Intensifying Bodhichitta

Chapter 7. Endeavour - Diligence

After generating bodhichitta and taking steps to prevent it from deteriorating, we must now learn to develop it continuously. This is the subject of Shāntideva's next three chapters, the first of which is devoted to endeavour.

Shāntideva now moves on to the culminating chapters of his great work and sets out ways in which bodhichitta may be intensified to the highest pitch. As in chapters 1 and 4, he begins by whipping up a sense of urgency and enthusiasm. **Here the stark realities of the proximity of death and the possibility of rebirth in the infernal states are forced upon us with unprecedented force. If we squander the incredible opportunity for liberation afforded by this human existence, how will we feel when the servants of the Lord of Death make their appearance and the din of hell breaks upon our ears?** Moreover, however well-off and virtuous we may think we are at the present time, Shāntideva assures us that, **lodged in the recesses of our minds, from time without beginning, we have karmic residues more than sufficient to precipitate a disastrous fall.**

> How can you remain at ease like this
> When you have done the deeds that lead
> To contact on your tender baby-flesh
> Of boiling liquids in the hell of Extreme Heat? (7.12)

This human life is not the time for complacency. And yet, as always, Shāntideva's message is full of hope and practical assurance. **We have this opportunity now; our destiny is in our own hands. "Take advantage," he says, "of this human boat. Free yourself from sorrow's mighty stream"** (7.14). **The requisite qualities are courage and a steadfast refusal to give up.** Shāntideva points out that **to let ourselves off the hook with the excuse that the effort is beyond us, far from corresponding with the facts, is nothing but indolence and cowardice.** After all, with perseverance, even insects have it in them to gain liberation. Here again we find the theme of pride as a positive tool in the task of maintaining one's resolve. Shāntideva develops this at great length, distinguishing wholesome confidence from arrogance, in a kind of word play (hardly possible to bring out in translation) that results in a sort of humorous riddle. As before, and despite somber reflections, the general tone is overwhelmingly positive. To shelter from the midday sun, elephants will plunge into the waters of a lake. **Bodhisattvas throw themselves into their great work for beings.** Chapter 7 concludes on a note of calm, immovable resolve.

Why is endeavour necessary? If we consider material progress, we see that research started by one person can always be continued by another. But this is not possible with spiritual progress. The realization we talk about in the Buddhadharma is something that has to be accomplished by the individual. No one else can do it for us. Of course, it would be wonderful if in the future we could attain realization through some sort of new injection or by means of a new generation of computers, without having to go through any difficulties. If we could be absolutely certain that such a time would come, we could simply lie back and wait to get enlightened. But I doubt that this will ever happen. It is better to make an effort. We have to develop endeavour.

> 7.1.
> Thus with patience I will strive with diligence.
> For in such diligence enlightenment is found.
> If no wind blows, then nothing stirs,
> And neither is there merit without diligence.

We can be patient in various ways, such as by not thinking ill of those who harm us or by accepting suffering as the path. Of these two, the latter is the more important for generating endeavour, and it is endeavour that enables us to attain enlightenment. As Shāntideva says, "In such diligence enlightenment is found." In the same way that protecting a lamp from the wind allows the flame to burn without flickering, **endeavour enables the virtuous mind to grow undisturbed.**

What is endeavour? It is finding joy in doing what is good. To do that, **it is necessary to remove anything that counteracts it, especially laziness. Laziness has three aspects: having no wish to do good, being distracted by negative activities, and underestimating oneself by doubting one's ability. Related to these are taking undue pleasure in idleness and sleep and being indifferent to saṃsāra as a state of suffering.** (These three make up verse 7.3.)

> 7.4.
> Snared by the trapper of defiled emotion,
> Enmeshed and taken in the toils of birth,
> Again you've strayed into the maw of Death.
> What is it? Have you still not understood?

(Verses 7.65 and 7.6) All of us want to be happy and to avoid suffering. But because of negative emotions, our minds are never at peace. As they arise, negative thoughts disturb our minds and create a negative atmosphere around us. Furthermore, these emotions make us liable to suffer in the future whenever we encounter difficult circumstances. While they persist, how can we tolerate them? We know that we shall die, but how can we tell when? **From this moment on, we must generate endeavour.**

7.7.
Death will swoop on you so swiftly.
Gather merit till that moment comes!
For even if you then throw off your indolence (laziness),
What will you do when there is no more time?

If we wait until the moment of death to decide to make an effort, it will be too late. At that time we may be in great pain, physically and mentally, tortured by fear of the unknown, by the memory of our negative actions, and by attachment to those close to us.

7.8.
"This I have not done, and this I'm only starting.
And this—I'm only halfway through …"
***Then* is the sudden coming of the Lord of Death,**
And oh, the thought "Alas, I'm finished!"

7.9.
You'll look upon the faces of your hopeless friends,
Their tearstained cheeks, their red and swollen eyes
(For such will be the depths of their distress),
And then you'll see the heralds of the Deadly Lord.

7.14.
So take advantage of this human boat.
Free yourself from sorrow's mighty stream!
This vessel will be later hard to find.
The time that you have now, you fool, is not for sleep!

7.15.
You turn your back upon the Sacred Doctrine,
Supreme joy and boundless source of bliss.
Why delight in mere excitement,
In distractions that will cause you misery?

Most people do not want to hear about death, let alone reflect on it. But if we have trained our minds and can face death with confidence and a fully positive attitude, then we will have nothing to fear. In the meantime, throughout our life, these qualities will help us a great deal. So **while we have this precious human life, with which we can achieve so much, let us not be overwhelmed by the laziness of feeling disinclined to positive actions.**

In this connection, we should consider the subject of rebirth, which Buddhism defines as the continuity of the mind from one life to the next. A future consciousness depends on a previous consciousness, of which it is the continuation. It cannot be produced by something other than consciousness. Consciousness, and not something else, must be the cause of future consciousness.

Buddhism makes a **distinction between gross and subtle consciousness**. In general, consciousness is associated with the brain and its chemical processes. But in my opinion, it is only the gross consciousness that is determined by such factors. It is true that the gross consciousnesses related to the activities of seeing, hearing, and so forth depend on the human body and its sense organs. What we call human consciousness is the gross consciousness that uses the human body as a support. The consciousness that other forms of life, such as animals, possess is different because their brains are different.

It would be difficult, however, to prove rebirth simply on the basis of the gross consciousnesses of the different sense organs that use the brain as a support. These gross consciousnesses appear as the sense organs develop in the womb. But **the consciousness that continues from life to life is a subtle consciousness; the faculty of experiencing and being aware, the natural clarity of the mind. If there were no cause for this subtle consciousness (such as the previous life's subtle consciousness), the idea of rebirth would in fact be difficult to explain.**

Leaving aside memory (which allows us to remember, for example, the experiences of our youth) **we all have latent and unconscious tendencies that arise under certain circumstances and influence the way our minds react. Such tendencies are the product of powerful experiences in the recent or distant past, which cause us to react unconsciously without our necessarily remembering those experiences. It is difficult to explain these tendencies and how they manifest other than by saying that they are the imprints of past experiences on the subtle consciousness.**

When we talk of the big bang theory to explain the origin of the universe, as Buddhists we would have to say that the big bang itself has a cause. **Everything is the product of an infinite chain of causes and**

effects, but we cannot in fact find an original cause to all this. There is no beginning to consciousness, to the series of our rebirths, or to the particles that make up the universe. It is simply the nature of things.

Within this context, phenomena are analysed according to the effects they produce or according to their interdependence. Concerning analysis in terms of interdependence, we say that if the effect exists, the cause exists. This is as true for the mind as it is for particles. When we mix two chemical substances, a chemical reaction occurs and a new substance is produced. Similarly, if a very short-tempered person practices loving kindness for a long time, his character will slowly change. Of course, he may not completely get rid of his tendency to become angry, but he will be less liable to do so. This transformation of his character takes place because of the interdependence between two types of consciousness, angry and loving. Regarding analysis in terms of the effect produced, we can talk about a chemical reaction as a change of entropy. It is the same for the mind. **If one contemplates the harmful effects of anger and the beneficial effects of love, one gains a new confidence in the power of love, and one's tendency to love grows stronger and stronger.** This is the nature of things, and it is important to appreciate it. I don't know if this Buddhist idea of nature will satisfy everybody, but it does answer a good many questions.

To return to the subject of endeavour; **if we want to get rid of the laziness of being disinclined to positive actions, we should think how short our human lives are. The Sanskrit word for laziness, *alassya*, means "not to make use of." Any positive actions we perform will benefit us now and in the future.** On the other hand, **letting ourselves be influenced by negative emotions will ruin us in this life and in future lives, so we should also avoid wasting our lives through the second type of laziness: being distracted by negative actions.**

7.16.
Do not be downcast, but marshal all your powers;
Make an effort; be the master of yourself!
Practice the equality of self and other;
Practice the exchange of self and other. (see Appendices 2 and 3)

The third type of laziness arises from underestimating yourself and thinking you will never be able to attain enlightenment. But there is no need to be discouraged in this way. **All of us have the potential for Buddhahood. The ultimate nature of the mind, though not something tangible, is present in each one of us,** even when it is obscured. Because of this, **even the tiniest insect can attain enlightenment if it makes the effort.**

7.17.
"Oh, but how could *I* become enlightened?"
Don't excuse yourself with such despondency!
The Buddha, who declares the truth,
Has truly spoken and proclaimed

7.18.
That if they bring forth strength of perseverance,
Even bees and flies
And gnats and grubs will gain
Supreme enlightenment so hard to find.

7.19.
And if, by birth and lineage of human kind,
I'm able to distinguish good from ill
And do not leave aside the Bodhisattva deeds,
Why should I not attain the state of Buddhahood?

We should also not worry that we will never be able to accomplish such difficult Bodhisattva activities as giving away our bodies, possessions, and all our merits. As beginners, we may not be ready for this, so we should start by simply generating the wish to give these things and give them mentally, using the path of means and wisdom. **As our practice becomes more powerful, we will arrive at a point where we know that it is appropriate to give away our bodies, and we will actually be able to do so without any physical or mental suffering.** (Verses 7.20 to 7.27)

7.28.
Merit is the true cause of the body's ease,
While happiness of mind is had through understanding.
What can sadden those who have compassion,
Who remain within samsara for the sake of beings?

7.30.
Mounted on the horse of bodhichitta,
Which puts to flight all mournful weariness,

What lucid person could be in despair
Proceeding in this way from joy to joy?

It is said in the *Garland of Jewels* that it is necessary to accumulate infinite merits for innumerable kalpas in order to accomplish Buddhahood. Let us not be dismayed by this, thinking, 'How could I ever accumulate so much merit?' Instead, **let us make the wish to lead infinite beings to the infinite qualities of Buddhahood by carrying out the infinite activities of the Bodhisattvas over an infinite period of time. With a single instant of such intention, having these four infinite characteristics, we can accumulate merit very easily. So let us not be influenced by the laziness of being discouraged.**

7.31.
The forces that secure the good of beings,
Are aspiration, steadfastness, relinquishment, and joy.
Aspiration grows through fear of suffering
And contemplation of the benefits to be attained.

To generate endeavour we need four supports: aspiration (and self-confidence), steadfastness, relinquishment, and joy. Aspiration is developed by reflecting on karma, on cause and effect. As you know, a good result comes from a positive action and a bad result from a negative action. So to attain the state of Buddha, who is free of all defects and endowed with all good qualities, it will be necessary to accumulate infinite merit and purify infinite obscurations over a period of many kalpas. Think how little inclined you are, in this short life, to do positive actions and to purify your obscurations. You should spur yourself to make an effort.

7.42.
But if my acts are good, sincerely intended,
Then no matter where I turn my steps,
The merit gained will honour me
With its resulting benefits.

7.43.
But if, through seeking happiness, my deeds are wrong,
No matter where I turn my steps,
The knives of misery will cut me down,
The wage and retribution of a sinful life.

7.44.
Through virtue I will rest within the cool heart of a fragrant spreading lotus,
With splendour nurtured by the sweet words of the Conqueror.
Then from the lotus opened in the Sage's light, in supreme form I will arise
To dwell, the blissful Buddha's heir, in presence of Victorious Ones.

The *Sutra of the Vajra Banner* speaks about firmness, or self-confidence, in these terms: "When the sun rises, it shines over the whole world, regardless of people's blindness or mountain shadows. Likewise, when a Bodhisattva manifests for the sake of others, he brings beings to liberation, regardless of their obstacles."

Shāntideva continues with this advice:

7.47.
Let me first consider my reserves—
To start or not to start accordingly.
It might be better not to start,
But once begun, I should not then withdraw.

Before we do anything, we should always ask ourselves whether we will be able to do it properly and complete it. If the answer is no, we should not start. Leaving tasks uncompleted creates a habit for the future. Once we have begun something, we should be sure not to go back on our decision.

Self-confidence is not to be confused with pride. Pride is thinking highly of oneself without good reason. Self-confidence is knowing that one has the ability to do something properly and being determined not to give up.

Ordinary beings are prepared to make a good deal of effort for relatively insignificant ends. We have promised to work for the immensely more important goal of liberating all beings, so we should cultivate great self-confidence, thinking, 'Even if I am the only one to do so, I will benefit all beings.'

7.50.
Overpowered by their minds' afflictions,

Worldly folk are helpless to secure their happiness.
Compared with those who wander, I am able!
This therefore shall be my task.

7.52.
When they find a dying serpent,
Even crows behave like soaring eagles.
Therefore if I'm weak and feeble-hearted,
Even little faults will strike and injure me.

7.53.
But if, depressed, I give up trying,
How can I gain freedom from my abject state?
But if I stand my ground with proud resolve,
It will be hard for even great faults to attack me.

Our resolution, however, should not involve ordinary pride, which is a negative emotion. On the contrary, we should be self-confident with regard to the negative emotions, determined not to be overcome by them.

7.55.
"I *will* be victor over all,
And nothing shall prevail and bring me down!"
The offspring of the Lion, the Conqueror,
Should constantly abide in this self-confidence.

This is the sort of pride we need; the self-confidence that does not accept the domination of the negative emotions and does everything to destroy them. The heroism of the Bodhisattva lies in this use of self-confidence to confront the negative emotions and conquer pride. People with no such self-assurance let themselves be invaded by pride and the other emotions at the slightest provocation. There is nothing heroic about that. Even if it were to cost us our lives, we should never let ourselves be influenced by these emotions.

7.61.
However great may be their peril,
People will by reflex guard their eyes.
And likewise I, whatever dangers come,
Must not fall down beneath defilement's power.

As regards joy, once we have generated bodhichitta, we should take up the activities of a Bodhisattva with joyful delight. The more we practice, the greater should be our desire to make further progress.

7.65.
And since they never have enough of pleasure,
Honey on the razor's edge,
How could they have enough of merit,
Fruits of which are happiness and peace?

7.66.
The elephant, tormented by the noonday sun,
Will dive into the waters of a lake,
And likewise I must plunge into my work
That I might bring it to completion.

From one life to another we have always sought happiness, and yet, because we have always been dominated by negative emotions, we have only met with difficulties. Reborn as humans, birds, deer, insects, and so forth, we have never had lasting happiness. **There has been nothing to show for all the efforts we have made to be happy and avoid suffering. Now that we have started on the Bodhisattva path, we should practice with joy and not be disheartened by the few difficulties that are bound to occur in the beginning. Our efforts will definitely bear fruit.**

Moderation is to be applied when, as happens to all of us from time to time, we become physically and mentally exhausted and are unable to continue, however much we try. At such times we should not force ourselves, but we should stop and rest so that later whatever we do will be done properly and completely.

When we have rid ourselves of laziness and gained a sense of enthusiasm through our aspiration, steadfastness, relinquishment, and joy, we should practice endeavour by applying mindfulness and attentiveness. Whether during or between sessions of meditation, we must always keep our minds focused on positive actions. We might be able to meditate on bodhichitta quite well for a short

while, but if we are not careful to maintain mindfulness and attentiveness all the time, we risk committing faults and transgressing our vows.

While we may concentrate on one particular aspect of the path at a time, it is important to have an overall balance between the different aspects. Meditation should progress hand in hand with study, without either one being neglected. Having cleared away doubts intellectually, we should integrate our understanding with the experience of meditation. In this way our practice will be balanced and complete.

So let us, with mindfulness and attentiveness, be careful to repel the attacks of negative emotions, putting an end to these enemies of ours so as not to slip into wrong activities.

7.69
If, in the fray, the soldier drops his sword,
In fright, he swiftly takes it up again.
So likewise, if the arm of mindfulness is lost,
In fear of hell, I'll quickly get it back!

Such are the dangers of becoming too relaxed and losing mindfulness.

7.70.
Just as poison fills the body,
Borne on the current of the blood,
Likewise evil, when it finds its chance,
Will spread and permeate the mind.

On how to actually practice mindfulness and attentiveness, Shāntideva continues:

7.71.
I will be like a frightened man, a brimming oil-jar in his hand,
And menaced by a swordsman saying,
"Spill one drop and you shall die!"
This is how practitioners should hold themselves.

7.73.
Every time, then, that I fail,
I will reprove and chide myself,
Thinking long that by whatever means
Such faults in future shall no more occur.

74. At all times and in any situation,
How can I make mindfulness my constant habit?
Thinking thus I will desire
To meet with teachers and fulfil the proper tasks.

Once we are able to practice mindfulness and attentiveness in what we do, we will never become tired or disheartened. We will always be prepared to continue.

7.76.
Just as flaxen threads waft to and fro,
Impelled by every breath of wind,
So all I do will be achieved,
Controlled by movements of a joyful heart.

Spiritual practice is difficult in the beginning. You wonder how on earth you can ever do it. But as you get used to it, the practice gradually becomes easier. Do not be too stubborn or push yourself too hard. If you practice in accord with your individual capacity, little by little you will find more pleasure and joy in it. As you gain inner strength, your positive actions will gain in profundity and scope.