvas. So when he speaks of prison he's probably thinking of being imprisoned unjustly, rather than being imprisoned as a result of some crime that you've committed. It could be that in his time, in ancient India, things were sometimes very arbitrary. When I was in Nepal in 1951 or '52, I was taken to see the palace of the then hereditary Prime Minister. Apparently it had been his custom to appear in the morning on the top verandah of his palace and look down into the courtyard, so that people who wanted to deal with him had to deal with him from a position in the courtyard. I was told that if he was in a bad mood he would send you to prison if you'd come to ask for a job. If he was in a good mood he'd give you a job even though you'd come to be sentenced for some crime.

If that was the case in the kingdom of Nepal in the twentieth century, well I wonder how things would have been in earlier ages. Kings could be very arbitrary no doubt in Shantideva's time, so even a Bodhisattva or would-be Bodhisattva might find himself in jail. But he should treat that as something of little consequence.

In at least some parts of the West, we're in a very fortunate position. We can practice the Dharma freely. We don't always realise, again,

how fortunate we are. Shantideva says we 'shouldn't be squeamish'. That's quite a good word isn't it? Especially in connection with prison and beatings. One shouldn't be squeamish about such things.

*[17] Their own blood for some is valour's boon;
While others' for others produces a swoon.*

The other translation of the [Bodhicaryavatara](#) I have been using, by Geshe Gyatso, puts things rather differently and I think better²⁵:

*Some when they see their own blood, become even stronger
and braver, while for others, just seeing someone else's blood,
causes them to become weak and even to faint.*

That's a bit more expressive. Maybe Shantideva is thinking of a battle. Someone gets just a little wounded and he sees his own blood and that has the effect of invigorating him still further, stirring up his heroic qualities. But some people see just a little drop of blood and they feel weak and they faint.

In London, during the [Blitz](#)²⁶, people had to put up with all sorts of things, even suffering in various ways, but they got by, people survived, very often quite positive and cheerful in the midst of it all. So I think this is another aspect of our being weak, so to speak.

²⁵ 'Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life', tr. Geshe Kelsang Gyatso.

²⁶ The 'Blitz' (from German, 'lightning'), or 'London Blitz', is the English phrase used to describe the period of sustained strategic bombing of the United Kingdom by Nazi Germany during the Second World War.

Metaphorically speaking, not being able to bear the sight of blood. So we need to be more strong.

[18] This comes from the bravery or cowardice of the mind. Therefore one should become invincible to suffering, and overpower discomfort.

These are very strong words. 'One should become invincible to suffering'. Unable to be conquered by suffering. And we know that some human beings have got a tremendous capacity to resist suffering. I heard an interview with a man who'd actually been tortured, and he described how he withstood it. He was tortured quite badly it seems, but he said one very striking thing. Apparently he'd been trained to resist torture, and he said what was important was, when you're being tortured, not to get angry. Not to get angry. That made things worse.

But he did say, when he was eventually freed, if he happened to meet two torturers in particular, and if he'd been able to get away with it, he probably would kill them. But at the time of being tortured he didn't feel anger, and he was very clear about that. He actually didn't feel anger. That was part of his training.

So human beings do have great capacity for endurance. Some people have that, but in the West on the whole we've become rather pampered. We expect that we will have an easy time, that life will give us an easy ride.

[19] Not even in suffering should a wise person allow his serene confidence of mind to be disturbed, for the battle is with the defilements, and in warfare pain is easily won.

Yes, 'the battle is with the defilements'. Of course some people nowadays will say, 'You have to accept the defilements', but that's not Shantideva's point of view. You have to do battle with them, you have to fight them, you have to overcome them. In a way that's what the spiritual life is all about.

Also, 'serene confidence of mind'. You can have confidence but it must be a serene confidence. Not an overbearing or arrogant sort of confidence. A serene confidence, a calm confidence. That's quite important. And a serene confidence that you're going to win, that you're going to defeat the defilements. Not all at once maybe, but little by little.

Some years ago I gave a talk on the heroic nature of the Bodhisattva ideal.²⁷ And that heroic nature comes out very strongly in these verses. It draws attention to a very important aspect of, not just the Bodhisattva ideal, but the spiritual life.

Q: At the end of this verse there is the phrase, 'and in warfare, pain is easily won', which suggests that the spiritual life is painful, or is likely to 'win' you pain. Is that right?

²⁷ Possibly 'The Heroic Ideal In Buddhism', tracks 10 & 11, 1969

Yes, if you expect a painless battle, that's rather naïve isn't it? If you expect the spiritual life to be easy, you're sure to be disappointed. Hence the Tibetan proverb I quoted, 'If it is not difficult, it is not the Dharma'. If you're not experiencing difficulties, the likelihood is you're not really practicing the Dharma.

[20] Those who conquer the enemy taking the blows of their adversary on the chest, they are the triumphant heroes, while the rest kill what is already dead.

This is a strange verse in a way. Shantideva seems to be comparing the real hero with the fake hero. It seems to be an ordinary battlefield. The really brave man confronts the foe. He takes the blows of the enemy on his chest. But there are others who, when the battle is more or less over, they go round killing those who are already dead, as though they themselves had killed them.

[21] The virtue of suffering has no rival, since, from the shock it causes, intoxication falls away and there arises compassion for those in cyclic existence, fear of evil, and a longing for the Conqueror.

'The virtue of suffering has no rival'. That's a very strong statement. Because suffering has virtue, there is potential in suffering, you can learn from suffering, or be stimulated by suffering, in a way that doesn't happen with anything else. So, 'the virtue of suffering is without rival'. One can make very positive use of suffering. It's without rival in that respect.

Then, the next clause: ‘...since, from the shock it causes, intoxication falls away...’ Suffering gives us a shock, especially when it’s unexpected. And ‘intoxication falls away’: I don’t think Shantideva is speaking of intoxication in the literal sense, [intoxication with alcohol](#). But several forms of intoxication in the more metaphorical sense are mentioned in the Pali scriptures²⁸. There’s the intoxication with wealth. There is the intoxication with youth. So, there are various other forms of intoxication.

Intoxication with wealth is when you are so puffed up by the fact that you are rich and powerful that you become careless, unmindful and more likely to make mistakes. And of course the intoxication of youth is when you’re young, you’re intoxicated with your sense of youth, your energy, maybe your good looks, you feel you can do anything. So you’re more liable to slip up, to make mistakes, to end up disastrously. The shock of suffering can sometimes bring you to your senses, and cure that kind of intoxication.

After that in the verse comes: ‘...and there arises compassion for those in cyclic existence’. when you’re intoxicated, whether with youth, or wealth or position, you can cease to care about other people. But once you’ve suffered, once suffering has given you a shock, once suffering has opened your eyes to what is really going on in the world, then you can start feeling compassion for beings, who are born again and again, in the course of cyclic existence.

²⁸ See, [Upajjhatthana Sutta](#): Subjects for Contemplation, and [more here](#).

So suffering has this great value, and therefore Shantideva says that 'suffering has no rival'.

Not everybody learns from suffering, of course. Some people are simply hardened by suffering. But the potential to learn from suffering is there. If one would only open one's eyes. And again Shantideva mentions the shock of suffering, especially in relation to intoxication. Because, this intoxication is a very dangerous state, however it comes about. As I mentioned, some are intoxicated with their youth, others with their wealth, others with their power... And then the shock of suffering can have a very salutary effect. Opening the person's eyes.

[22] I feel no anger towards bile and the like, even though they cause intense suffering. Why am I angry with the sentient? They too have reasons for their anger.

Here of course Shantideva is referring to the [Ayurvedic medical system](#), which is found in the West as the [Four Humours](#)²⁹. The Black Bile, the Yellow Bile, there's Phlegm, and Blood. So he's saying, if you suffer with Bile, you don't get angry with the Bile, you know it's due to certain causes, due to something you've eaten perhaps. You don't get angry with it. Similarly, you shouldn't get angry with sentient beings, because their anger or the fact that they hurt you is due to certain causes in the same way, so why get angry? Again this is one of Shantideva's very logical arguments, which perhaps can convince you of the undesirability of anger, if you're already convinced.

²⁹ See, [Sangharakshita, 'The Question Of Psychological Types'](#)

If you can see the anger of another person as arising in dependence on causes, you can see it as inevitable that a person of that kind is going to get angry. Why get angry with him? He can't help it, he's acting mechanically. And in the case of many people that is just what happens. They act, or they re-act, quite mechanically, without thought, without awareness.

One aspect of the spiritual life is trying to bring awareness into one's actions, so that one doesn't act mechanically. So one doesn't simply re-act, but acts more creatively. But Shantideva seems to be concentrating on that more mechanical aspect of people's behaviour, and using reflection on that as a means of convincing us that we shouldn't get angry with sentient beings.

He says 'sentient beings'. He doesn't say 'human beings'. So presumably that includes animals. If a dog bites you, you don't get angry with the dog; that's its nature. If an insect stings you, that's its nature, why get angry. So you could also say, in the case of an ordinary person who gets angry, it's his nature to get angry, why get angry with him on that account? That's the way some people behave. So why should you make matters worse by getting angry with him or her in turn?

So by various means, various arguments, Shantideva is doing his best to convince us that we ought not get to angry, but should respond with kshanti, with forbearance. If one argument doesn't appeal to you well perhaps another will. He's offering all sorts of arguments, trying to

get you to practise kshanti by hook or by crook. Because that's what you really need to do if you're going to be a fully-fledged Bodhisattva.

Q: It strikes me that he applies very different measures to others than to himself. If you want to be a Bodhisattva, you can't justify yourself the way that he justifies others.

Often we say things like 'he made me angry' as if to say our reaction of anger was inevitable, and therefore in a way was justified, because 'he made me angry'. We don't say, 'I became angry, because that was what I chose to do. That was the way I chose to react.' So sometimes we excuse our own anger or other unskilful behaviour by speaking of it in those sort of terms of inevitability. 'I couldn't help it. I had to become angry.'

We sometimes make ourselves out to be mechanical by way of excusing ourselves, when really we're not mechanical. We do have the capacity to respond in whatever way we choose. We don't have to be reactive, we can be creative.

[23] As this sharp pain wells up, though unsought for, so, though unsought for, wrath wells up against one's will.

Shantideva is realistic. He realises that sometimes, practically speaking, we can't help ourselves. Wrath, anger, it just wells up. Sometimes I think that most people have almost reservoir of hatred or negative feeling, ready within them, and it just needs some little occurrence to spark it off. But it's always there. Shantideva seems to

be saying something of that kind. The potentiality for wrath or anger is there all the time. We can't help it welling up, as he says. So what should we do about that?

[24] A person does not get angry at will, having decided 'I shall get angry', nor does anger well up after deciding 'I shall well up'.

He's continuing the theme of the previous verse, that we don't always have control, in practice, over our anger. It just wells up. We don't decide to be angry. Of course, some people do decide to be angry. I'm sure my old friend [Buddharakshita](#)³⁰ sometimes used to decide to be angry. He seemed to get some sort of 'kick' out of being angry. So he very readily took offence at things that happened or at things that people said. So there are some people who do choose or decide to be angry, but normally speaking, anger just wells up.

Q: Apart from that exception that you just pointed out, does this verse suggest that anger doesn't have any intentionality at all?

It often doesn't have any intentionality, in the sense that it's not being directed towards any particular person. It just wants some object to have an outlet, so that it can well up, and perhaps sometimes it doesn't particularly care what that object is. It just wants to get angry.

³⁰ Early companion of Sangharakshita after his initial [Going Forth](#) as a Buddhist in India. See [Sangharakshita, 'The Rainbow Road'](#).

Q: Do you think that anger arises when you're in pain? Because if I can see someone else's anger as an expression of the fact that they're in pain, that helps me to avoid becoming angry myself.

Shantideva, in a way, has already covered that by saying that people act mechanically. That they re-act for various reasons, usually because they experience pain on account of something that one has said or something that one has done. So yes, if one can understand that, one not only does not get angry, but in some circumstances one can even feel sorry for the person who has gotten angry, even if as a result of that anger, they have tried to hurt you.

[25] Whatever transgressions and evil deeds of various kinds there are, all arise through the power of conditioning factors, while there is nothing that arises independently.

This is a basic psychological-cum-philosophical principle. Shantideva is drawing a general conclusion from the examples he's already given. If we can see that whatever happens has a definite cause, and if we can see that when people become angry or when they harm us, it's just due to causes, well that can alleviate our anger.

[26] Neither does the assemblage of conditioning factors have the thought, 'I shall produce'; nor does what is produced have the thought, 'I am produced'.

He's pressing the same point, the same argument that nothing is deliberate, it's just a question of causes and conditions coming

together. Whether taken singly or taken collectively, there's no-one saying, 'I will do this, I will do that'. It's an impersonal process. Again his point is, well, what is there to get angry about? Who is there to get angry with? It's just certain things happening in dependence upon certain causes.

I don't know to what extent we can generally look at things in this way. It's probably rather difficult. But to some extent we can. To some extent if we understand what makes people tick, or what it is that is causing them to act in a certain way, that will help modify or even mollify our own reaction, so that we react less negatively. Just as we don't become angry when a child hits us. The child is just a child. Similarly, with adults, who in many cases are not much better than children, why get angry with them when they do something that we don't like? They can't help it. They're not mature. They don't have much awareness. We should respond creatively, even though they are acting reactively.

Q: This raises the question for me, how much is anger, rather than forbearance, our innate nature? How much do we have to use our will to supplant that which is more innate, rather than letting the anger fall away?

Well, both are potentials. We have the potentiality to be angry, we have the potentiality to forbear. And to use the term 'free will', we have the free will, so to speak, to choose between them. And that would

seem to depend on our being aware that there are those potentialities, that there is the possibility of choice.

[27] The much-sought-for 'primal matter', or the imagined 'Self', even that does not come into being after deciding 'I shall become'.

Here Shantideva is getting polemical, and you may have to refer to the end-notes. The 'pradhana'³¹ is a term of the Samkhya philosophy³². In regard to the 'atman'³³, it's not altogether clear which school he's referring to here. It may be the Jains or it may be a Vedanta school³⁴.

Yes, that hits the nail on the head. Shantideva doesn't go into any detailed argumentation, he assumes that they are clearly wrong. Because they are certainly inconsistent with the view that he has been putting forward in the previous few verses. And in a way, they're

³¹ [From the end-notes, quoted in the seminar:] 'Primal matter (pradhana) is considered by Samkhya philosophers to be the material cause of all phenomenal existence. The 'Self' (atman) is the ultimately real essence of an individual according to many, non-Buddhist Indian philosophies. The sarcastic tone of this verse reflects Shantideva's disdain for these philosophical theories which are rejected in Buddhist thought.'

³² One of the six orthodox (astika) schools of Hindu philosophy and classical Indian philosophy.

³³ Translated in this verse as 'self'.

³⁴ Originally synonymous with the Upanishads. By the 8th century, all philosophical traditions were concerned with interpreting the three basic texts (the Upanishads, the Brahma Sutras and the Bhagavad Gita). At least ten schools of Vedanta are known, of which Advaita Vedanta, Vishishtadvaita, and Dvaita are the best known.

extremes. The primal matter is the extreme of materialism; the atman is the extreme of spiritualism. Anyway, perhaps we need not bother too much about the pradhana or the atman here. The Samkhya school of philosophy is virtually extinct in India today, and of course there are still a number of schools putting forward various versions of the atman theory and they don't necessarily agree with one another.

[28] Since what has not arisen does not exist, who would then form the wish to come into existence? And since it would be occupied with its sphere of action it cannot attempt to cease to exist either.

Clearly Shantideva is still concerned with some polemical point. We need to consider what the end-note says.³⁵

We probably don't need to go into that in too much detail. Shantideva basically is trying to state his opposition to those philosophies which are incompatible with his view of things arising in dependence on causes.

[29] If the Self is eternal and without thought processes, then it is evidently inactive, like space. Even in contact with other

³⁵ [From the end-notes, quoted in the seminar:] 'These arguments are both based on the premise held by atmavadins, 'those who hold a doctrine of a Self', that a Self is necessarily permanent and unchanging. If it is permanent it must always have existed, so there can never have been a time, prior to its existence, at which it forms the intention of coming into existence. If it does exist and is involved in 'the sphere of action' or the material world, since it is unchanging, this involvement must be part of its nature and so it cannot change and stop doing this.'

conditioning factors, what activity can there be of something which is unchanging?

Again he continues a polemic against the unchanging self, which of course is an idea inconsistent with Buddhist philosophy.

[30] What part does something play in an action if, at the time of the action, it remains exactly as it was prior to it? If the relationship is that the action is part of it, then which of the two is the cause of the other?

He's continuing the same polemic against the unchanging atman. He's trying to point out an inconsistency in the point of view of the opponent, that is to say the person who believes in an unchanging atman.

[31] In this way everything is dependent upon something else. Even that thing upon which each is dependent is not independent. Since, like a magical display, phenomena do not initiate activity, at what does one get angry like this?

Shantideva now returns to the Buddhist point of view that everything depends upon conditions. He restates that as a reason for one not getting angry. So he has made this little detour through contemporary Indian philosophy, rejecting the views that contradict those which he holds.

One can trace the process of causation back and back. Maybe the more one traces it back the less likely one is to get angry. Supposing

for instance, someone speaks very angrily to you. You reason, and say yes, there's a reason for him getting angry, he's not in a good mood. He had a quarrel with his wife this morning. So that's why he's not in a good mood. Why did he have a quarrel with his wife? Well there was a disagreement over money. Why was there this disagreement over money, well, they're rather hard up at present.

In that way you can go on tracking it back and back, each event being caused by some previous event, and the more you track it back in that way the less likely you are to get angry with someone who becomes angry with you. Or who does something against you, or something that you don't like.

[32] If it is argued that to resist anger is inappropriate, for 'who is it that resists what?', our view is that it is appropriate: since there is dependent origination³⁶ there can be cessation of suffering.

That's a very important point. The first part reflects the sort of attitude of the popularised **Advaita Vedanta**, which is becoming a little bit popular it seems nowadays. 'Who resists what?' Who does what to whom? But Shantideva retorts by saying, 'Our view is that it is appropriate: since there is dependent origination there can be cessation of suffering'. Because suffering comes into existence as the

³⁶ 'Pratitya Samutpada', the central philosophical doctrine of Buddhism, that all things arise and pass away in dependence upon complex conditions. For extensive discussions of this, [see here](#).

result of a series of causes, as the result of a series of causes, it can also be made not to exist.

Q: It strikes me that you could only hold that view, of 'who is it that exists?' if you were quite alienated and you had thought this through in a philosophical way but weren't connecting with the fact that there's another person, in pain.

Well perhaps the people who espouse that view are a bit alienated, but alienated or not, it does seem to have crept into some Buddhist circles in the form of Advaita Vedanta. I certainly encountered it when I was in India. You may remember that my friend Buddharakshita got into an argument with an Advaita Vedantan, a monk, and they got angry with each other, and Buddharakshita accused the monk of having got angry, and the monk said, 'Who has got angry? No-one has got angry. It's just your delusion.' So, it amounted to the same thing.

Q: I suppose the trick must be to somehow talk about dependent origination without the idea of a self. That must be the subtlety of the argument.

Yes, well it depends how one expresses oneself: if one can talk of things happening without bringing in the notion of an unchanging self behind it all. And of course sometimes language is not very helpful here.

Q: Well it breaks down doesn't it? Because what we're talking about is taking responsibility for one's actions, while not making the mistake of seeing a self at the core of those actions.

Yes, you recognise the relativity of your own self, even though at the same time you are insistent on that changing, impermanent self taking responsibility for what it does.

[33] Therefore, even if one sees a friend or an enemy behaving badly, one can reflect that there are specific conditioning factors that determine this, and thereby remain happy.

So, it may be that the friend is behaving badly and you can understand why. Maybe an enemy is behaving badly, again you can understand why. So you don't trouble yourself too much about it. You remain happy.

Of course, if they are acting in a way that might harm themselves or others, yes, you can be concerned. But the fact that you are able to see why they are acting that way means you yourself can remain happy and not be mentally disturbed.

That is not to say that something should not be done about it. Otherwise you end up in the position of saying that people are not to blame for what they do because it's all the result of their upbringing, they can't help it, and so on and so forth... That may be true, but if they've been conditioned in a particular way, a negative way, they can also be conditioned in a positive way. They can be rehabilitated. So

one doesn't accept as final, so to speak, the way in which people are behaving badly at present. You see that due to certain causes and conditions they're behaving badly, but if the causes and conditions were changed, they could in fact behave in a much better way. So in both cases you invoke the principle of Dependent Origination. To explain why something bad is happening, but also to make possible the arising in its place of something good.

[34] Were all embodied beings to have their wish fulfilled, no one would suffer. No one wishes for suffering.

Well, it's an impossible situation isn't it? For everyone to have their wishes fulfilled, because some of those wishes are conflicting. So what does Shantideva mean I wonder?

'Were all embodied beings to have their wish fulfilled, no one would suffer. No one wishes for suffering.' It just seems obvious doesn't it? But it doesn't represent the actual situation: people don't have their wishes all fulfilled. Very few people have all their wishes fulfilled; some might have some wishes fulfilled. The result is that people aren't always happy. Some people in fact are very unhappy.

[35] People cause themselves torment, with thorns and other instruments, in a state of intoxication, by refusing food and the like out of anger, and with things that they wish to obtain, such as unattainable women.

Yes. People torment themselves in various ways. Let's look at that bit by bit.

'People cause themselves torment, with thorns and other instruments, in a state of intoxication...' I'm assuming that Shantideva can either be referring to literal intoxication, or he can be referring to intoxication in the more metaphorical sense. Of course, when people are literally intoxicated we know that they do themselves harm. They might not even feel it at the time. But taking the intoxication to be metaphorical, how would that work out? Perhaps religious devotees lying on beds of nails.

Let's continue with the rest of the verse: 'by refusing food and the like, out of anger...' Yes...when you're angry you don't feel like eating do you?

Q: It says in the notes that the refusal of food is a widespread form of emotional blackmail in Indian society.

Well, some people used to think that Mahatma Gandhi's fasts were just emotional blackmail. He tried to get his own way. That was almost certainly the case when he fasted over the [Scheduled Caste Reservations](#)³⁷ in opposition to Ambedkar's attitude. I think he said that he learned this trick from his wife. She used to go off her food

³⁷ See [Wikipedia](#) for the general topic, and also [this discussion](#) of antipathy between Gandhi and Ambedkar. Also referred to more sympathetically on the main Wikipedia [page for Gandhi](#). For a more in-depth look at the issues around the relationship between the two men, see '[The Doctor and the Saint: Ambedkar, Gandhi and the battle against caste](#)' By Arundhati Roy.

when she was angry with him, to try to bring him round to doing something he didn't want to do. But yes, children, when they sulk, which is a mild form of anger, they can go off their food. So, at it's worst it's a sort of emotional blackmail.

Finally, 'they cause themselves torment... with things that they wish to obtain, such as unattainable women.' Now what's the logic there? Maybe it's the case of the lover who threatens to starve himself to death, unless the lady returns his feelings.

The next two verses kind of explain this in terms of a longer argument.

[36] Some people kill themselves, by hanging themselves, by throwing themselves off cliffs, by taking poison or other unwholesome substances, and by conduct that is devoid of merit.

[37] When, under the power of the defilements in this way, they injure even their own dear selves, how could they have a care for the persons of other people?

In the same way that people abstain from food as a sort of emotional blackmail, they may even commit suicide, as a sort of emotional blackmail, when they don't get what they want. As if to say to the survivors, 'Look what you've done to me, you've made me kill myself.'

It's all highly reactive behaviour, instead of having a more creative response. And of course, it's all to do, as Shantideva says, with the

defilements. The wishes and desires that are frustrated, as a result of which you torment yourself, are negative, are not skilful.

[38] When, driven insane by their defilements, they resort to killing themselves, how is it that not only have you no pity but you become angry?

Here again Shantideva strikes the note of compassion. If people have been driven to commit actions which are harmful to themselves, through their reactivity, even though you see that, you don't condemn them, because they are suffering and therefore you feel pity, you feel compassion.

That's why, from the point of view of the Bodhisattva, if you look out at the world, and you see all the foolish things that people do, all the different ways in which they bring suffering upon themselves, individually and collectively, you don't feel angry. You just feel pity. You feel compassion. That's the more Bodhisattva-like attitude.

Sometimes, I suppose, when one listens to the news or sees television or reads the newspaper, you can get such a very dreadful impression of what is going on in the world, of people doing all sorts of foolish, crazy, even wicked things, that it's very easy to become indignant or angry. But that's not the right response. The right response is one of pity and compassion, that people are acting in that way, whether collectively or individually, causing themselves suffering just basically out of ignorance, or out of unhappiness, out of suffering. So the emotion evoked should be more one of pity and compassion,

and also perhaps a stronger determination to make sure that in one's own little corner of the world one does one's best to react to people's suffering with compassion, rather than in some other way.

I notice over the last dozen or so verses there is a slight, in fact, quite a definite, development with regard to Shantideva's thinking, or perhaps I should say, his presentation. He starts off by pointing out that people act as they do, unskillfully, or commit hostile actions, or are angry towards us, for various causes and conditions. If we bear that in mind, we shall be more likely to be able to respond with forbearance. We see them as driven, as it were, as driven by their defilements, rather than acting spontaneously.

But then he seems to change his note, and point out that, not only do they act as a result of certain conditions, but they act blindly. They act so as to secure their happiness, as they think, but in fact their actions result only in suffering. So instead of viewing people with a sort of detached, almost cold sort of scientific attitude, seeing them, in a way, as mechanical and reactive, because they do suffer, we should see them as acting in such a way as to bring suffering on themselves and therefore as giving rise to compassion on the part of the Bodhisattva. So there's this change or development, in Shantideva's thinking, in the course of those verses.

[39] If it is their very nature to cause others distress, my anger towards those fools is as inappropriate as it would be towards fire for its nature to burn.

Yes, a different argument. You don't blame fire for burning you, and in the same way, when people act inappropriately or harmfully, they're just acting in accord with their natures: that's another reflection that one can have. In a way, this goes back to the more mechanical model. So that doesn't really tell us anything new.

[40] In fact, this fault is adventitious. Beings are by nature pleasant. So anger towards them is as inappropriate as it would be towards the sky if full of acrid smoke.

'Beings are by nature pleasant'. Let's see if the other translation clarifies what Shantideva means by that:

'On the other hand, if that harmfulness were a temporary fault, and that person were otherwise good-natured, it would be just as unreasonable to get angry with him as it would be to resent space for filling with smoke.'

Yes, good-natured instead of pleasant gives a clearer meaning. But, even if people do perform unskillful actions, which even do us harm, we must reflect, basically they're good-natured. They don't really intend to do harm. They're just like the sky when it fills with smoke. We don't say that the sky isn't there because of the smoke. In the same way we can recognise that even someone who does harm, perhaps foolishly, is basically good-natured.

In other words, one has to see people as a whole and not simply see them in relation to oneself. They may not behave very well towards

oneself, but on the other hand they may behave very well in other ways towards other people. So one should try to see the sky, as well as seeing and feeling the smoke. I suppose we can say that it's very common that we judge people harshly just from a very slight knowledge of them or a very slight experience of them.

I can recollect an experience of my own in this connection. I remember when I was in Kalimpong³⁸ I happened to meet a visiting monk, a Nepalese monk, quite elderly. I didn't have much contact with him, but in the little contact I had he didn't create a good impression on me. He seemed rather bad-tempered.

But some years ago I read an autobiography that he had published, and it was really quite amazing: the pilgrimages he'd undergone, the meditations he'd done. So I got a completely different picture of that particular monk. It was quite revealing. That's an example of how easy it is to judge people, or even to generalise, from a very limited experience of them.

So we need to think sometimes, even if someone impinges on us in a rather unpleasant way, he's not necessarily an unpleasant person in relation to others. He may be a very pleasant person, a very good-natured person. It's not easy to know other people. It's not easy to know them in a rounded, comprehensive sort of way, so we should be very wary of making any judgements.

³⁸ Sangharakshita's home in India from 1950, and his base until 1966 when he returned to the West. See '[Facing Mount Kanchenjunga](#)' and '[In The Sign Of The Golden Wheel](#)'.

Q: Do you think that if someone is generally a pleasant person but they've been unpleasant to us, it's an opportunity to reflect on what effect we might be having on them?

Yes, of course. I don't know what that particular monk that I've mentioned thought of me. Perhaps he didn't think very much. I was just a young monk, but I thought quite well of myself in those days! To me he seemed just a rather grumpy old man, but there was much more to him than that.

[41] If, disregarding the principal cause, such as a stick or other weapon, I become angry with the person who impels it, he too is impelled by hatred. It is better that I hate that hatred.

Yes - better that I hate the hatred. And what's the best way of 'hating the hatred?' Responding with metta, with forbearance. With forbearance, you can hope to destroy the hatred even, bring it to an end. Shantideva is rather fond of these rather neat little arguments.

[42] Previously, I too caused just such pain to living beings. Therefore this is just what I deserve, I who have caused distress to other beings.

Of course, one can say this, one can believe this, only if one also believes not only in [karma](#)³⁹ but in rebirth. So Shantideva is saying, we should reflect that we deserve the punishment that we get, because the likelihood, perhaps even the certainty, is that in a previous existence we've committed similar acts. So this is just a consequence: we're suffering the results of our own previous bad deeds.

I think this sort of reasoning is convincing only for someone who really does believe in karma and rebirth, and many Western Buddhists don't have that firm faith in karma and rebirth that Buddhists often have in the East. We also believe that there is such a thing as the five [niyamas](#)⁴⁰: that not everything that happens to us is necessarily the result of our own previous deeds, even according to the Buddha's teaching itself. So we might say that what we're experiencing now is the result of bad deeds of ours in the past, but we don't really know.

Shantideva seems to have the faith that that is the case. But that is not the Buddha's view, so far as the Pali Canon is concerned. The

³⁹ A term that literally means 'action' or 'doing'. The term karma is used in two senses within the Buddhist tradition:

1. On the specific level, karma refers to those actions which spring from the intention ([cetanā](#)) of a sentient being. Karmic actions are compared to a seed that will inevitably ripen into a result or fruition (referred to as [vipāka](#) or [phala](#) in Sanskrit and Pali).
2. On the general level, contemporary Buddhist teachers frequently use the term karma when referring to the entire process of karmic action and result.

⁴⁰ The [niyamas](#) are the five levels on which, according to Buddhist commentarial tradition, [pratitya samutpada](#) is said to play out. Karma is only one of these levels. Listen to [introductions to the niyamas](#).

Buddha says very clearly that whatever we do has a result; whatever willed action we commit has a result. We experience that result. But that does not mean that everything we experience is the result, karmically, of a willed action on our part. The one does not follow from the other. But the Tibetans seem to have got hold only of half of the truth. Some Tibetan Buddhists will argue the point very vigorously. They really do believe that everything that happens to you is the result of your own past karma, but that's not what the Buddha really taught, and it's important that we should understand that.

You can say you have been reborn because of certain [samskaras](#)⁴¹, so therefore, indirectly, whatever happens to you is due to something you have done. But it's only indirectly due, not directly due.

Q: Would this view of karma be a hindrance to spiritual practice in some way, or to gaining Enlightenment?

Yes - because certainly you have to believe that what you do has an effect, but it's pointless to attach so much importance to what happens to you, in the karmic sense. The subject is an important one.

⁴¹ A term figuring prominently in the teaching of the Buddha. Literally, 'that which has been put together' and 'that which puts together'. Frequently rendered as 'karma formations'. Samskaras are viewed as volitional in nature both because they are formed as a result of volition and because they are causes for the arising of future volitional actions. Listen to Sangharakshita's [description of samskaras](#).

[43] His the knife, and mine the body - the twofold cause of suffering. He has grasped the knife, I my body. At which is there anger?

Another of Shantideva's very logical propositions. Two things have come together: my body, and his knife. So I'm as much responsible as he is, in a way. Why blame him? Why blame him for being angry?

Q: Presumably one didn't throw oneself on the knife, so there's no intention to be stabbed.

No, but one has the body, and I suppose at one time in the course of cyclical karma, you intended and wanted to have a body. You would have to be already convinced to find these sort of arguments at all plausible. So they're meant to bolster the already established faith of the Buddhist or Bodhisattva. Though in a way, Shantideva does have a point.

[44] Blinded by craving I have grasped this boil in the likeness of a human figure, which cannot bear to be touched. In that case, when there is pain, at which is there anger?

Yes, in the order of karma and rebirth, he has, so to speak, wanted a body. When he died, the last time, all his samskaras came into play, and they resulted in his being born as a human being. That's what he wanted, so that's what he got. And of course, Shantideva compares this human body to a boil. A boil is something very sensitive, so in the same way the body is very sensitive. It's susceptible to pain.

Theoretically I suppose we could have been born with a cast-iron body that didn't experience feelings of pain, but that's not the body we've got. And in a way, it's our own fault. We wanted to have an embodied existence as a human being. So here we are, with this very sensitive body, which is like a boil, which is very easily hurt. So we have some responsibility for the situation. We suffer through the body.

We also continue to care for it. We don't want to give it up, and perhaps we look forward to the dissolution of that body with a certain amount of dread. Indian Buddhists are rather fond of this comparison of the body with a boil. A boil is so sensitive, easily feels hurt, even at the lightest touch. The body is very sensitive, but it is we who have wished for, who have wanted this boil-like body. And of course we continue to cherish and protect it.

[45] I do not wish for suffering. Being a simpleton, I do wish for the cause of suffering. When suffering has arisen through my own wrongdoing, how can I become angry with someone else?

Again, he's pursuing the same line of thought: I'm responsible for my own suffering. And sometimes we quite obviously are. Shantideva seems to be thinking of the fact that we're responsible for having a body and therefore any suffering that comes to us through the body is ultimately our own fault. So he maybe consoles himself with that thought.

[46] Just as the infernal forest of razor leaves, just as the winged creatures from hell are really brought into being by my actions, so is this. At which is there anger?

Well here we are in hell again. I think some readers will be rather shocked by the number of references to hell in the Bodhicaryavatara. There's all sorts of very unpleasant descriptions of the sufferings of hell in some sutras. But according to Shantideva, these have all been brought into existence — all these unpleasant experiences, these hell-like experiences — as a result of his own unskilful actions.

Q: But it's noticeable that he's not giving them an objective existence. They exist through past actions.

Well of course it's also said that even our present existence is not absolutely real, it has only a conditioned existence, but nonetheless we do feel both pleasure and pain. So it's the same in the case of the heavens and the hells, according to Buddhist thought. They are not ultimately real, but nonetheless we can experience pleasure in one and pain in the other.

Q: I find this line slightly disturbing. I mean I experience quite a bit of suffering in my life, and I sometimes wonder, what was it that I did to get this amount of suffering, and it doesn't seem to add up.

I suppose this is one of the questions that people have always asked. When we suffer, especially when we suffer intensely, we want to know why. We want to make some sort of sense of the situation, because

the suffering is there and it may be very intense. So it seems to me that there are basically three answers.

One, it is due to your own past actions, either direct or indirect. Indirect as when we take a human body. Or (two) it's due to the will of God. Or (three) that it just happens by chance. There's no reason why it happens, it's just an accident. Not many people nowadays like to think that suffering is due just to pure accident. That isn't very meaningful. So they've got a choice between God, and karma and rebirth.

And some people find one alternative preferable and, for various reasons, others find the other alternative preferable. But what people want to do is to give their experience of pain or suffering some sort of meaning, to be able to interpret it, to be able to understand it in some way. I remember hearing on the radio some time ago an interview with a woman whose child had been killed, and the woman said, I'm a good person, I'm a Christian, I go to church regularly, I've always worshipped God, and now look what he's done to me. It's God who has taken away the child; God who is responsible. She blames God. So she has found a reason, which satisfies to an extent. She can at least blame God. But not so many people nowadays have that sort of naïve faith in God, even Christians.

Maybe Muslims do. I remember again a similar experience listening to the radio. There was a recording of an incident where in Iraq, people in a convoy were attacked, and many were killed, and most of them

were Iraqis. So the recording showed their voices. And what one man, when people were killed, was shouting, 'It's His will, it's His will' - meaning it's the will of Allah. Even in those sort of circumstances. So that's one explanation that many people have found plausible and convincing throughout the ages, but not so many now. Buddhists, of course, have always sought the explanation of suffering in human action and the law of karma.

But we can't look at karma and karma-vipaka⁴² in too literal a manner: that you do something and then there's a result, a reward, or maybe a punishment. I think by virtue of the character of your own action, whether skilful or unskilful, you have an effect upon your own being, and that is what is really important. If you perform acts of violence, it's not that on some future occasion someone does something violent to you. The result is that you become a violent person. And that is a very negative development; you have, as it were, punished yourself. So one can think of karma more along those sort of lines.

In the course of one's life one does see that if one acts unskilfully, yes, there can be consequences here and now in this life, in this world. That's sometimes plain and obvious. The problem arises, when you extend karma from one life to another. But one can think of karma and karma-vipaka in terms of: one, the actions you commit, whether skilful

⁴² 'Vipaka' (often used as shorthand for 'karma-vipaka') is the result of karmic action. For more, [see here](#).

or unskilful; and two, the vipaka in the form of the way in which those actions of yours modify your over-all being and character.

Q: It would seem, looking at it in that way, that individual actions are a little less important; it's more of a cumulative process.

Yes. In the teaching about karma, there's a mention of what's called habitual karma, that is to say karmas, willed actions, which are repeated over and over again. They will of course inevitably modify one's character, as well as the more dramatic actions that you may commit, skilful and unskilful, only occasionally.

[47] Those who injure me are really impelled by my actions. For this they will go to the realms of hell. Surely it is they who are harmed by me?

Another little logical exercise on Shantideva's part. People act unskilfully towards me, they do me harm, and what's the result? They go to hell. Well it's my fault: I was in the way, so to speak, of their unskilful action. I'm not sure how seriously Shantideva really takes these arguments, or whether he's just enjoying the intellectual exercises. The logic here seems a little perverse.

[48] On account of them, because I am patient, my evil is considerably decreased. While on account of me they experience the long-lasting agonies of hell.

Again, he's developing that same rather perverse line of thought.

[49] Really it is I who am harmful to them, and they who aid me! So why, slippery mind, do you turn it the wrong way round and become angry?

We would normally say that it's Shantideva who's turning it the wrong way round, but as I said, he's being perverse. He's making this sort of logical point, which in a way is convincing, but one couldn't really influence anyone who wasn't a believing Buddhist.

Of course we can quite literally sometimes do harm to others, and think that we're doing good. And perhaps even do good when we think we're doing harm. It's sometimes very difficult to judge.

[50] If I am not to go to the realms of hell, I must possess the virtue of determination. If I protect myself, what in that case is the effect on them?

If one is not to be reborn in a painful situation, one must act and practise the Dharma with determination. That part is clear enough. Then in what follows Shantideva is asking, what is the effect on other people if I protect myself by practising the Dharma and as a result, am not reborn in hell? So, he is only acting for himself, for his own benefit. Presumably that's to be seen within the context of the Bodhisattva Ideal that he is concerned with. Simply to act in such a way that one benefits oneself is not the sort of thing that a Bodhisattva normally does.

[51] If I did retaliate, they would not be protected and I would fail in my practice, with the result that those in torment would be lost.

In other words, there's a continuation of this perverse logic, as I've called it.

[52] Since it lacks physical form, the mind can never be harmed by anything, but because it clings to the body it is oppressed by the body's suffering.

This is a very clear point. In a sense, the mind can't be harmed, because it's an immaterial thing. But the mind can be hurt, can't it? We can say things which hurt people, mentally. But literally, you can't hurt the mind in the way that the body can be hurt. That's pretty obvious.

[53] Humiliation, harsh speech, and disgrace, this collection does not oppress the body. Why then, mind, do you get angry?

It's as though Shantideva is assuming that we ought to get angry, or we can be justified in getting angry, only when the body is hurt, because according to him, the mind cannot be hurt. I suppose one could argue that, yes, the mind can be hurt. People's feelings can be hurt. So one finds oneself a little in disagreement with Shantideva here, perhaps. There's that rhyme about 'Sticks and stones may hurt my bones, but names will never hurt me.'⁴³ That's what Shantideva is

⁴³ For origins of this nursery rhyme, [see here](#).

saying. Words don't hurt, literally, but the meaning they convey may be very hurtful to the mind. Presumably it's an argument in favour of forbearance, because it is forbearance that Shantideva is still concerned with.

Q: What do you think of this basic division of mind and body?

That's a very big subject indeed. The general trend of Buddhist thought is not to accept a mind-body dualism. I have said more than once, that I think that, within samsara, one never finds body apart from mind, but sometimes the body may not be literally a material body, but a more subtle one, a more refined one. And according to traditional Buddhist teaching, it's that sort of body that one experiences in other worlds, in the so-called heavenly worlds.

But a radical mind-body dualism seems to be foreign to Buddhism. Of course then you have the problem of, if they're so completely different, how do they manage to interact? Materialism reduces consciousness to body, mind to body; but a one-sided idealism, similarly, reduces body to mind, or consciousness. Buddhism follows a **Middle Way**⁴⁴ in this respect. One might even say that the same experience can be looked at from two different points of view: from the point of view of body; from the point of view of mind. But this sort of topic has been

⁴⁴ A common term used by the Buddha to evoke the nature of the path to liberation. See '**Twenty Years on the Middle Way**' by Sangharakshita.

the subject of endless discussion through the ages. It's one of the very knotty problems.⁴⁵

Q: It strikes me, though, that Buddhism does tend to focus more on the mind, as a practical matter.

Well it does in a way because it's not just the mind, it is volition. It is mind which determines how you act. The first verse of the [Dhammapada](#)⁴⁶ says that: mind comes first. If you act with an impure mind, suffering follows. If you act with a pure mind, happiness follows. So mind has to be the starting point; experience, conscious experience, has to be the starting point, from a practical point of view.

[54] Will the disfavour that others show me devour me, here or in another birth, that I avoid it so?

Yes, is it such a big deal, if others disfavour us, or are inimical towards us? Perhaps we attach too much importance to it.

Q: Does this come down to our struggle with believing in a permanent, fixed self, and disfavour deeply disturbs that, and we constantly try to reassert our permanent self?

We have a sort of idea about ourselves, and we're constantly trying to maintain that, and if that is challenged, of course, instead of questioning the idea of that fixed self, we feel upset, and we respond

⁴⁵ For practical discussion in terms of health, see '[Mindfulness For Just About Everything](#)' by Paramabandhu.

⁴⁶ For Sangharakshita's own translation, see '[Dhammapada: The Way of Truth](#)'.

to the challenge. But it is the fixed self, or the idea of the fixed self, that is at the root of all the trouble.

[55] It may be that I avoid it because it gets in the way of my material gain, but that will be lost in this life alone, whereas my evil will certainly persist.

'Lost in this life' isn't such a big deal, but if you act unskillfully, well that will have unpleasant consequences much further on.

[56] Better that I die right now than have a long life lived improperly, since, even if I remain here for a long time, the same pain of death awaits me.

Better a short and virtuous life than just a long life, because in any case, we're going to die, and that can be a painful experience.

[57] In a dream one person enjoys one hundred years of happiness and then awakes, while another awakes after being happy for just a moment.

[58] Surely the happiness of both ceases once they have awakened. That is what it is like at the time of death for the one who lives long and for the one whose life is short.

Whether you have lived a long life or whether you have lived a short life, well when you come to die, it doesn't make any difference. You die, you're dead. That's a bit of a truism in a way. One could say that there is no value in long life just in terms of its length. It depends on

what you've done and it depends upon the quality of your life. For good or bad, when you come to die, well, you die. Just the same.

When you look back over your life, especially if you have lived a long time, it can seem rather like a dream. Especially if it is very different from the sort of life that you are leading at the present. Was that really me? Did that really happen? It does seem rather dreamlike. So whether long or short it doesn't really make any difference. In death is the final reality as it were.

Looking back on my wandering life and my life in Kalimpong, it is very easy to think well, was this really me? It was a very different set of circumstances. And I suppose in some ways, to some extent, a very different me. It is difficult to think of me as having once been a young man. Or even a baby! I don't think there are any people around now who have known me for my whole life. Most of the people who know me have known me in the course of the last 25, 30 or 40 years. There are still a few in India who knew me before I came back to England, but they are a dwindling band. Occasionally Order members travelling in India come across some old man sitting in a village, a remote village who says 'Ah, in 1950 so and so I met Bhante...' So yes the past can seem like a dream.

[59] And though I acquire many possessions, though I enjoy many pleasures over a long time, I shall go empty-handed and naked, like someone who has been robbed.

'Like someone who has been robbed'. It is interesting that Shantideva uses that comparison because you don't give up your pleasures, you don't give up your possessions willingly. They are torn away from you by the fact that you have come to the end of your life. So it does feel as though you have been robbed. Especially if you have identified yourself with those pleasures and those possessions, so that can be a very painful, a very uncomfortable experience. That is why we should sit rather loose in relation to the pleasures that we experience or the possessions that we have, so that when death comes it's not such a violent turning away from things that we are attached to.

It's a very sobering thought. The more greatly one is attached to something - a certain kind of enjoyment or possessions, the more likely you are to suffer at the time of death. We can be very attached to relations and friends or your property or your reputation, your power, and then it is all snatched away.

And Shantideva says you go naked, you can't take anything with you. When I was in my teens, I saw a balletic version of the old morality play '**Everyman**'⁴⁷. In the play God sends Death to summon Everyman to judgment. So Death goes to Everyman and says, 'You've got to come along with me. God calls you.' And Everyman wants to take someone with him and doesn't want to go alone so he goes to his

⁴⁷ *The Somonyng of Everyman (The Summoning of Everyman)*, usually referred to simply as *Everyman*, is a late 15th-century English **morality play**.

relations, but no one wants to go with him. Then he goes to his friends, not even his best friend wants to go with him.

Then he goes to his money bags, but they don't want to go with him either. After trying to persuade all these people to go with him, he hears a faint, weak voice coming from the ground and it's the voice of his good deeds. She says, 'Here I lie cold in ground, your deeds have me sore bound, so that I can neither stir nor go'. He manages to help her up and she staggers to her feet. She's very weak: he hasn't done many good deeds. But anyway, she does agree to accompany him.

This play really struck me at the time when I saw it performed as a ballet in London, during the war. It seemed to convey a very Buddhist sort of message. Apart from of course God: Death doesn't have to be sent by God, he just comes. It was a very moving play. It drives home a serious message and must have made a strong impression on the medieval people who saw it. It's only our good deeds that can go with us so to speak. And unfortunately our bad deeds as well, whether we like it or not.

[60] Suppose I destroy evil and perform good while living off my gains? There is no doubt but that someone who grows angry on account of gain acquires evil and destroys good.

Someone who lives off his gains... perhaps he's a merchant or a businessman living off the income from his business. Then of course with the wealth he has acquired it is possible for him to do good. Nonetheless he may be attached to his wealth and maybe could easily

become angry if anyone attempts to rob him of it. So, it's as though Shantideva is saying that the possibility of doing good in those sort of circumstances also entails the possibility of acting or behaving unskillfully. In one respect you may be skilful, in another unskillful.

It does raise the general question of about how much you need to live on to enable you to destroy evil, presumably unskillful mental states and to do good. I remember there is a passage somewhere in the writings of Asanga where he is arguing that monks ought to be able to possess property. Usually of course they don't possess property or riches. Because he says, if you don't have property, you can't be generous. You can't practise at least one form of dana. So he sees having a certain amount of wealth as necessary to the full practice of the Dharma. Nonetheless, in guarding that wealth even though you do use some of it skilfully you may fall into other forms of unskillfulness such as being angry with people who try to rob you.

It's a two-edged sword. You might say that I really want to help the FWBO, I really want to donate a lot of money. All right, I'll go into business. But when you get into business you find there are all sorts of crooked things you have to do. Perhaps you have to give bribes. Perhaps you have to cheat sometimes if you really want to make money. In the course of earning money for a good cause you may have to act fairly unskillfully, so that lands you in a contradictory sort of position. It seems it's that sort of situation, roughly speaking, Shantideva has in mind here.

[61] If that for which I live comes to nothing, what is the point of living, performing only unlovely deeds?

This is a rather serious reflection. This might be the reflection of someone who has lived not in a very ethical way. Even so his life has not been much of a success, and he reflects 'Well, what is the point of it all?' It's doubly sad. It's sad that he spent his life in that particular way and it's sad that at the end he had nothing positive to show for his life.

[62] If you argue that your dislike of one who speaks ill of you is because he is harming living beings, why then do you feel no anger when he defames others in the same way?

This is an obvious point. We don't like it when people criticise us, we feel it very strongly, whereas if he's criticising other people we don't take it so much to heart. This illustrates the strength of the difference which we feel between ourself and others. We are much more concerned about things that happen to us than about what happens to other people.

[63] You tolerate those showing disfavour when others are the subject of it, but you show no tolerance towards someone speaking ill of you when he is subject to the arising of defilements.

This is the same point made in slightly different terms. We feel something when it is directed towards us, but we don't feel it directed towards others.

[64] And my hatred towards those who damage sacred images and stupas or who abuse the true teaching is inappropriate, since the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are not distressed.

That's very, very appropriate and very timely. This sort of teaching goes right back to the Buddha himself. You may remember, I think it's the opening of the [Brahmajala Sutta](#), where the Buddha, the Dharma, the Sangha are being criticised by people. I forget by whom. This is reported to the Buddha, and he says that if the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha are being criticised, you should calmly consider whether or not the criticism is justified. You should not get angry, because if you got angry you would be obstructing your own practice of the Dharma. So the Buddha is quite clear here, he doesn't expect us to become full of indignation and anger, when he himself is criticised or his teaching is criticised or his Sangha is criticised. This is so different from what we find in some other religions.

Some people seem to feel that if their religion is attacked or criticised they are justified in getting angry. They are justified in being violent. But the Buddhist approach is totally different and the Buddha has made that clear from the very beginning. It is this teaching that Shantideva is referring to in this particular verse.

We know that in Tibet, under the [Cultural Revolution](#)⁴⁸, images were smashed, temples were destroyed. Monks were harassed and persecuted. And no doubt we feel upset and perhaps to some extent we are justified in feeling upset, but not justified in expressing anger or not justified in trying to respond with violence. It's a very fine line that we have to tread. Because one can't be totally indifferent when say the Buddha is criticised or images are smashed. But one must be very careful that one's feeling of pain or hurt doesn't result in one indulging in unskilful mental states or unskilful actions. Because in Europe, not so long ago, there were the [cartoons of the prophet Mohammed](#)⁴⁹ in that Danish paper and that led to a lot of violent outbursts on the part of Muslims, who seem to have felt fully justified in expressing anger and even in some cases being violent, by way of protest. But that is quite foreign to the spirit of Buddhism. So I think it's important that people should generally understand this, that this is the Buddha's position.

⁴⁸ A social-political movement that took place in the [People's Republic of China](#) from 1966, intended to remove [capitalist](#), [traditional](#) and cultural elements from Chinese society, and to impose [Maoist](#) orthodoxy within the Party. [See this note](#) on the destruction of 6000 monasteries in Tibet.

⁴⁹ 12 editorial cartoons, most of which depicted the [Islamic](#) prophet [Muhammad](#), were published in the Danish newspaper [Jyllands-Posten](#) on 30 September 2005. The newspaper announced that this publication was an attempt to contribute to the debate about criticism of Islam and self-censorship. Muslim groups in Denmark complained, and the issue eventually led to protests around the world, including violent demonstrations and riots in some Muslim countries.

[65] When people harm one's teachers, relatives and others dear to us, one should, as above, regard it as arising on the basis of conditioning factors and refrain from anger towards them.

This is very difficult and a lot of people in this world are in this dilemma. When those near and dear to one, one's wife and one's children are attacked or misused it is very difficult not to feel anger and not to be violent. So, of course, we can apply the teaching of dependent origination here. But it'd be very, very difficult. I think one can apply it in a situation like that only if one is a very serious and experienced Buddhist. The ordinary non-Buddhist is of course not going to ever think in that sort of way.

There have been two or three quite remarkable cases that I've heard about on the radio, where someone's son or near one has been killed and the mother, in one case it was the mother, did not feel any anger or hatred towards the killer. She felt only compassion for him, because he must have been in a very negative state of mind to have been able to commit such an action. So occasionally one does find people responding in this way and sometimes one has to admit it's in accordance with their Christian faith: that they genuinely believe in what Jesus teaches in this respect and are genuinely trying to practise that. In a way that is quite admirable, in a way as Buddhists we can appreciate.

[66] Whether the cause possesses consciousness or not, distress is inevitable for embodied beings. That distress appears in what is conscious. Tolerate that pain therefore.

What is Shantideva saying here? He is concerned with kshanti, forbearance, so therefore what is it that you practise forbearance in relation to? Something painful. Whether it is caused by something animate or inanimate that's really irrelevant from the point of view of the practice of forbearance.

[67] Some commit offences out of delusion, others deluded grow angry. Who among them should we say is free from blame, or who should we say is guilty?

So some act out of delusion, some act out of hatred inspired by delusion: there is a kind of ideological hatred we could say. Shantideva wants to know which is the more blameworthy?

I think somewhere in the Pali scriptures the Buddha does say something to the effect that acting unskillfully on the basis of an established wrong view is a more serious matter than acting unskillfully out of straightforward anger or greed⁵⁰. That is what I would call the ideological hatred. It's got its roots in some sort of ideology and derives a great deal of strength and pseudo-justification from that.

⁵⁰ Reference unknown. For the Buddha's basic exposition of skilfulness and view, see the [Sammaditthi Sutta](#) and also this [collection of suttas](#).

In my book 'From Genesis to the Diamond Sutra' I have written on the way in which the Church in the past has treated heretics. It wasn't that the inquisitors, say, who burnt people at the stake, just had a personal dislike for them or a personal hatred, no, they had a firm belief that heretics were dangerous. They were dangerous because they had the effect of encouraging skepticism about the Christian faith among people and in that way imperilling people's souls. So they were convinced that when they were trying heretics, and finding them guilty, and sentencing them to death, and burning them at the stake, they were performing a good action, which God would approve. So here, the unskilful action is deeply rooted in wrong views, a whole complex of wrong views. So therefore, much more difficult to extirpate. It's like a plant that has a whole network of underground roots so it's very difficult to tear up, whereas some plants have just a few short very weak roots and they can easily be pulled up.

So this is the reason why in Buddhism so much importance is attached to right view and wrong view. Right view can strengthen right action and wrong view can strengthen wrong action or unskilful action.

If we think of modern times, the Nazis had certain wrong views which went deep into their consciousness and those views were responsible for some very terrible behaviour on the part of the Nazi party and the German government.

[68] Why did you behave before in such a way so that others now trouble you in this way? Everybody is subject to the force of prior actions. Who am I to change this?

Who is speaking here, I wonder? This sounds almost like a rationalisation for not feeling sorry for people who are suffering as a result of their previous wrong deeds. It's as if they are getting their just deserts. Perhaps one shouldn't think like that: just feel sorry for those people.

I think somewhere amongst **my aphorisms** there is an aphorism that some people are quite happy to forgive their enemies in this life, and they quite genuinely forgive them because they are convinced that God will punish them later when they die! But that's not real forgiveness.

So if we forgive, we forgive wholeheartedly. And also if we see people suffering we should not rejoice because we believe they are only suffering the results of their own unskilful actions in the past; but we should also feel compassion for them, while perhaps acknowledging the justice of their suffering.

[69] But realising this I shall make the effort to perform good actions in such a way that everyone will develop an attitude of friendship, each towards the other.

That is the objective, to act in such a way as to create harmony within society. There is no direct reference to the Sangha here but clearly it

applies to the Sangha, but it also seems to apply to a much wider situation. I remember there is a saying of [William Blake's](#)⁵¹. He says somewhere, 'Religion is politics and politics is brotherhood'⁵², so brotherhood, friendliness, amount to more or less the same thing. We're to act in a such a way as to have a positive harmonising effect upon the society in whose midst in which we move. Encouraging friendly relationships between all people, regardless of differences. Sometimes of course we have to recognise the differences objectively but they are just differences. They shouldn't be seen as reasons for giving rise to unfriendly feelings. I think that this kind of aspect of Buddhist teachings is quite difficult for a lot of people to understand because it runs counter in some respects to human nature or even runs counter to some other religious teachings.

[70] When a house is burning down and the fire has spread towards the next house, any grass or such in which it might spread is dragged off and taken away.

[71] So, when the mind is catching alight with the fire of hatred as a result of contact with something, it must be cast aside immediately for fear that one's body of merit might go up in flames.

⁵¹ Seminal English poet, painter and printmaker of the 18th/19th Century.

⁵² From '[Jerusalem](#)': 'Are not Religion & Politics the Same Thing? Brotherhood is Religion'. For the text of Blake's works, see the [Blake Digital Text Project](#). For the illuminated manuscripts, see [The William Blake Archive](#).

This comes back to what was almost the first verse:.. that anger or hatred destroys the merit that you have heaped up perhaps in the course of hundreds of lifetimes. So the flame of hatred is to be extinguished immediately. In an earlier verse it spoke of hatred as just welling up. As soon as we become aware of that, if it does happen at all, which is unfortunate, we should just damp it down as soon as we can. Otherwise it will consume our good qualities. If we act in accordance with it, it will leave us very regretful and sorry, and ashamed perhaps.

Shantideva is concerned that that sudden burst of anger and hatred does not come to fill your whole mind and affect every aspect of your thinking and your behaviour in such a way that any good qualities that you may possess may be simply burned up and nullified, they're neutralised or even destroyed for the time being. That's what he's concerned about. The damaging, detrimental affects of hatred.

If one might develop the analogy a little bit more, there is the anger that flares up. So I suppose when the fire catches the thatched roof it flares up. But then there is also the anger that smoulders underneath the ashes, sort of biding its time. Waiting for an opportunity to harm another person, so we're left in no doubt as regards the unpleasant and painful niche of anger and how incompatible it is with the life of the compassionate Bodhisattva.

[72] If a man condemned to death has his hand cut off and is spared, is it not good? If, through human sufferings one is spared from hell, is it not good?

Here is a reminder of the rather grim punishments in ancient India. If a man who is condemned to death, instead of being executed, he just has his hand cut off, he counts himself lucky. In the same way, it's better for us that we endure a little hardship and suffering in the cause of the Dharma, or for the sake of the Dharma, rather than act unskillfully and go to hell⁵³.

Again, a rather logical argument. Putting it into the words of the Dhammapada, better to endure a little suffering in a good cause than enjoyment now and punishment later. In a way, this does suggest a slightly utilitarian approach to ethics. In some ways, it's better to stress the positive appeal of the good life, and basically hone on enjoying what it is. A vision of suffering that is sort of incidental.

[73] If even this small measure of suffering cannot be tolerated now, then why is anger, the cause of torment in hell, not restrained?

Rather strong words: again the argument from the possibility of future punishment, future suffering. Really not much one can add to that. It's pretty direct.

⁵³ The idea of 'hell' in a Buddhist context is framed somewhat differently from the traditional Christian view. For some perspectives, [see here](#).

Anger and violence, if carried to extremes, are likely - according to Shantideva - to cause one to end up in hell, in a painful state, a state of suffering. So, this is an additional argument for the practice of forbearance. Shantideva is producing all these different arguments and persuasions in the hope that anyone reading the book will at least be convinced by one or two of them, even if they're not convinced by all of them.

[74] In this very same way, on account of anger, I have been placed in hells thousands of times, and I have benefited neither myself nor others.

Once again hell comes into it; also the question of rebirth, because basically the Bodhisattva wants to benefit others. If the Bodhisattva commits unskillful actions and ends up in hell, he's not in a position to benefit anybody. So again Shantideva presupposes rebirth, hell, and so on, [as part of] the Bodhisattva ideal.

[75] But this suffering is not of that kind, and it will produce great benefit. Delight is the only appropriate response to suffering which takes away the suffering of the universe.

Here we get a more positive touch: delight. If you practice forbearance as a Bodhisattva, in order to benefit others, it's a very positive thing; it's even a delightful thing.

[76] If others take pleasure and joy in praising the strength of someone's virtues, why, mind, do you not similarly rejoice in praising it?

This seems to be an objection. I've been listening to an audio book of another translation of the Bodhicaryavatara, and these objections are made in a different voice. The bulk of the text is read by a very pleasing female voice, and then a rather gruff male voice butts in with the objections from time to time, and this I think is one of those verses. The first time I heard that, it sounded just like the voice of Mara! The answer seems to be expected in the next verse.

[77] Such pleasure from your rejoicing is a blameless source of pleasure, not prohibited by the virtuous, attractive to others in the highest degree.

It's only too often we rejoice, we find pleasure in, something which is not very skilful. But rejoicing in someone's virtue; rejoicing, for example, when they practice forbearance - this is a highly positive thing. Shantideva is striking a slightly different note here. I suppose one can connect it with sympathetic joy, and also with singing the praises of other people - rejoicing in people's merits.

'A blameless source of pleasure' is a very significant expression. You might also say innocent pleasure. I think some years ago something struck me, it was in the course of a convention, an Order Convention. Everybody was there in the tent, and one of the speakers made a remark, and everyone laughed. I thought to myself, it was such a

happy, innocent laugh. And I thought, one doesn't often hear that sort of laughter in ordinary life. But it was so happy, in a way so childlike, so innocent - without any sort of negative element in it. I was really struck by that. It's that sort of innocent joy that we should be able to feel, to experience.

There's verse in the Dhammapada which says it would be like a certain kind of *devata*⁵⁴ - living on joy. One could say joy is very nourishing. You feel joyful if you're uplifted; you feel well. Especially, perhaps, when you rejoice in the virtues of others.

[78] What if you do not like it because it is a pleasure only for him? If you were to stop giving wages and the like, both visible and unseen benefit would be lost.

It's difficult to follow the argument here, I'm afraid. Let's consult another translation.

Those who are not concerned by others' happiness, and do not want them to be happy, are like someone who stops paying wages to those who work for him, who then experiences many problems.

That's clearer and pretty obvious.

⁵⁴ The Hindu term for 'deity'.

[79] When your own virtues are being praised, you want others to be pleased as well. When the virtues of others are being praised, you do not even want to be pleased yourself.

Again, he's addressing himself. This just shows how partial we can be, how one-sided.

Q: Is this talking about envy and jealousy, rather than straightforward anger?

Yes. Envy and jealousy are very unskilful mental states. And also, they're very painful unskilful states. The jealous man is not a happy person. We can see that in Shakespeare's *Othello*⁵⁵. People can be tormented by jealousy. You don't get any benefit, and pleasure from it at all. It's a very serious weakness, almost an illness, in some people who are jealous or envious. Of course, the opposite is rejoicing in the merits of other people; feeling happy when they're praised.

Q: Not paying another's wages implies a rather short term view of the benefit, and I suppose forbearance implies having a longer term view of what is healthy or more skilful.

Yes. And of course forbearance itself can be pleasurable in itself if you reflect on the fact that you're behaving skilfully, and also if it's accompanied by compassion.

⁵⁵ The Tragedy of Othello, the Moor of Venice is a tragedy by Shakespeare. The work revolves around four central characters: *Othello*, a *Moorish* general in the *Venetian* army; his new wife, *Desdemona*; his lieutenant, *Cassio*; and his trusted *ensign*, *Iago*. Its main themes are racism, love, jealousy and betrayal.

[80] After arousing the Awakening Mind, out of the desire for the happiness of every being, why are you angry at them now that they have found happiness for themselves?

Yes, Shantideva is thinking, what a contradiction! You as a Bodhisattva are aiming at Enlightenment so that you can benefit all living beings, and here in the world at present, if someone is praised, or if someone enjoys a certain happiness, you're upset. How contradictory.

Shantideva is pointing out in a specific way, not only how we often fail to live up to our own aspirations, but how contradictory our actual behavior is to those aspirations. One would have thought that the very first thing that a would-be Bodhisattva would be happy about is to see other people happy or satisfied or successful, but no. Sometimes he isn't, even though he is supposedly dedicated to bringing happiness to all. I suppose we can apply that very easily nearer home.

[81] You desire Buddhahood, which is worthy of worship throughout the three worlds, expressly for living beings. Why do you burn inside on seeing them have some slight honour?

He may be making this remark within the context of the monastic community, where sometimes, of course, jealousy does occur. He's perhaps envisioning a situation where another monk is being greatly respected and honored by somebody, maybe by the lay people, and he feels jealous. And he says, how inconsistent, because as a Bodhisattva you're hoping that all beings will become Enlightened; all

beings will become Buddhas, and of course as Buddhas they will receive immense respect. But despite that, you begrudge the little respect that is being paid to somebody here and now.

So again, a tremendous inconsistency. But I've seen this myself, in India as a monk - little jealousies between the monks. Sometimes, not always.

[82] The person who nourishes someone whom you should nourish is really giving to you. On finding him supporting your family, you do not rejoice; you become irate.

Another example of inconsistency: the would-be Bodhisattva behaving in a very un-Bodhisattva-like way. If, in the previous verse, he had in mind a monastic situation, here he has in mind a more domestic situation.

[83] What does the person who wishes Awakening upon living beings not wish for them? How can one who is angry at the good fortune of others possess the Awakening Mind?

The 'Awakening Mind' is this translator's version of Bodhichitta⁵⁶. You can't have both.

[84] If he had not received that gift it would have remained in the donor's hands. In any case it is not yours, so what matters it whether it was given or not?

⁵⁶ For talks on the significance of Bodhichitta and Sangharakshita's view of it, [see here](#).

This suggests again a monastic situation, where one monk might be envious of the gifts given to another. There's been a rule for the monks that you shouldn't look into the contents of another monk's bowl - his begging bowl - the inference being to see whether he has received more than you. Even within a monastic life, where in principle monks have given up so much in leading an ascetic life, there's always room for little jealousies and envies to creep in.

Q: What sort of implications do you think these verses have for us as non-monastic ordines? For a monk who enters the monastery, the whole idea is that he just accepts whatever is given to him. It's not so simple for us out in the world. We're actually going out and trying to earn our living.

Yes, you sometimes argue over your salary, maybe even join a union to try to pressure your employer to give you more. So it is a different sort of world, and different values. But I suppose as a Buddhist, as an Order member, one is seeking to live simply, and to demand from society only what is enough to sustain one's life in a reasonable way. And not to be greedy.

In much of the East, especially in the **Theravada**⁵⁷ countries, the ethics of the general spiritual practice of the laity - where there is any spiritual practice at all - usually, apart from giving dana to the monks, is a sort of watered-down version of the monastic ideal. Say, monks don't eat

⁵⁷ The oldest surviving branch of Buddhism, derived from the Sanskrit word meaning 'the Teaching of the Elders'.

after 12:00, so the lay person doesn't eat after 12:00 once a month. Or even twice a month. Or the monk observes celibacy, so once a month the lay person observes celibacy.

In that way, the layman's spiritual life tends to be a watered-down version of the monastic. But it seems to me that we need somehow to formulate an ethic for the person who is living and working in the world, and who is trying to practise the Dharma as seriously as the monk practises it, despite living and working in the world. And that's the position, of course, of many Order members.⁵⁸ So, I think we have to try to work out a different kind of ethic, especially one connected with the whole question of **Right Livelihood**. Right Livelihood within the Movement, as team-based Right Livelihood, and Right Livelihood outside the Movement, where one is working in an ordinary job, so to speak⁵⁹.

One needs a system of ethics and spiritual life and training generally which is appropriate for the person who genuinely does want to lead a fully Buddhist life, but nonetheless who has also to live and work in the midst of secular society.

[85] What! Have him suppress acts of merit, and those who are faithful, and even his own virtues? Let him not accept when he is being given donations? Tell, with what are you not angry?

⁵⁸ See 'Monk or lay' discussion on [The Buddhist Centre Online](#).

⁵⁹ Listen to explorations of [Right Livelihood](#).

‘Tell, with what are you not angry?’ An angry person can be angry with anything. He’s not very particular, provided there’s something onto which he can latch his anger. He’s not exactly happy, but that’s how he likes it.

[86] Not only do you not grieve at the evil you yourself have done, you seek to compete with others who have performed acts of merit.

Here’s another paradoxical situation. Presumably Shantideva is still addressing himself. He’s saying you don’t grieve over the unskilful actions that you yourself have performed, which is what you should be doing; instead you try to compete with others in virtue. This raises a profound question of competition, especially competition in spiritual life and the extent to which it can be a positive thing. People probably are competitive by nature. It’s very difficult to avoid. But I think the important thing is one should think of competitiveness as a means of encouraging oneself to do the best that you can; not so much as concern with defeating the other person. I think that’s probably the right or the more positive action towards competitiveness.

The right sort of competition, one could say, is a form of collaboration. I think you get that in the [Karuna appeal](#)⁶⁰, don’t you, where different people go off door-knocking. There is a sort of competitiveness as to

⁶⁰ A regular intensive fundraising event by the [Karuna Trust](#), a Triratna UK-based charity striving to help oppressed people to develop the skills, dignity and confidence to transform their lives and take their rightful place in society.

who can do best - who can raise the biggest amount of money. You're not trying to do anybody down. You're just using the competitive element as a means of urging yourself to do as well as you possibly can. So I could say that sort of competitiveness is relatively healthy. But when you want to win at all costs, as in some sports, even to the extent of taking drugs that you're not supposed to take, well that is extremely unhealthy, and unethical in fact.

Competition is certainly a means of achieving excellence for both or all the competing parties, not just for the one who, so to speak, wins. The others have benefited because, although they may not have won, they've done their best. They've done their very best and that is what is really required; that everybody should do their best. The fact that someone does better than anybody else in a way is incidental. So if you do win you shouldn't crow too much. You've just done your best [and] others have also done their best. In that respect you're all equal, but your best happens to be better than their best. So I don't think healthy competitiveness needs to be discouraged.

[87] Suppose something unpleasant does befall your rival. Would your satisfaction make it happen again? It would not happen without a cause, merely by your wishing it.

I'm not sure what Shantideva is really getting at here, but it's pretty clear. Take the example of a sport. If you're competing against somebody else and they happen to trip and fall over, that may give you a certain amount of satisfaction because it enables you to be

more certain of winning. But the fact that you might wish for that sort of accident to happen again, doesn't mean it will happen merely because of your wishing. It would, if it happens at all, be the result of a certain sequence of causes and conditions.

[88] If your wish was fulfilled, what pleasure would there be for you in his suffering? But even were there some advantage in this, what disadvantage would ensue?

Yes, after all, you are supposed to be a Bodhisattva, or would-be Bodhisattva as Shantideva would say. So even if your wish of that kind was fulfilled, what good would it do you?

[89] For this is the horrific hook cast by the anglers, the defilements, from whom you will be bought by the warders of hell and stewed in cauldrons.

Rather a dreadful fate! So what is that hook? What is the verse referring to? Taking pleasure in your rivals defeat. Not just the defeat but the fact that some accident befalls him that prevents him from winning the competition, whatever it happens to be. Basically, if you're a real sportsman you'll regret the fact that your opponent has an accident because that will not enable him to genuinely compete, and if he can't genuinely compete then neither can you because you're rivals. It would be a very empty victory if you won just because he'd had an accident and could not do his best. It would be a hollow victory.

Unfortunately some people do feel a sort of quiet satisfaction when things go wrong for some other person.

The **defilements**⁶¹ are like a hook. Once they get stuck in one's gullet they're very difficult to remove, and you can be hauled in by Mara, not to speak of being boiled alive in hell like a fish. But this whole area of competitiveness is very interesting. Because it obviously comes up in connection with business and the question arises of what is fair competition, what is unfair competition? It's a very big business question. If a Buddhist is involved in any kind of business this ethical issue obviously arises.

[90] Praise, good repute, and honour lead neither to merit nor long life, are no advantage to strength or to freedom from disease, nor do they bring me physical pleasure.

'Praise, honour and good repute.' Shantideva is making the point that in a way they're just words. They don't constitute by themselves any merit of one's own. The fact that you are praised and held in high repute doesn't mean that you're any further advanced on the Path to Enlightenment. And at the same time, people are so influenced by praise and rewards and decorations.

⁶¹ The 'kleshas', 'mental states that cloud the mind and manifest in unwholesome actions'.

I remember there's an incident in the life of **Napoleon**⁶² when he was distributing all sorts of war awards and honours when he'd made himself **Emperor**. Someone said to him, 'Why do that? These things are just baubles - just toys'⁶³. So Napoleon smiled and said 'Ah, but men are governed by baubles'! So in Britain recently we had '**cash for honours**'⁶⁴ - some people apparently are so keen on getting themselves an honour that they're prepared to fork out substantial sums of cash. So clearly it must mean something to them.

As **Tennyson** said, 'His honour rooted in dishonour stood'⁶⁵, referring to a different kind of situation. 'His honour rooted in dishonour stood.'

Q: Do you think Shantideva's going so far as advocating practising forbearance towards praise?

⁶² Napoleon Bonaparte (18th/19th C), regarded as one of the greatest French military and political leaders in history.

⁶³ The full **attributed quote** is: 'On appelle cela des hochets; eh bien! c'est avec des hochets que l'on mène les hommes... Croyez-vous que vous feriez battre des hommes par l'analyse ? Jamais. Elle n'est bonne que pour le savant dans son cabinet. Il faut au soldat de la gloire, des distinctions, des récompenses.' 'You call these baubles, well, it is with baubles that men are led... Do you think that you would be able to make men fight by reasoning? Never. That is only good for the scholar in his study. The soldier needs glory, distinctions, and rewards.' As quoted in *Mémoires sur le Consulat. 1799 à 1804* (1827) by Antoine-Claire, Comte Thibaudeau. Chez Ponthieu, pp. 83-84.

⁶⁴ A political scandal in the UK in 2006-7 concerning the connection between political donations and the award of **life peerages**.

⁶⁵ From '**Lancelot and Elaine**' by Alfred Lord Tennyson, from '**Idylls of the King**' [1859-1885].

Maybe forbearance is not quite the right word here, but certainly one should try to practise equanimity in the face of praise. There are the eight worldly winds and two of those relate to praise and blame. One should do one's best to maintain one's equanimity in the face of praise and blame. Anyone in the course of their lives is going to encounter a certain amount of praise and a certain amount of blame.

I've certainly encountered quite a lot of praise and quite a lot of blame also, in one way or another. I've always said to myself if someone praises me, 'Well sooner or later I'm going to be blamed by somebody'. And if I was blamed by somebody, I'd say to myself, 'Never mind, somebody's sure to praise me before long!' So one tries to maintain an even mind. If one day you get a bouquet, the next day you get a brickbat. That's how life is. So one has to try to maintain equanimity, and not be disturbed, not be elated by praise, and not be downcast by blame.

Q: Is that state of equanimity in response to praise fundamentally similar to the state one should have in response to criticism or anger?

If one is responding to criticism - as the Buddha said of criticism to the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha - one should just ask oneself, 'Is the criticism justified?'⁶⁶ That means you adopt a calm, objective sort of attitude. You don't just react negatively because you're being criticised. Maybe there's something in the criticism. Maybe it should be

⁶⁶ In the [Brahmajala Sutta](#). For details, see '[Responding to Praise and Blame](#)' by Vishvapani.

taken seriously. If there's nothing in it, all right you can afford to shrug your shoulders and forget about it

In the case of praise the temptation could be seen as more subtle because you think 'Oh well, they're wise; they're praising me; they must be right.' So the fact you're being praised by the wise shouldn't make you any less vigilant.

[91] And this is the kind of thing that would benefit the wise person who knows what is best for himself. One desiring pleasure for the mind could resort to drunkenness, gambling, and the other vices.

This verse is more easily understood in the alternate translation:

Transient pleasures, such as drinking and playing meaningless games are deceptive. If I understand the real meaning of the human life, such things will have no value for me.

That's clearer and, of course, rather obvious in a way.

[92] For the benefit of renown they deprive themselves of benefit. They even kill themselves. Are words fit for food? In death who feels their pleasure?

Some people are crazy to become famous. Perhaps this has a more positive side. There are those lines in Milton. 'Fame is the spur that the clear mind doth raise - that last infirmity of noble mind.'⁶⁷ But in

⁶⁷ From 'Lycidas' by John Milton. The full quote is: 'Fame is the spur that the clear spirit doth raise / (That last infirmity of noble mind) / To scorn delights, and live laborious days.'

modern times and the television age it's become rather ignoble rather than noble. Sometimes people will even commit a crime so that their name and their photo will be in the papers. It is said, in the case of some criminals, after they've been arrested, the first thing they ask for is the newspapers to see if their picture's there. There is this desire; this craving for renown, for fame, for celebrity. People will go to great lengths to become famous, to become a celebrity. They may even kill.

[93] Like a child that howls a wail of distress when his sandcastle is broken, so my own mind appears to me at the loss of praise or renown.

I suppose you lead a rather sad life when you've been famous, been a celebrity for a while, and then it all collapses and no-one knows you any more. Shantideva gives a very apt comparison of a child whose sandcastle has been broken - maybe washed away by the waves: the ex-celebrity. Well sometimes they are in a very sad state. Recently I heard something about [George Best](#)⁶⁸. He retired at the age of 25, after being I think England's most famous footballer⁶⁹. He became an alcoholic and the closing years of his life were very sad indeed, though just for a few years he'd been very famous indeed.

⁶⁸ Celebrated footballer of the late 1960s and '70s who played for [Manchester United](#) in England.

⁶⁹ This refers to Best unexpectedly quitting his club Manchester United relatively early in 1974 at age 27, though he returned to football for a number of clubs around the world in short spells, until finally retiring in 1983, age 37.

Of course in the case of famous footballers it's the loss of income also. The model is, when one does achieve a level of renown or celebrity or praise, do not be too upset when it comes to an end, as one day it will. The opposite story - this is more the case with literary people and artists - is that they're not recognised for the greater part of their lives, and in the case of some of them fame and fortune come right at the end of their lives, when perhaps they're too old or too tired to enjoy it. That's also sad.

[94] Because it lacks consciousness, I must admit that a word cannot praise me. Undoubtedly, the cause of my delight is that another is delighted with me.

It's very pleasant when people are delighted with us. It's something we have to be careful about. And similarly, when they show their displeasure, that also we have to be careful about. But probably praise is much more seductive. I think we're likely to be much more on our guard against being too depressed when we're blamed than we are being on our guard when we are praised and when we feel that perhaps we deserve the praise - that is much more seductive.

This is a very basic Buddhist teaching. I mentioned a little while ago [the worldly winds](#)⁷⁰. The worldly winds are mentioned right at the end of the [Mangala Sutta](#). The Buddha says 'He whose mind is not moved when touched by the worldly winds but remains stainless and secure,

⁷⁰ For a full exploration of the teaching of 'the worldly winds', see [Urban Retreat 2011 archive on this theme](#).

his is the greatest blessing'. So in some ways you can say that the whole practical ethical teaching of the Buddha is summed up in these words. And when I first encountered them, they were words that made a very strong impression on me. I can still remember the Pali:

*Putthassa lôka dhammehi - Cittam yassa na kampati
Asokam virajam khemam - Etam mangala muttamam.*⁷¹

It's almost like a **mantra**⁷². My own verse translation is:

*He whose strong mind, untroubled by the touch of all terrestrial
happenings whatso'er is void of sorrow, stainless and secure. His is
the greatest blessing. Or This is the most auspicious sign.*

There's a great deal of teaching summed up here. Worldly conditions is my translation of **lokadhammas**⁷³ - the four pairs of opposites: success and failure; praise and blame, and so on. If we attain a state where our mind is untroubled by these opposites, we have achieved a very great deal. Here Shantideva is concentrating much more on praise and blame and the dangers of attaching to them.

⁷¹ As given at [here](#).

⁷² 'Mantra' is a sacred utterance, numinous sound, or a syllable, word, phonemes, or group of words believed by some to have psychological and spiritual power. See '[The Symbolism of Colours and Mantric Sound](#)' by Sangharakshita.

⁷³ Commonly translated as 'worldly winds'.

[95] But what does it matter to me whether another's delight is in me or someone else? His alone is the pleasure of that delight. Not even a trifling part of it is mine.

One should not appropriate that delight. It doesn't really belong to you. He feels delight; that's his experience. The fact that he feels delight in you, is in a sense nothing to do with you. You gain really nothing from it. Once again, we need to be detached.

Of course it's not necessarily quite as straight forward as that because on the one hand we want to sing people's praises - we want to rejoice in their merits - but we don't want them to become inflated or puffed up. So we have to be a bit objective even when we enthusiastically praise someone or rejoice in their merits.

[96] If I take pleasure in his pleasure, let me take it in every single case. Why do I take no pleasure in people who are made happy through their faith in another?

[97] Therefore, it is because I am praised that delight is produced in me. In this case, too, because of such absurdity, it is simply the behaviour of a child.

To be happy just because someone praises you is very childish. It's behaving just like a child does when he's told 'you're being a good boy'. It means you're easily influenced. Your emotional positivity depends upon the praise or the good opinion of other people. That means you can very easily change. So if people praise you for

something one day, well you will maybe try to continue acting in the way that they praise. But maybe on another occasion someone praises you for something quite different, so you go along with that and try and be more like that. So the more susceptible you are to praise the less sensibility there will be in your own character and personality. You can be more easily influenced by the winds of passion.

You really do have to have self-confidence and be clear about your own values. The case in my own experience I had years ago when I was staying in Benares with Jagdish Kashyap⁷⁴. On the same day I had two letters: one was from a very orthodox Singhalese monk who I knew; the other from a Singhalese lay-woman. The monk wrote to me 'When you can write such good intellectual articles on Buddhism, why do you waste your time writing those foolish poems?' That's what the monk wrote. The lay-woman wrote 'When you can write such lovely poems, why do you waste your time writing those dry intellectual articles?' You can't please everyone! So I'm afraid I continued writing both articles and poems.

[98] Praise and so on give me security. They destroy my sense of urgency. They create jealousy towards those who possess virtue, and anger at success.

⁷⁴ Another of Sangharakshita's main teachers during his years in India. See 'My Eight Main Teachers'.

Shantideva says quite a lot of things here. Let's take it clause by clause.

Praise and so on give me security.

'Give me security': psychological security; emotional security. This suggests that you're not really a very secure person.

They destroy my sense of urgency.

Yes, that's the point. You need to be kept on your toes, as it were, and encouraged, but it should be a critical encouragement that will motivate you to make more of an effort to be even better, not just to settle down in your present achievement or present level.

They create jealousy towards those who possess virtue, and anger at success.

'Jealousy towards those who possess virtue'. How could that be? If you're praised, well obviously you start thinking very well of yourself - perhaps too much of yourself - and that may mean you may start feeling competitive in relation to those possessed of virtue and perhaps be jealous of them if you feel that they perhaps are doing better than you.

... and anger at success.

Sangharakshita: '...and anger at success' presumably of others of whom you're jealous.

[99] Therefore those conspiring to destroy things such as my praise, are really engaged in preserving me from descent into hell.

Yes, people who try to destroy our praise are really doing us a good turn. Because it means our own heads won't be turned by that praise and we shall be saved from a possible descent into hell. I suppose this is just one aspect of Shantideva's general idea that our enemy is really our friend. It's not an easy thought, but there is some truth in that. If we can think of our enemy of having in fact done us a good turn by his enmity, well perhaps it will save us from many sleepless nights. I think Nietzsche says something about being careful in one's choice of enemies. An enemy keeps one on one's toes, keeps one alert. Perhaps it's not the best way of being kept alert but there is something in that saying.

[100] The shackle of acquisition and honour is unfitting for me who longs for liberation. How can I hate those who liberate me from that shackle?

I suppose one has to take the spirit of what Shantideva is saying. But it's true, because if we lose something, whether it's stolen or any other way, we can reflect quite realistically that perhaps I was a bit attached to that particular object, and perhaps it's not a bad thing that I'm no longer in possession of it.

As for praise, as I mentioned earlier, sometimes people may praise you, but you can be pretty certain that sooner or later you're going to

incur some blame from someone or other. I think perhaps it's better to reflect in that way.

[101] How can I hate those who have become, as if by the Buddha's blessing, a door closed to me as I seek to enter upon suffering?

'A door closed to me as I seek to enter upon suffering.' Suffering by allowing my head to be turned by praise and so on. Those who have the Buddha's blessing: they're doing the Buddha's work. They're helping me.

[102] Nor is anger appropriate in the case of someone who hinders acts of merit. There is no spiritual practice equal to forbearance. Without doubt, this is accomplished through him.

Shantideva is speaking in the highest terms of the practice of forbearance. I suppose in a way his reasoning goes like this: that the outstanding quality, the characteristic quality, of the Bodhisattva, is compassion. But nothing destroys compassion like anger. So the Bodhisattva cannot afford to be angry. He therefore has to practice forbearance, and therefore, for the Bodhisattva, forbearance is the highest form of spiritual practice. It is that which enables him not to give way to anger, to develop compassion, and therefore to be really and truly a Bodhisattva.

At the very beginning of the chapter Shantideva says that a sudden outburst of anger will consume all one's previous merits. And of

course a Bodhisattva's greatest merit consists in his compassion. His compassionate activity.

Q: So he is getting at the outburst, at the expression of the anger, which is the dangerous thing. But the impulse to anger, the feeling, the irritation or whatever, before the expression of anger, is still there and needs to be dealt with.

Yes, it's still there and needs to be dealt with. It's not enough simply to restrain oneself. Genuine forbearance goes beyond restraint. The real practice of forbearance includes compassion, because of your compassion for those who are doing you harm and seeking as it were to make you angry.

Q: So anger doesn't even arise, if you're practicing all the time?

Yes, just as in the case of the mother, even if the child kicks her, she doesn't feel angry.

Q: In the case of a practitioner would that imply some degree of Insight⁷⁵, or reflection. Could we use this as a reflection for practice?

Well, yes and no. One could say that in a sense there are two levels of practise. The first level where the practice is a discipline, where you do something with effort, where ego is still present, but nonetheless you practise. The other level is where, due to Insight, the practice

⁷⁵ Usually given as a translation of '[vipassana](#)', the transformative attainment of seeing clearly and deeply into the nature of reality so that one cannot fall away from that degree of awareness. Listen to [various perspectives on Insight](#).

becomes part of your very nature, because there is no ego there at all, or very little ego. So one is the mundane practice of the virtues, the other is the transcendental practice of them. As with the [Eightfold Path](#)⁷⁶; there is the [Mundane Eightfold Path](#) and there is the [Transcendental Eightfold Path](#).

In the case of the Mundane Eightfold Path you're following it with effort and there's always the danger of slipping back. In the case of the Transcendental Eightfold Path, to follow that path has become your second nature and there's no possibility of your falling back, you've become at least irreversible.

Q: Shantideva, throughout the text, uses the language of self and other. Does that indicate the presence of an ego and therefore a more mundane level of practice?

To the extent that you are aware, not just aware but strongly aware, of the existence of 'an other' or take the other as real, to that extent of course you are still within the realm of ego, because you can posit the existence of 'other' in a real sense only in distinction from a strong

⁷⁶ Perhaps the most widely known of the Buddha's teachings. It is ancient, extending back to the Buddha's first discourse and is highly valued as a treasury of wisdom and practical guidance on how to live our lives. Traditionally the teaching is seen as highlighting eight areas or 'limbs' of 'right' practice (Sangharakshita prefers 'perfect' to 'right'), which sit in mutual relationship to one another and are each essential elements in an integrated approach to the Dharma.

Listen to Sangharakshita's classic series of talks on [The Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path](#). Read the [extended companion book](#).

sense of 'I'. So yes, Shantideva would seem to be addressing the struggling would-be Bodhisattva, namely, apparently, himself. If he had been a real Bodhisattva, he wouldn't have needed to address all these exhortations to himself. Or perhaps he was a real Bodhisattva and was only putting the verses of the Bodhicaryavatara in that form for the encouragement of other people. We don't really know I suppose.

Q: So the compassion that's included in forbearance here would be attainable by anybody, even without Insight?

Well it depends what kind of compassion and what degree, what depth of compassion. For it to be irreversible and as it were, invincible, there would have to be Insight, but it is possible to practise and to develop compassion short of developing Insight. Compassion in the full sense, transcendental compassion, goes together with Insight, but one can have, so to speak, mundane compassion, without there being any genuine Insight. There may be just a general understanding.

[103] In fact, it is through my own deficiency that I fail to practise forbearance here. In this instance I alone create the hindrance when grounds for an act of merit have been provided.

He's saying that we are our own worst enemy. Someone gives me a wonderful opportunity of practising forbearance and I don't take that wonderful opportunity. So it's my fault. I'm my own worst enemy. He gives me the opportunity of doing something really good and I don't

take it. He's coming back in these last few verses very much to forbearance directly, having made a bit of a detour in previous verses.

[104] If one thing does not exist without another, and does exist when that also exists, then that other thing is really its cause. How can that be called an obstacle?

Very logical. Shantideva is nothing if not logical. If someone acts towards you with anger, well you practise forbearance. Where forbearance exists well the anger exists, where anger exists the forbearance exists. They both go together.

So someone's anger towards me, or act of violence towards me, is the cause of my forbearance. One could perhaps dispute with Shantideva here because there is a difference between cause and occasion. So strictly speaking I suppose one should say, not that someone's aggression against us is the cause of our forbearance; it's the occasion of our forbearance. That would probably be more correct.

It is one of the principles of Buddhist philosophy, or Buddhist thought, that for a phenomenon to occur there must be at least two conditions⁷⁷. I think that was one of the arguments against the creation of the Universe by God⁷⁸. That it cannot just have one cause.

⁷⁷ See note on '[Pratitya Samutpada](#)' [here](#).

⁷⁸ [See this note](#) on the Buddhist view of a creator God. For a Christian argument *against* pratitya samutpada as the basis for refuting the Creationist approach, [see here](#).

[105] After all, a person in need who turns up at a suitable time is not a hindrance to generosity, nor can it be called a hindrance to going forth when one meets someone who has gone forth!

In the same way that someone who assaults you is not a hindrance to forbearance, so in the same way, someone who turns up at a suitable time is not a hindrance to your being generous.

[106] Beggars are easy to find in this world but those who will cause harm are not, because, if I do no wrong, no one wrongs me.

It's difficult to find those who will act aggressively towards me and therefore enable me to practise forbearance. Because if I have acted rightly, well there will not be those people. In a way he seems to be in a paradoxical sort of situation, regretting even his own good behaviour, because it means he doesn't have any enemies who will give him the opportunity for practising forbearance.

It's an obstacle to the practice of forbearance. that there are no people with regards to whom one is obliged to practise it. Shantideva therefore seems to attach some value to the practice of forbearance even apart from the necessity of practising it. He doesn't say 'well if there's no need for you to practise forbearance, that's a good thing'. He seems to have the view that the practice of forbearance is something that, as a Bodhisattva, you really need to do. If no one behaves in such way that you have to practise forbearance, well, that

is unfortunate. Therefore one would need even to look for, even to expose oneself to, people in relation to whom you can practise forbearance. So Shantideva seems to see forbearance as a sort of virtue in its own right one might say.

We usually assume that nice quiet places with pleasant scenery and agreeable companions are the good conditions for spiritual practice. But that's perhaps a rather simple-minded way of looking at things, and perhaps true only with regard to the beginner. Perhaps even to a certain kind of temperament. That's why there is the saying which I mentioned earlier that 'Hell is the lama of all the Buddhas'⁷⁹. There is a place for difficulties; there is a place for obstacles.

Q: Have you found yourself that there have been certain times in your life, certain conditions that have been particularly helpful in your own practice?

That's very difficult to say. I can certainly say that when I was moving about in India, especially central and western India, among the ex-Untouchables, conditions were often very difficult, material conditions, in every sense, and I was having to exert myself quite a lot. But I consider that as a very valuable part of my experience, and difficult though it was, I did really enjoy it at the same time.

So I suppose the moral is, that good conditions for spiritual practice are not necessarily easy conditions. Some people find it far from easy

⁷⁹ See earlier note.

staying at **Guhyaloka**⁸⁰ for a few months. Some find it really difficult. There you are: ideal conditions. But it's basically not so much a question of thinking whether the conditions are easy or difficult, but maintaining one's inspiration, strengthening one's spiritual aspiration, and gradually finding that you can operate under almost any conditions.

[107] Therefore, since he helps me on the path to Awakening, I should long for an enemy like a treasure discovered in the home, acquired without effort.

Again there's a verse very similar in the Dhammapada, where the Buddha says that if you are reproved by someone you should be just as happy as if you'd found a buried treasure⁸¹. This is very similar.

I should long for an enemy. I should long for someone who will give me the opportunity of practising forbearance. Not just put up with it, but long for it. Long to be tested, as it were, long to be given an opportunity of practising that wonderful virtue. Shantideva is a little extreme at times.

⁸⁰ The Triratna Buddhist Community's retreat centre for men in Spain, mainly used for four-month long ordination courses.

⁸¹ From '**Dhammapada - Panditavagga: The Wise**', translated from the Pali by Acharya Buddharakkhita: 'Should one find a man who points out faults and who reproves, let him follow such a wise and sagacious person as one would a guide to hidden treasure. It is always better, and never worse, to cultivate such an association.'

[108] Both he and I, therefore, receive the reward of this forbearance. It should be given to him first, since the forbearance was first occasioned by him.

Note that the word is ‘occasioned’ by him, not ‘caused’ by him. So the merit is due to him. If I practise forbearance, well it’s he who has enabled me, he who has been the occasion, so let the greater merit go to him. Of course that may not be the other person’s intention, but Shantideva doesn’t consider that.

[109] If an enemy deserves no honour, because he did not intend you to achieve forbearance, then why is the True Dharma honoured? It too is the unconscious cause of achievement.

So what does one think of that argument? The Dharma is not a person but we do in a way honour the Dharma. In fact we [Go for Refuge to the Dharma](#)⁸².

[110] If an enemy is not honoured because his intention is to hurt, for what other reason will I be patient with him, as with a doctor who is intent on my well-being?

⁸² Traditionally Buddhists express their spiritual aspiration by ‘Going for Refuge’ to the *Buddha*, his *Dharma* (teaching) and the *Sangha* (spiritual community) – or the [Three Jewels](#), as they are called. The emphasis on Going For Refuge as a unifying factor for all Buddhist practice traditions is a hallmark of Sangharakshita’s non-sectarian approach to the Dharma. See many perspectives from within Triratna on ‘[Going For Refuge](#)’. See also, ‘[Going For Refuge’ As Idiom And Metaphor](#)’ by Dhivan Thomas Jones.

Yes. The doctor is intent on my well-being even though he may hurt us in the course of performing a little operation. The enemy is a bit like a doctor in a way. Hmm. So in a way the comparison is changing a bit. The enemy was more like a friend but now the enemy is become even more like a doctor. Doing good to you, even though it may be a bit painful.

[111] In that case, it is really in dependence upon his malign intention that forbearance is produced, and in that case it is really he that is the cause of my forbearance. I must worship him as the True Dharma.

Here the word 'cause' is used rather than 'conditions'. Perhaps we should understand 'occasion' rather than 'cause'.

Q: If even one's enemy can provide an occasion or even an inspiration to practise the Dharma, couldn't one's entire world, one's entire existence be seen as spurring one towards greater progress?

Yes. Even if you look at nature, you look at a tree, you see a leaf falling, it's giving you a teaching, giving you a teaching of impermanence. So you can look upon everything that surrounds you as giving a teaching in some way or other. You can learn from everything, learn from anyone. It's not that they will have the conscious intention to teach you, especially the inanimate things, but one can certainly derive a lesson from everything.

This verse comes to me from **St. Paul**: 'All things work together for good, for him who loves God'⁸³. So we could translate that into Buddhist language, that all things work together for him who loves the Dharma and tries to practise it. You can always find occasions for practising the Dharma. Of course Shantideva is more concerned with those occasions for practising the Dharma, and especially forbearance, that normally we would not think of in that particular way. That we would more likely think of as hindrances.

We might think, 'Well here am I, wanting to be calm and serene in mind, and along comes somebody and tries to make me angry'. We don't take it as an opportunity for practice, but take it as interfering with our practice. Shantideva is trying to direct our attention to those circumstances which normally we would regard as hindering us, and he points out that they really help us, in fact they're essential in some respects if we want to practise forbearance.

[112] For this reason the Sage has said that the fertile field of living beings is the fertile field of the Conquerors, because many have reached success and spiritual perfection by propitiating them.

Propitiating is a curious sort of variant on forbearance. It's more active than forbearance. Usually it's used in connection with God, or a god, that you seek to please them, to win their favour, by offerings or

⁸³ Romans 8:28, 'And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.' (**King James Bible**).

behaving in a certain way. So Shantideva is saying 'Well, here are beings, this is one's field of practice'. In fact it was the field of practice of the Buddha's, and he gained his Enlightenment by, Shantideva says 'by propitiating beings'. But the basic point is I suppose that one gains Enlightenment, the full Enlightenment of a [Samyaksambuddha](#)⁸⁴, not in isolation, but through one's interaction, one's positive interaction, with other beings. That's the point that is being made.

Of course, we mustn't forget that in the ultimate sense there are no beings; but, of course, Shantideva doesn't go into that. On the level at which you are conscious of yourself as a separate existence and of others as separate existences, on that level you need to practise with regard to others, and among other things you practise forbearance. That practice, so to speak, of 'propitiating' others will lead you to Enlightenment, Shantideva is saying.

Q: Wouldn't you say though, that even the Bodhisattvas still set out to save beings?

Yes, but at the same time the Bodhisattvas realise that there are no beings to save. The two have to go together. This is the refrain we've

⁸⁴ Samyaksambuddhas gain [Nirvana](#) by their own efforts, and discover the Dharma without having a teacher to point it out. They then lead others to Enlightenment by teaching the Dharma in a time or world where it has been forgotten or has not been taught before, because a Samyaksambuddha does not depend upon a tradition that stretches back to a previous Samyaksambuddha, but instead discovers the path anew. In the [Bahudhātuka Sutta](#) ('Many Kinds of Elements Discourse'), the Buddha tells Ananda: 'It is impossible, it cannot happen that two Accomplished Ones, Fully Enlightened Ones, could arise contemporaneously in one world-system - there is no such possibility'.

had throughout the [Perfection of Wisdom](#) texts⁸⁵. The Bodhisattva resolves that he will lead all beings to Enlightenment at the same time he reflects that there are no beings in the ultimate sense. But as I said, Shantideva isn't going into all that in the Bodhicaryavatara. He remains very firmly on the level of practice.

The practice of all the precepts, just the ordinary precepts, has relation to other beings. The first precept, non-violence, clearly relates to other beings; not stealing relates to other beings, and no sexual misconduct, relates to other beings; not telling lies relates to other beings. So the whole of our practice, in one way or another, relates to other beings and is concerned with our attitude towards other beings. That applies above all with regard to the practice of the Bodhisattva, and especially here in connection with forbearance.

[113] When the transmission of Buddha-qualities comes equally from both ordinary beings and from the Conquerors, what logic is there in not paying that respect to ordinary beings which one pays to the Conquerors?

The Conquerors are of course the Buddhas, but how have the Buddhas become Buddhas? By the practice of the paramitas, which brings them into relation with beings. So the fact that those beings exist, with regard to whom the Buddhas were able to practise

⁸⁵ The Prajnaparamita texts ('Perfection of [Transcendent] Wisdom') elucidate the practice and understanding necessary as indispensable elements of the Bodhisattva Path. See, Sangharakshita, '[Wisdom Beyond Words](#)'. Listen to [the introductory lecture](#) and download the [free community audiobook](#).

forbearance and other qualities, it's on their account that the Buddha is able to become a Buddha. So we should respect beings in the same way that we respect the Buddhas, because both have made possible the development of the Buddha-qualities. That seems to be the argument. So we should be grateful to all those beings with whom the Buddha in his previous existences came in to personal contact, and through whom, or with the help of whom, by virtue of the occasion of whom, he was able to become a Buddha. So we should be grateful to them as well as to the Buddha himself. In a way they have equal value.

[114] The greatness of the intent comes not from itself but rather from its effect, and so the greatness is equal. In which case ordinary beings are the equals of the Conquerors.

Those ordinary beings didn't intend that the future Buddha should become a Buddha. But even though they didn't intend it the result was the same, as though they had intended it like the Buddha himself. So with regard to the effect they're equal. So, they also should be honoured equally.

Q: The ethics that we ourselves practice is one of intent, however, not necessarily one of effect, correct?

Yes indeed. So far as we're concerned intent is definitely what has to be taken into consideration above all. But Shantideva is concerned with making another kind of point,.

[115] It is greatness on the part of beings that someone with a kindly disposition is honourable, just as it is greatness on the part of the Buddhas that merit comes from serene confidence in the Buddhas.

Let's use the alternative translation:

Whatever merit there is in venerating one with limitless love is due to the greatness of all beings, and whatever merit there is in having faith in the Buddhas, is due to the greatness of the Buddhas.

That's a bit clearer, especially in the case of the Buddhas. In the last few verses Shantideva has brought in the Buddha. He speaks of veneration of the Buddha. It's quite an interesting thought that Shantideva offers: yes, we must venerate the Buddha, obviously all Buddhas do, but what about those who in one way or another, intentionally or unintentionally, did help the Buddha to become the Buddha. We have to venerate them as well.

With regard to the life of [Gautama the Buddha](#)⁸⁶, there are those who did actually help him in the course of his life. You may remember that after the Buddha gains Enlightenment, and after he decides to communicate his Enlightenment, or communicate the teaching, he reflects, 'To whom shall I first communicate that teaching that I've

⁸⁶ Siddhartha Gautama, the name given to the historical future Buddha before his Enlightenment. For accounts of this particular story, [see here](#). For a comprehensive revisiting of the Buddha's life story, see '[Gautama Buddha](#)' by Vishvapani.

discovered, that truth that I've discovered' and then he thinks of his earlier teachers.

He then says to himself, 'They were very helpful to me, and therefore I should communicate what I have discovered to them'. Then he realises that they no longer are alive. Then he thinks of his five previous companions, and he reflects that they were helpful to him in his earlier days, so he will communicate the teaching to them. They are still alive, so he goes to them. The Buddha here recognises the value of the help that he received earlier on in his career and is grateful for that. So we can speak of the Buddha feeling gratitude towards those who had helped him. In a way there's a little hint here of the sort of thing that Shantideva is talking about.

Years ago I gave a talk on gratitude⁸⁷, because it does seem to be very often one of the unacknowledged virtues. We need to be grateful to all those who in one way or another have helped us along the spiritual path. Some of course may not have intended to do so, but we can be grateful to them none the less.

[116] Therefore in one aspect of the transmission of Buddha-qualities, ordinary beings are equal to the Buddhas. Of course, none are fully equal to the Buddhas, who are oceans of virtues with unlimited aspects.

⁸⁷ 'Looking At The Bodhi Tree', 1999. Listen to [more talks on gratitude](#).

Shantideva is reverting to the theme mentioned just earlier by him, that sentient beings by being objects of the Buddha's forbearance, for instance, have helped him to become a Buddha. Therefore in a way, they're known as his equal, and therefore we should respect other beings. That seems to be the conclusion. Shantideva seems to be basically inculcating, for the would-be Bodhisattva, a positive attitude to other living beings, especially other human beings, and this argument seems to be intended to drive that point home.

If it wasn't for others and their being objects of the Buddha's forbearance when he was a Bodhisattva, there would have been no Buddha, there would have been no Dharma for us to follow. Therefore we should be grateful to them, should have a positive attitude towards them and see them in a sense as equal to the Buddha.

[117] If a virtue appears anywhere which is even an atom of those who are a unique mass of the very essence of virtue, then even the three worlds are not adequate for the purpose of worshipping it.

Not to speak of worshipping the Buddha, who has oceans of good qualities, we cannot pay sufficient respect even to the smallest manifestation of what is virtuous or positive. That seems to be the meaning. Once the seed is there it can develop. So long as there's even the slightest trace of positivity, well that positivity can develop eventually, even into Enlightenment. So it's not to be despised, in fact it is to be highly regarded, even venerated. We do sometimes see that

thing, in quite ordinary people, a flash of sheer goodness as it were, and we can appreciate that and even venerate it because it contains an infinite potential, if that person only happens to come across the favourable conditions for its development.

[118] Yet the very best aspect of the development of Buddha-qualities is found in relation to ordinary beings. One should worship ordinary beings in accordance with this aspect.

The translation uses the word worship and perhaps the term ‘respect’ could just as well have been used. Ordinary beings are to be respected, venerated, even worshipped, on account of the part that they have played in the Buddha’s attainment of Buddhahood. And also I suppose, for the fact that they themselves contain the potential for the realisation of Buddhahood.

[119] Moreover, for those friends who give immeasurable help without pretext what better recompense could there be than propitiating beings?

Let’s consult the other translation again for this verse:

Moreover, besides pleasing living beings, what other way is there for us to repay those supreme, unchanging friends who bestow immeasurable benefit?

Yes, Shantideva seems to say ‘what better way have we for repaying the Buddhas for all that they do for us, than by respecting living beings, who, in some cases at least, by being objects of their

forbearance, have enabled them to become Buddhas'? It's a little bit round about but it's as though Shantideva is saying, 'Well, you're concerned with Buddhas and you're concerned with living beings, so you're concerned with those who have actually realised Enlightenment and those who have the potential for realising Enlightenment. And what better way of showing your gratitude (than) by a positive attitude towards living beings'?

One might paraphrase that rather irreverently and say 'well, love me, love my dog'. If you love the Buddha, you will love Buddhists presumably. It would be rather odd if you were to profess to love the Buddha but not particularly like Buddhists. So This is what Shantideva is saying, show your love for the Buddha by loving Buddhists, or appreciating them at least.

Q: You could take it further, couldn't you, just loving beings?

Yes, because beings are not just potential Buddhists but potential Buddhas, though it might take them rather longer.

[120] One should do it for those for whose sake they dismember their own bodies, and enter the Avici hell⁸⁸. For that reason, even if people are extremely malignant, all that is skilful should be done for them.

⁸⁸ In Buddhist mythology, Avichi ('without waves') is the lowest level of the Naraka or 'hell' realm, into which the dead who have committed grave misdeeds may be reborn.

According to traditional Buddhism the Buddha, as a Bodhisattva, passes through all sorts of lives and sacrifices himself on many occasions and in that way gains Buddhahood. So you should show your gratitude to him for what he has done by the way in which you behave towards sentient beings. Shantideva's putting almost the same sentiment as before into slightly different words.

[121] How can I act with arrogance rather than servitude towards those very same masters for the sake of whom my Masters, of their own accord, have such lack of regard for themselves?

Presumably Shantideva is referring to the Buddha's lives as a Bodhisattva, before he became a Buddha, and when he sacrificed himself for the sake of other beings, with the attitude that they were his masters. So how can we be disrespectful towards those living beings, whom the Buddha himself, as a Bodhisattva, regarded as his masters, and for the sake of whom he sacrificed himself?

Once again Shantideva's purpose seems to be just to encourage us to respect living beings, and the part that they may have played in the Buddha's own previous lives, and also bearing in mind their own potential for gaining Enlightenment.

[122] At whose happiness the Lords of Sages become joyful; at whose distress they are sorrowful: to satisfy these creatures is to satisfy the Lords of Sages; to offend them is to offend the Sages, too.

We can't take this very literally for obvious reasons. First of all Buddhas don't become happy or sad. They're even-minded. But Shantideva puts it in that way. So if the Buddhas themselves become happy when beings are happy and sad when beings are unhappy, we should do our best to make beings happy and avoid making them unhappy. Again, he is trying to encourage a certain attitude, a positive attitude, towards other beings, but we can't take this verse at least quite literally.

In the Pali Canon, we don't find the Buddha using the language of service with regard to himself and his teaching. This sort of language comes in the Mahayana, and of course comes here in the Bodhicaryavatara. No, the language of the Pali Canon is a bit different. The Buddha is always the Teacher. He's always the Master⁸⁹. I don't remember him ever being described in the Pali Canon, either by himself or by anyone else as being a servant, or serving. That sort of language goes quite against the general image of the Buddha that we're presented with in the Pali Canon, which is of course the human historical Buddha. Shantideva seems to be speaking more of the Mahayana Buddha who is much more of an idealised figure, one might say.

[123] Just as no bodily pleasure at all can gladden the mind of one whose body is engulfed in flames, so too those full of

⁸⁹ See [here](#) for some epithets of the Buddha in the Pali and Mahayana texts.

compassion cannot come near to feeling joy when living beings are in distress.

I think this rather underestimates the capacity of the mind in certain extreme circumstances. Yes. I mention this because it has been a bit in my mind recently on account of the investigations that Devamitra's been doing into the life of [Quang Duc](#)⁹⁰. He was the first of the Vietnamese monks who immolated themselves in Vietnam, and by all accounts, though he was enveloped in flames, his mind remained quite calm and steady, as one can see from the photographs taken at the time. There are other remarkable cases, even in relatively modern times, or earlier times, of people who've died in that sort of way, but apparently maintaining a very positive mental state. So it does seem that the mind has capacities that we're not usually aware of, in exceptional circumstances, and perhaps exceptional people.

And Quang Duc was certainly an exceptional person; Devamitra's been interviewing people who knew him, and finding out more and more about him, and he's found, he's discovered some quite extraordinary things, which I hope that he'll eventually be able to embody in a book or at least a lengthy essay, about Quang Duc. I was around at that time, and I remember very clearly reading about Quang Duc's self-immolation and seeing photographs of it in the Indian papers. I had Vietnamese monk friends who spoke to me about it. In

⁹⁰ The Vietnamese monk famous for his self-immolation in 1963 as a protest against persecution of Buddhists by the South Vietnamese government. See '[Quang Duc](#)' by [Devamitra](#).

the same way, in the case of the genuine Bodhisattva, it's difficult for him to enjoy himself when he realises that beings are suffering.

Usually we find it very easy to exclude from our mind the thought of others suffering, especially when we are enjoying ourselves; we find it very easy, usually, to shut it out. But Shantideva is saying that the Bodhisattva is not like that. While beings are suffering, whether they realise it or not, it's difficult for him to feel happy. He wants to relieve them, wants to relieve them of their suffering, and that's why he wants to become Enlightened, so that he can do that more effectively, by teaching them.

Q: How do you think this fits with the idea that an Enlightened being, having attained Nirvana⁹¹, has attained highest happiness, and yet also will feel for other living beings in states of distress?

I suppose it's a state of mind which is very difficult for us to envisage. I sometimes quote a line of Tennyson, which goes like this; he speaks of 'Some painless sympathy with pain'⁹². It must be something of that sort. Somehow you sympathise with pain, but you don't experience the pain. Nonetheless your sympathy is genuine. So some painless sympathy with pain. One has to think of the Buddha exemplifying that in the highest degree. He deeply sympathises with the pain of other

⁹¹ Literally 'blown-out' or 'extinguished'; referring to the peace of having extinguished the fires of greed, hatred and confusion in ourselves.

⁹² From 'In Memoriam, A.H.H.', section 8, written for his friend Arthur H. Hallam: 'Canst thou feel for me/Some painless sympathy with pain?' The full text is [available here](#).

people; it's a very genuine sympathy, but it doesn't mean that the Buddha himself is suffering. It's a sort of state of mind very difficult for us to have an idea of.

[124] Therefore, today, I confess as evil the suffering I have caused to all those of Great Compassion by causing suffering to those people. May the Sages forgive that which has oppressed them.

Shantideva now brings in the element of confession. He asks the Buddhas to forgive the pain he has caused them by inflicting pain on those on whose account they feel pain, in other words living beings, human beings. Of course Shantideva seems to assume here, as in previous verses, that the Buddhas do actually, literally, feel the pain of others, but I do not personally agree with that.

I think we have to be honest with regard to these rather grandiose sentiments, whether we really mean them or not. And I think with regard to the Mahayana generally, and its rather florid style of expression, we have to be particularly careful. We don't have to be so careful with regard to most of the Pali Canon, the Pali scriptures, because the language is much more restrained and sober. But the language of the Mahayana is often very extravagant.

We have to make sure that we really understand what it is we're saying not just repeat the words, and not think that we understand what we're saying when in fact perhaps we don't, or don't understand it fully. Of course, there are some people who can get into rather

strange mental states where they really do think that they're taking upon themselves the sufferings of the world. It's a sort of saviour complex that can develop, and that's certainly not a very healthy thing. Perhaps it's much safer to just think, I would like to be so spiritually developed, so highly developed, that I can really make a very definite contribution to the lessening of human suffering. That's more realistic, and more truthful.

*[125] Now, to propitiate the **Tathagatas**⁹³, with my entire self I become a servant to the world. Let streams of people place their foot upon my head or strike me down. Let the Lord of the World be satisfied.*

I don't like this word 'propitiation'. It suggests something rather dark and negative in the character of the Buddha, which needs to be propitiated. Also, this expression of others placing their feet on one's head. This is very extreme indeed, because in India, normally you would never allow your head to come into contact with somebody's feet, unless of course you revered them very, very greatly.

Let me become a servant to the world. Of course, Shantideva has expressed this much more elaborately early on in the text. And 'a servant of the world' is perhaps a bit too ambitious. Perhaps one can be of service within one's own sphere of activity. Perhaps Shantideva, when he speaks these words, is thinking of the time that he will be a

⁹³ An epithet of the Buddha which he uses to describe himself. Often translated as either 'one who has thus gone' or 'one who has thus come'.

Buddha, and will perhaps be able to be of service to the whole world, not just to a few people.

It's easy to be carried away by wonderful dreams of what you'll do when you become a Buddha, or even a great Bodhisattva, and actually not do very much in the here and now, in your immediate circumstances. I think that's perhaps a weakness of some popularised forms of the Mahayana, that people lose themselves in these sorts of dreams.

Q: Would it be better then to have a simpler form of the Transference of Merit and Self-Surrender⁹⁴?

No, I wouldn't like to alter Shantideva's words, but certainly we should interpret them in our own case rather modestly, and realise our limitations, but do the best we can within those limitations.

[126] There is no doubt that those whose selfhood is compassion have taken this entire world for themselves. Is it not the case that they appear in the form of these good people! It is these people who are the Lords. How can I be disrespectful?

Those 'whose selfhood is compassion': that clearly refers to the Buddha, or Buddhas. They've 'taken the whole world for themselves, that is, made no distinction between themselves and the world,

⁹⁴ The [closing section](#) of the [Sevenfold Puja](#), a [key ritual](#) performed in the Triratna Buddhist Community, the text of which is derived from the Bodhicaryavatara itself.

themselves and others. And then, 'Is it not the case that they appear in the form of these good people!' That's a further point: that we should see the Buddhas as existing potentially, in people, people in general.

It's a question of recognising the potentiality that people have. This may sometimes be quite difficult, because people may be behaving in a very unskilful way, and it may be difficult to see any virtue in them, not to speak of potentiality for Enlightenment. But it is very much the belief, the confidence of Buddhism in general, not just the Mahayana, that every human being has the potential of becoming Enlightened. So one should bear that in mind in dealing with people, and bear in mind the possibility of a change, as it were a conversion, taking place in the case of even the most unlikely people.

[127] This alone is the propitiation of the Tathagatas; this alone is the fulfilment of my own goal; this alone beats back the suffering of the world; so, let this alone be my vow.

Here Shantideva seems to be winding up or be concluding. You please the Buddhas by serving living beings, by becoming a servant of the world. But again, propitiation I think isn't really quite suitable.

[BREAK IN RECORDING; missing verses:]

[128] When a single servant of the king tyrannizes the entire populace, the far-sighted populace has no power to effect change,

[129] Because he is not really alone: his potency is the potency of the king. So one should refrain from slighting any impotent person who has caused offence,

[130] Since his potency is that of the warders of hell and of the Compassionate Ones. For that reason one should propitiate living beings, just as a servant would a cruel king.

[131] What could a wrathful king do that would equal the agony of hell experienced as a result of causing misery to living beings?

[Recording resumes:]

[132] What could a gratified king give that would equal Buddhahood, experienced as a result of causing happiness to living beings?

That's a more positive, other side of the coin. It's pretty obvious.

[133] Never mind future Buddhahood arising from the propitiation of living being! Do you not see good fortune, renown, and well-being right here and now?

Yes. You'll gain a good reputation. Yes. 'All this and heaven too.'⁹⁵ Shantideva's saying, not only Buddhahood, but good fortune, here and now.

⁹⁵ Possibly refers to the title of the 1939 novel by Rachel Field, or the subsequent film.

[134] Serenity, freedom from disease, joy and long life, the happiness of an emperor, prosperity: these the patient person receives while continuing in cyclic existence.

The 'patient person' presumably being the person who practises forbearance. Yes. So let's go through the list of the benefits he receives.

Serenity: you just forbear, so you have a serene mind.

Freedom from disease: perhaps diseases which originate in a negative mental state.

Joy: you'll enjoy practising forbearance. That's Shantideva's idea, anyway. It shouldn't be something that you grit your teeth and do. You should positively enjoy practising forbearance.

Long life, possibly: At least, perhaps you won't make enemies, who might bring your life to an end. Also, perhaps if you're happy and contented and joyful, that will contribute to longevity.

The happiness of an emperor: That's supposed to represent the summit of human happiness. So Shantideva is saying if you only practise forbearance, well, you'll be as happy as any earthly person possibly could be, even an emperor - I suppose even a **chakravartin raja**⁹⁶.

⁹⁶ Ancient Indian term for an ideal universal ruler, who rules ethically and benevolently over the entire world.

Prosperity: The connection here is not so obvious. Let's take Shantideva's word for it.

So we end on a very happy note: '...these the patient person receives, while continuing in cyclic existence.' It's not that he will be happy and prosperous just in this life. The patient person will enjoy all these advantages in his future rebirths, until Enlightenment.

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