Chapter 5 Attentiveness

Once it is clear, however, that the problem lies in the mind itself, or rather in the emotions that arise there, the simple but difficult task is to become aware of how thoughts emerge and develop. This is the theme of the fifth chapter, on vigilant introspection. Again we find the same note of practical optimism. **Just as the mind is the source of every suffering, likewise it is the wellspring of every joy. And once again, the good news is that the mind can be controlled and trained.**

If, with mindfulness' rope,
The elephant of mind is tethered all around,
Our fears will come to nothing,
Every virtue drop into our hands. (5.3)

The essential problem, which a moment's reflection on experience will confirm, is not that defilements occur within our minds, but that nine times out of ten, we are not aware that they are there. Or rather, by the time they obtrude upon our waking consciousness, they have usually acquired such dimensions and strength that in the ordinary run of things we are powerless to prevent their consequences. The sudden outburst of destructive anger, the lustful impulse, the cruel or arrogant word that can have life-changing consequences, must have had their source, perhaps a long time previously, in a momentary flash of impatience or desire that, had it been adverted to at the time, might easily have been neutralised and dispelled. All very well, but **how precisely is one to become so perfectly self-possessed that no impulse of the mind, however slight, is able to pass unnoticed?** Alas, there are no magical solutions. **The technique prescribed by Shāntideva is that of constant, unrelenting vigilance; a continuous advertence to what is happening within the inner forum. He says that we should guard our minds with the same care with which we would protect a broken or wounded arm while moving through an unruly crowd; and here again, the educative methods of fear and encouragement have their place. Shāntideva recommends that as soon as we feel the urge to do anything (to speak or even to walk across the room) we should get into the habit of self-scrutiny. The slightest impulse to negativity should be greeted with a total paralysis of the system: "It's then that like a log you should remain" (5.50–5.53). No thought should be allowed to develop into action unchallenged. Given the required degree of self-awareness, it comes as no surprise that Shāntideva should refer to the minutiae of everyday behaviour; all the little things we habitually overlook, excusing ourselves with the thought that they are too insignificant to bother about.** In such a practice, in fact, **it is precisely the small, often subliminal impulses and behaviour patterns that require the closest attention.** And in any case, **everything we do affects the world. Any action can be the cause, or the cause of the cause, of another's suffering. Thus the way we eat, walk, move furniture around, even matters of personal hygiene; all are significant.**

A heightening of consciousness of the kind Shāntideva advocates is liable to awaken an understanding of something that for most of us passes, if not actually unnoticed, at least unexamined. This is the peculiar infatuation that the mind has with its physical support. We love our bodies and are deeply involved in them. We are engrossed in their sensations to the point that we identify them as ourselves and invent philosophies, and theologies, to justify this. Like the Buddha before him, Shāntideva calls all this into question, pointing out how strange it is that the mind should identify with, and find desirable, something so external to itself, so fragile, so ultimately disappointing and, in its constituent parts, so repulsive as the physical body. In relation to its own bodily support and that of other beings, the mind seems to move in a dimension that is almost entirely one of make-believe; and it is an extraordinary paradox that it can experience the most powerful yearning for something by which, on closer inspection, it is almost invariably repelled. Nevertheless, Shāntideva does not in any way repudiate the body, and the spirit of destructive asceticism and repression is as foreign to him as to any other Buddhist teacher. The body has its place and value, but the mind must be freed from an obsessive and enslaving preoccupation with it.

5.1.
Those who wish to keep the trainings
Must with perfect self-possession **guard their minds**.
Without this guard upon the mind,
The trainings cannot be preserved.

Having taken the vow of bodhichitta, we should know what are the precepts to be followed; what we have to do and what we must avoid doing. We need to be always careful in our thoughts, words, and deeds. It is here that attentiveness, or mental scrutiny, keeps us on our guard, so that when we are on the point of committing a negative action, we are aware that we are in danger of doing so and are therefore able to apply the appropriate antidote. Attentiveness is thus a watchdog, preventing us from doing anything negative. At the same time, it keeps us mindful of positive actions, so that our Bodhisattva activities increase and we are able to develop bodhichitta in all circumstances.

The spiritual training according to the monastic and lay rules of the Vinaya predominantly involves discipline of physical actions and speech, although the mind is important to the extent that it governs both of these. In the Bodhisattvayāna and Mantrayāna, on the other hand, **it is the mind that is of paramount importance. The root of the Bodhisattva's discipline is to avoid any selfish attitude. We should never pursue our own interests while forgetting others or do so at the expense of others. Of course, our body and speech are involved, but we are concerned here mainly with the mind. It is within this context that a Bodhisattva, whose mind is clear, stable, and completely under control, is able to work for the benefit of others in ways that might otherwise produce harm. The main discipline, therefore, concerns the wrongdoings of the mind.**

5.6.
For **all anxiety and fear,**
And pain in boundless quantity,
Their source and wellspring is the mind itself,
As He who spoke the truth declared.

All suffering in this life and others is created by the unsubdued mind. Similarly, the basis of all the practices of the six pāramitās, such as generosity, moral discipline, and so on, is the mind.

5.18.
Therefore I will take in hand
And well protect this mind of mine.
What use to me are many disciplines,
If I can't guard and discipline my mind?

Nothing is more important than guarding the mind. Let us constantly keep watch over the wild elephant of the mind, curbing it with mindfulness and vigilance. This is how to avoid being influenced by different external conditions. But even in retreat in a very secluded place, if the mind is not kept under control, it will wander all over the place. Even completely alone, we can have an enormous amount of negative emotions.

How are we to guard the mind? We should use attentiveness to watch our thoughts and use mindfulness to judge whether we are acting correctly. With these two, we have the means to annihilate all adverse conditions. But without them, we will not see whether our thoughts are positive or negative or whether we are doing right or wrong, nor will we then be able to use antidotes as necessary.

5.23.
All you who would protect your minds,
Maintain your mindfulness and introspection;
Guard them both, at cost of life and limb,
I join my hands, beseeching you.

5.29.
Therefore from the gateway of my mind
My mindfulness shall not have leave to stray.
And if it wanders, it shall be recalled
By thoughts of anguish in the lower worlds.

Constantly thinking about the sufferings of the lower realms and the results of the negative emotions will help us to develop attentiveness, mindfulness, and greater discipline. Furthermore, as Shāntideva explains:

5.30.
Through fear, and by the counsels of their abbots,
And staying ever in their teacher's company—
In those endowed with fortune and devotion
Mindfulness is cultivated easily.

5.31. "The Buddhas and the Bodhisattvas both
Possess unclouded vision, seeing everything:
All lies open to their gaze,
And likewise I am always in their presence."

5.32.
One who has such thoughts as these
Will gain devotion and a sense of fear and shame.
For such a one, the memory of Buddha
Rises frequently before the mind.

As we develop mindfulness, never forgetting what to do and what to avoid, attentiveness gradually becomes part of us.

5.33.
When mindfulness is stationed as a sentinel,
A guard upon the threshold of the mind,
Introspection will be likewise there,
Returning when forgotten or dispersed.

In all circumstances it is necessary to evaluate the need for a particular action in relation to the precepts. According to time and circumstances, the necessity for an action may outweigh the fact that it is

forbidden by the precepts, and in such circumstances we are permitted to transgress a vow, and it is our duty to do so.[30] Indeed, there are some rules originally laid down in the Vinaya that later had to be adapted to changing circumstances.[31]

Attentiveness should be applied to everything we do, and at all times we should be aware of our physical behaviour, constantly checking whether we have been successful in doing what is proper and avoiding what is not. In this way, **the mind, like a drunken elephant, maddened by the three poisons,[32] will be tied to the pillar of positive actions with the rope of mindfulness and tamed with the hook of attentiveness. If we are unable to keep the mind attuned to virtue all the time, we can let it rest in a neutral state, neither positive nor negative. But at all costs, let us avoid negative thoughts. In our meditation, when we are concentrating on specific objects, we need to be attentive and mindful all the more, for such concentration should not be distracted even by positive thoughts, let alone neutral or negative ones.**

Although Bodhisattvas may be concentrating on one particular practice, they must be able to put it aside temporarily in favour of such circumstances as participating in ceremonies that benefit others, performing acts of generosity, protecting themselves if their lives are in danger, giving teachings, or accumulating merits and helping others to do so. **For example, if a hunter in pursuit of a deer were to ask us if we had seen his quarry, it would be entirely admissible, in order to save the deer's life, to tell him untruthfully that we had not seen it. Here we would be giving precedence to the generosity of protecting from danger over the discipline of not telling lies. We need to evaluate such situations carefully, and we must always be on our guard to prevent negative emotions from entering our thoughts and determining our words and deeds. It is important to be sure of our practice, clearing up all doubts and making certain that we have understood everything correctly.** This confidence in the practice has to be based on clear reasoning and faith, determination and stability, and respect for the practice we are doing. Our actions should be guided by our own conscience, by concern for what others might think, and by dread of the consequences of negative actions. Keeping our senses under control, let us be peaceful and try to make others happy.

5.56.
Let us not be downcast by the warring wants
Of *childish persons* quarrelling.
Their thoughts are bred from conflict and emotion.
Let us understand and treat them lovingly.

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[30] An example of this would be telling a lie if to do so will save the life of someone.

[31] In the history of Buddhism, certain **Vinaya (monastic discipline) rules** were adapted or relaxed over time to accommodate changing circumstances, cultural contexts, and the spread of Buddhism to different regions. While **no core Vinaya rule was outright "dropped"**, some were modified or given exceptions. Here are examples of **adaptations and relaxations**:

1. Rules Regarding Food and Medicine
- Originally, monks and nuns were only allowed to eat **food collected on alms rounds**.
- Over time, as Buddhism spread to regions where alms rounds were impractical, monasteries accepted **donated meals and stored food**.
- **Allowance for afternoon medicine** (ie honey, ghee, and sugar) was introduced in response to monastic health needs.

2. Wearing Robes and Clothing Adaptations
- The early Vinaya mandated **triple-layered robes**), but this was impractical in colder climates (like Tibet).
- In Tibet, monks wore **thicker robes and boots**, which were exceptions to the original Vinaya dress codes.
- Some Chinese monastics began wearing **gray or black robes** instead of the traditional saffron or ochre.

3. Monastic Residence and Shelter
- Early Buddhist monks lived **only in forests or under trees**.
- As Buddhism spread and the **rains retreat (Vassa) tradition** developed, permanent monasteries became acceptable.
- The original rule forbidding monks from **sleeping on raised beds** was softened in some traditions to allow minimal bedding for health reasons.

4. Handling Money
- According to the **strict Vinaya**, monks and nuns should not handle gold or silver (i.e., money).
- As Buddhism spread, monastic communities **allowed the use of funds handled by lay stewards** to purchase necessities.
- In certain traditions (like Japan), monastics were even permitted to directly handle money.

5. Work and Agriculture
- Early Vinaya forbade monastics from **engaging in agriculture** (digging the soil was seen as harming insects).
- In regions where lay support was insufficient (e.g., Japan, Tibet), some monks cultivated food to sustain their communities.

6. Interaction with Women
- The Vinaya originally had strict separation between monks and nuns.
- Over time, in some Mahayana traditions, these restrictions were relaxed, allowing **limited interactions** for the sake of teaching and spiritual guidance.

7. The Bhikshuni (Nuns') Ordination Issue
- The Vinaya originally established Bhikshuni (fully ordained nun) ordination.
- In some regions (Tibet & Theravāda countries), the lineage of fully ordained nuns **died out** due to historical circumstances.
- Some Buddhist schools later adapted by introducing alternative forms of ordination, ie the Ten Precept Nuns in Theravāda.

Why Were These Adaptations Made?
- As Buddhism spread to different cultures and climates, practical adjustments were needed.
- The Buddha himself allowed the **Vinaya to be adapted in minor ways** after his passing (according to the Mahāparinibbāna Sutta).
- The Mahāsāṃghika and later Mahayana traditions were more flexible in interpretation, while Theravāda and Mūlasarvāstivāda remained stricter.

Conclusion

No Vinaya rule was completely **"dropped"**, but many were **adapted** due to cultural, geographical, and practical necessities. The core principles of monastic discipline—**renunciation, ethical conduct, and reliance on lay support**—remained intact.

[32] The three poisons are hatred, attachment, and ignorance.

5.57.
When acting irreproachably,
For our sake or the sake of others,
Let us always bear in mind the thought
That **we are self-less, like an apparition**.

Childish persons refers to those of immature intelligence, that is, ordinary beings with no realization. If we mix with such childish people, we risk losing our direction and will not be able to help others. So while we should avoid being influenced by them, we should not get discouraged or annoyed by them. Rather, **we should feel great compassion for them, as they are in the grip of their negative emotions.**

Let us try to avoid all negative actions, both those that are negative by nature and those that have been proscribed by the Buddha in connection with any vows we have taken. At the same time, let us keep foremost in our minds the intention to benefit others. For example, **if allowing someone not to lose face will be the best thing for them, we should do our best to act accordingly**. And **all the time we should understand that we ourselves, our actions, and those who are affected by our actions are all like illusions, entirely devoid of reality.**

Human life is a unique and favoured opportunity and not easily gained. If we do not use this life to benefit others, when will we ever get another chance? Let us value this occasion, and cultivate joy in esteeming others more than ourselves. Our determination in this should be as stable as a mountain.

Shāntideva discusses **next the danger of being excessively attached to our bodies, which can prevent our doing positive actions.**

5.61.
Why, O foolish mind,
Don't you appropriate a clean form carved in wood?
How is it fit to guard
An unclean engine for the making of impurity?

5.62.
First, with mind's imagination,
Shed the covering of skin,
And with the blade of wisdom, strip
The flesh from off the bony frame.

5.63.
And when you have divided all the bones,
And searched right down amid the very marrow,
You yourself should ask the question:
Where is the essential core?

5.64.
If, persisting in the search,
You see no underlying essence,
Why do you protect with such desire
The body that you now possess?

We sometimes spend all our time looking after our bodies, to the extent that we are almost their servants. We begin the day by washing our bodies, then we feed them, and we continue to serve their needs throughout the day. But the purpose of human life is not just to sustain the body. The body is rather to be used as a vehicle for the intelligence that characterises human existence so that we can progress spiritually. In ordinary terms, a servant who did not do what he was asked would never be paid. Factory workers lose their jobs if they do not do what they are paid for. Similarly, if our bodies, which we have fed and clothed till now, do not listen to us, this is completely wrong. **The very reason we look after our bodies should be to enable us to develop a positive mind.**

5.70.
Regard your body as a vessel,
A simple boat for going here and there.
Make of it a thing that answers every wish
To bring about the benefit of beings.

We should use the body, which is made up of impure ingredients, to support our intention to help others. If we use it properly for our spiritual growth, combining wisdom and means, we shall be able

to develop a new realization and attain the omniscient rūpakāya of the Tathāgatas, which is like a wish-fulfilling jewel.[33]

5.71.
Be the master of yourself
And have an ever-smiling countenance.
Rid yourself of scowling, wrathful frowns,
And be a true and honest friend to all.

True practitioners are unaffected by external pressures and their own emotions, and they are free to secure the temporary and ultimate benefit of both themselves and others. They remain independent, fear nothing, and are never at odds with themselves. Always peaceful, they are friendly with all, and everything they say is helpful. **Wherever we go, let us be humble and avoid being noisy or bossy. Let us not hurt other people's feelings or cause them to act negatively. Rather, let us be friendly and think well of others, encouraging them to accumulate positive actions.**

If other people offer you advice, instead of thinking, What business is it of yours to be making suggestions? respect what they have to say and consider yourself as the disciple of all beings. If their advice is reasonable, act on it rather than arrogantly rejecting it. Show support for any positive things people say, and rejoice when you see others doing something good, encouraging them with praise. Nevertheless, if such praise is likely to appear as flattery or make them proud, **praise them in private, joining in when others praise them. And if it is you whose qualities are being extolled, don't allow yourself to become proud and self-important. Simply recognise the quality others have of appreciating goodness.**

The joy we can have from appreciating others' positive deeds is priceless. We stand to lose nothing from it in this life, and it is the cause of great happiness in future lives. If, on the other hand, we react negatively when other people try to correct us, or competitively when others are praised, or proudly when it is we who are praised, it will make people unhappy, and we will become lonely and friendless. And in future lives we will experience great suffering.

Whatever we say, let us speak clearly and to the point, in a voice that is calm and pleasant, unaffected by attachment or hatred. Look kindly at others, thinking, It is thanks to them that I shall attain Buddhahood.

What are the best ways to accumulate positive actions? Above all, we need a positive mind that is strong and constant. This will of itself engender positive actions. Then we must consistently apply the antidotes to desire, hatred, and ignorance. Moreover, beneficial activities are most fruitful when they are performed for learned and accomplished beings; for our parents, to whom we owe so much; for the sick, old, and weak; and for those who suffer greatly. In all these, we should not simply go along with others passively but should make an independent effort to initiate positive actions ourselves.

Our spiritual development should follow the stages of the six pāramitās (Generosity, Ethical discipline, Patience, Diligence, Meditative Concentration, Wisdom see Buddhism Glossary Advanced), perfecting each one in turn. But we should not sacrifice a major cause of merit for a minor one. The most important thing is to keep in mind the benefit of others.

5.84.
Therefore understand this well,
And always labor for the benefit of beings.
The Compassionate One farsightedly permits,
To this end, even what has been proscribed.

This verse can be interpreted in either of two ways. One meaning is that the compassionate Buddha, who sees both the immediate and also the distant future, has seen that what is not permitted for certain beings is allowed for others. The other way of understanding this is that what is not permitted for others is allowable for the Compassionate Ones, meaning Bodhisattvas, who are endowed with wisdom and compassion. (Or allowed in some important instances.)

5.85.
Eat only what is needful;
Share with those who have embraced the discipline,
With those who are defenceless or have fallen into evil states.
Give everything except the three robes of religion.

[33] The rūpakāya is the form body of a Buddha, in which he appears to beings. It comprises the sambhogakāya and the nirmānakāya (see Glossary).

The last line of this verse concerns those who have taken monastic vows. Apart from the three monastic robes, which they should keep, any extra clothes they have should be given away for the use of others.

Now that we have dedicated our body, speech, and mind to accomplishing the sacred Dharma, **we should not harm our bodies needlessly**. For our bodies are the vehicles for our practice, and if we take proper care of them, we will quickly be able to fulfil the wishes of all beings.

5.87.
They should not give up their bodies
Whose compassionate thoughts are not yet pure.
But let them be surrendered when, both now and in their future lives,
Great benefit is thereby gained.

In the *Compendium of All Practices* Shāntideva explains that as long as our compassion is not completely pure and our realization of emptiness is not perfect, it is not proper to give away our bodies and all our wealth and merits. We need to protect our bodies, while we purify any selfish motives we have and increase our altruistic attitude. If we do this, we will be able to accomplish the wishes of all beings. We should not give our lives too hastily. Instead, we should cultivate the aspiration to be able to sacrifice ourselves, until such time as doing so is truly beneficial.

The *Bodhicharyāvatāra* continues with advice concerning our everyday behaviour, down to how we should sleep. We should lie on our right side with our head toward the north, as did the Buddha when he passed into nirvana, and be ready to rise promptly in the morning.

To sum up, of all the vast activities of the Bodhisattvas the most important is the training of the mind, which we should undertake from the very beginning.

5.97.
The actions of the Bodhisattva
Are unbounded, so the Teachings say.
Of these, until the goal is won,
Embrace the practices that purify your mind.

If during the day we have committed any fault, we should acknowledge it.

5.98.
Reciting thrice by day and thrice by night,
The Sūtra in Three Sections,
Relying on the Buddhas and the Bodhisattvas,
Purify the rest of your transgressions.

To be able to help beings, whose needs and dispositions are so varied, it is necessary to resort to numerous and diverse methods. Those who excel in skilful means accumulate immeasurable merits. As Shāntideva says:

5.100.
There is indeed no field of knowledge
That the Buddhas' offspring should not learn.
For those who are well-versed in all these ways,
There is no action destitute of merit.

5.101.
Directly, then, or indirectly,
Do nothing that is not for others' sake.
And solely for their welfare dedicate
Your every action to the gaining of enlightenment.

To make progress in our practice, we have to rely on qualified teachers, learned in the profound and vast aspects of the teachings contained in the Māhayāna texts. Mere learning is not enough, though. Such teachers should have practiced what they have studied, incorporating it into their daily lives and combining knowledge with true spiritual realization. **We should never abandon them, even if it were to cost us our lives, and we should learn how to follow them properly.**

To further our understanding, Shāntideva recommends that we study other texts, such as his own *Compendium of All Practices*, which he wrote before the *Bodhicharyāvatāra*. The Kadam school used to teach six principal texts, two at a time: the *Bodhisattva Levels* and *Ornament of the Māhayāna Sūtras, Bodhicharyāvatāra* and *Compendium of All Practices*, and *Stories of the Buddha's Series of Lives* and *Specific Counsels*. It is therefore a good idea to study the *Bodhicharyāvatāra* and *Compendium of All Practices* together, as points that are treated succinctly in the one tend to be explained in detail in the other and vice versa. If we do not have time to read the *Compendium of All Practices,* Shāntideva himself advises us to study his *Compendium of All Sūtras*. However, the Tibetan translation of the latter has not

survived, so we can refer instead to Nāgārjuna's text of the same name. These texts should be put fully into practice so that we can benefit others.

5.108.
Examining again and yet again
The state and actions of your body and your mind—
This alone defines in brief
The maintenance of watchful introspection.

5.109.
But all this must be acted out in truth,
For what is to be gained by mouthing syllables?
What invalid was ever helped
By merely reading in the doctor's treatises?