Chapter 8. Meditative Concentration

8.1.
Cultivating diligence as just described,
In concentration I will place my mind.
For those whose minds are slack and wandering
Are caught between the fangs of the afflictions.

To strengthen our practice, it is necessary to develop one-pointed concentration of the mind. For this we first need to understand the disadvantages of being distracted. **Lack of concentration prevents us from keeping our minds focused on the object of meditation. The mind follows any thoughts that arise, and it is then all too easy for negative emotions to grow. Any positive actions we do will not realise their full effect. Distraction is therefore a major defect, and it is very important to counteract it by developing mental calm (*shamatha*).**

The practice of mental calm is not unique to Buddhism. Non-Buddhist traditions include methods for developing mental calm through which it is possible to attain the state of concentration of the formless celestial beings (*devas*) in the realm of *nothing at all*.[37] In this state negative emotions are allayed but not entirely eliminated; they remain latent. Mental calm on its own, therefore, is not uniquely special. But this **one-pointed concentration is very important in developing fully the power of positive actions, and it is crucial for our practice of clear insight (*vipashyana*). The Mādhyamika view, which is common to both Sitrayana and Mantrayana, is established through analytical reasoning until we obtain certainty in it.**[38] This is something very subtle, and unless our power of concentration is stable, there is a danger of losing this view of emptiness. **The more stable our concentration is, the clearer will be our understanding of emptiness.**

What do we mean by meditation? First, there is meditation through analysis, whereby we repeatedly examine an object until we gain a degree of certainty concerning its nature. When we cannot proceed any further with analysis, we let ourselves repose in the state of clarity and confidence that we have achieved. This is placement meditation. It is the latter type of meditation that is used in practices such as visualising deities and training in mental calm, where one is developing the power of concentration.

One can also meditate on devotion, in order to understand and increase it; or on impermanence, where one contemplates an object and the way in which it is constantly changing; or on emptiness, realising that the object has no true existence.

There are many ways to describe the perception of things. **In meditation it is important to be able to distinguish between the perceived object, the object in itself, the object as it is considered to be, and the object of intention.**[39] We should also study the five defects to avoid in mental calm meditation, mentioned in the *Treatise on the Centre and Extremes*.[40]

In brief, **meditation is a way of training and transforming the mind, and this it certainly does.** For our purposes, **the main thing is to develop the one-pointed concentration of mental calm and to meditate on bodhichitta. For concentration to become clear, we need the right conditions, namely, freedom from outer distractions. The ideal is to meditate in a secluded place that is conducive to physical and mental serenity.**

8.3.
Because of loved ones and desire for gain,
We fail to turn away from worldly things.
These, then, are the first things to renounce.
The prudent should conduct themselves like this.

8.4.
Penetrative insight joined with calm abiding
Utterly eradicates afflicted states.
Knowing this, **first search for calm abiding,**
Found by people who are happy to be free from worldly ties.

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[37] The realm of *nothing at all* is one of the four formless worlds, or realms, at the summit of cyclic existence, experienced through the four formless absorptions said to be attained by practitioners of the Brahma Vehicle. Beings in these worlds have temporarily suppressed the gross negative emotions but their minds are still pervaded by ignorance and they lack any realization of selflessness. For this reason they cannot escape from saṃsāra and continue to take rebirth in the lower realms. See Glossary, *Three worlds*.

[38] The Mādhyamika view is the view of the Middle Way introduced by Nāgārjuna. It is discussed more fully in chapter 9 of the *Bodhicharyāvatāra*.

[39] These are four ways of perceiving an object.

[40] **The five defects that interrupt mental calm are laziness, forgetting the instructions on meditation, dullness and being distracted by thoughts of attachment, lack of effort, and overexertion.**

The Bodhisattva in training, with an intention consolidated by carefulness, vigilant introspection, and the perfection of patience, and stirred by the desire to labor unrelentingly until the goal is reached, now proceeds to embrace the real, the truly mind-transforming discipline. The eighth chapter, on **meditative concentration, which is the culmination of the teachings on the level of relative bodhichitta, falls into two main sections. First there is a preliminary instruction on how to create the proper environment for the meditation (the first ninety stanzas). Then there follows a lengthy description of the meditation itself.** Shāntideva presents the case from the standpoint of monastic renunciation. He was himself a monk and it will be remembered that the first public reading of the *Bodhicharyāvatāra* was given to the monastic assembly at Nālandā. Even so, it would be a mistake for the lay practitioner to dismiss Shāntideva's teaching as being exclusively relevant to ordained clerics. On the contrary, **Shāntideva delineates principles of universal validity that are in fact mandatory for everyone wishing to follow a path of profound and effective spiritual transformation.**

The chapter begins, as we might expect, with a demand for concentration and the elimination of mental wandering. And the point is driven home that, whether one enters a monastery or prefers to remain in the lay condition, there can be no progress in concentration without a severe reduction in one's involvement in worldly affairs. Naturally, the external observance of the monastic rule is understood to be peculiarly propitious to the development of mental calm, but in the last analysis, **it is inner motive and personal discipline that count. Thus we are counselled at length to be careful about the company we keep, recognising the simple fact that an unexamined lifestyle, in which we are immersed in the materialistic values and behaviour of worldly friends, will get us nowhere. Only frustration and inanity will be the result. Shāntideva advises us to fight shy of those whose values are contrary to the Dharma; people he habitually refers to as "those who are like children"** (in other words, in terms designed to stimulate feelings of concern rather than resentment). Thus **Shāntideva prescribes solitude, a flight from the world; not of course in a puritanical, world-denying sense, but in a spirit of inner freedom. Tranquillity of mind, he says significantly, is "found by people who are happy to be free from worldly ties,"** and who for that reason, "never turns … a backward glance" (8.4, 8.26). And he is **lyrical in his celebration of retreat in the wilderness**.

The practice is naturally attended by difficulties and obstacles, and these are summarised under two headings: desire for companionship and desire for property. In the first case, Shāntideva addresses the question of **sex and the problem posed by physical desire**; which naturally leads to the practical matter of how to attenuate, and defuse, sexual obsession. As a meditative technique, he recommends to himself and to his monastic audience a reflection and concentration on the impure, unattractive aspects of women's bodies. And, not without a sense of humour, he expatiates on the absurdity of the social conventions of courtship and marriage; with reference both to the sheer physical realities, and also from the point of view of impermanence and death. Shāntideva thus gives important instructions for the ordained community on how the virtue of chastity might be cultivated and the state of celibacy preserved. But as we have said, since the point at issue is physical desire as such, the teaching here is of universal application, irrespective of social status and, for that matter, sexual orientation. Lay practitioners also are obliged to recognise that in sexual life, as in other aspects of saṃsāric existence, the mind is attracted to what is in fact a mirage. It habitually functions by thoroughly ignoring objective physical realities or at any rate by being highly selective in what it notices. And in any case, desire is desire; it must be transcended if progress on the path (the tantric path included) is to be possible.

As with personal attachments, so with the acquisition of property, Shāntideva's message is the same: people spend their lives chasing chimeras. They destroy themselves in the quest for wealth which, even when acquired, is only for the enjoyment of a brief and passing moment; the scraps of grass that the ox is able to snatch along the way as it laboriously pulls the cart! And yet, Shāntideva exclaims, "with but a millionth part of such vexation enlightenment itself could be attained!" (8.83).

After again **extolling the advantages of solitude, Shāntideva begins to consider two themes that form the high point of his teaching and which are the essence of the Bodhisattva path: meditation on the equality of self and other, and meditation on the exchange of self and other.** Here the subject matter becomes complex, hinging as it does on **the profound doctrine of emptiness**. For **it quickly becomes apparent that on the Bodhisattva path, compassion is understood not merely as sympathy for the sufferings of beings, or even as the resolve to do something about it in practical terms (however admirable such work may be). In Mahāyāna Buddhism, compassion involves, through the application of wisdom, the transcending of the notion of ego itself and the understanding that, in the final analysis, the existential barrier dividing self from other is totally unreal, a mere mental construction. Once this barrier has been crossed, and Bodhisattvas realise the unreality of the distinction between self and other, the sufferings of others become as real to them as their own. Indeed, the sufferings of others are the Bodhisattvas' own sufferings; and the urge to relieve them, both immediately and ultimately, becomes their primary impulse.** These ideas will be unfamiliar and perhaps disconcerting to many readers, and the meaning of the text itself is not always easy to understand. For this reason, a substantial excerpt from the Tibetan commentary of Kunzang Pelden has been provided in appendix 2 at the end of the book. It is sufficient to emphasise here that **the Buddhist teachings on compassion are grounded in the wisdom of emptiness.** It is from this that they derive their meaning and compelling force, their validity and at the same time their practical possibility.

> **Those desiring speedily to be**
> **A refuge for themselves and others,**
> **Should make the interchange of "I" and "other,"**
> And thus embrace a sacred mystery. (8.120)

This exchange, possible to the extent that the duality of self and other has been transcended, is the peak of Bodhisattva practice and takes us to the heart of Buddhist wisdom. This is the point from which all the teachings of *The Way of the Bodhisattva* derive their sense and where they find their completion. Everything is condensed into a single stanza which Shāntideva proclaims with the finality of a cosmic principle:

> ***129.***
> ***All the joy the world contains***
> ***Has come through wishing happiness for others.***
> ***All the misery the world contains***
> ***Has come through wanting pleasure for oneself.***

Here, as always, Shāntideva does not leave us gaping in stunned amazement. He quickly sets about with methods designed to help us on our way. In so doing, he indicates a practice that, according to His Holiness the Dalai Lama, is unique in the entire range of Buddhist teaching. Directed at the principal obstacle to the realization of equality (namely, the ego itself), and taking as his cue the idea of exchange, Shāntideva describes a meditation that consists in projecting oneself, through a feat of sympathetic imagination, into the position of an opponent. Looking back, as it were, through the opponent's eyes, meditators must target their own egos, generating the appropriate "negative" emotion of jealousy, competitive rivalry or pride, and getting a firsthand impression of what it is like to be at the receiving end of their own behaviour. This technique, which is of great psychological interest and effectiveness, has been commented on at length by Kunzang Pelden, and a translation of his remarks is found in appendix 3. Fascinating as this technique is as a means of diminishing the ego's strength and also of attenuating the illusory barrier between self and other, it will be evident from what has been said previously that for the real experience of equality and exchange to occur, a true understanding of the wisdom of emptiness is indispensable. We can thus perceive the importance of Shāntideva's metaphysical position and appreciate the extent to which his entire teaching is inspired and underpinned by this. The Bodhicharyāvatāra would be incomplete without a detailed discussion of wisdom.

8.7.
If I crave for other beings,
A veil is cast upon the perfect truth.
Wholesome disillusion melts away,
And finally there comes the sting of pain.

8.8.
My thoughts are all for them,
And thus my life is frittered by.
My family and friends all change and pass, for whom
The changeless Dharma is cast out.

As we are impermanent, is it really worth being so attached to others, who are also impermanent? Is it really worth getting angry with them? Let us reflect on this and stop the stream of clinging and aversion.

8.9.
For if I act like childish beings,
Sure it is that I shall fall to evil destinies.
So why do I keep company with infants,
Who lead me to a state so far from virtue?

Ordinary beings dominated by gross attachment and hatred are like children. If we behave like them, we will not achieve anything for ourselves, and it will be impossible for us to benefit them. One minute they are our friends, the next they turn against us. However hard we try, it is difficult to please them. And when we do not listen to them, they become angry.

8.13.
Keep company with them and what will follow?
Self-aggrandisement and scorn for others,
Talk about the "good things" of saṃsāra—
Every kind of vice is sure to come.

8.14.
Only ruin can result
From such a link between myself and others.
For they will bring no benefit to me,
And I in turn can do them nothing good.

It is therefore better to keep our distance from such beings. In doing so, however, we should avoid offending them, and when we do meet them, we should be courteous and do what we can to make them happy, without becoming too familiar.

8.16.
Like bees that get their honey from the flowers,
Take only what will serve the practice of the Dharma.
Treat everyone like new acquaintances
And keep yourself from close familiarity.

Let us not be attached to ephemeral pleasures. It is only ignorant and confused people who spend time amassing possessions. They end up with suffering a thousand times as great as the happiness they seek.

8.19.
Since this is so, **the wise have no attachments;**
From such cravings fear and anguish come.
And fix this firmly in your understanding:
All that may be wished for will by nature fade to nothing.

8.20.
For people may have gained great wealth of riches,
Enjoying reputation, sweet renown.
But who can say where they have gone to now,
With all the **baggage** of their gold and fame?

What point is there in hoping for people's approval and fearing their criticism? If a few people sing our praises, there is not much to be happy about, because there might be many more who are secretly criticising us. We need not worry when a few criticise us, because there are others who have only praise for us. **The wants and needs of others are so various that it is impossible for us ordinary beings to satisfy them all. Even the Buddhas themselves cannot do so. So it is better to distance ourselves from the childish and consider instead the advantages of living in solitude.**

8.25.
In woodlands, haunt of stag and bird,
Among the trees where no dissension jars,
It's there I would keep pleasant company!
When might I be off to make my dwelling there?

8.26.
When shall I depart to make my home
In cave or empty shrine or under spreading tree,
With, in my breast, a free, unfettered heart,
Which never turns to cast a backward glance?

In such secluded places we can give up attachment to our belongings and bodies and devote all our time to meditation.

8.28.
When might I be free of fear,
Without the need to hide from anyone,
With just a begging bowl and few belongings,
Dressed in garments coveted by none?

8.33.
Like those who journey on the road,
Who pause and lodge along the way,
Beings on the pathways of existence
Seize upon the lodging of their birth.

8.34.
Until the time comes round
When four men carry me away,
Amid the grief of worldly folk—
Till then, I will away and go into the forest.

8.35.
There, with no befriending or begrudging,
I will stay alone in solitude,
Considered from the outset as already dead,
Thus, when I die, a source of pain to none.

In short, **in lonely places one is able to meditate with one-pointed concentration, free from personal concerns and attachment.** Thoughts of the Buddha and his teachings come naturally to mind.

Shāntideva continues by pointing out the mistake of being attached to sensual pleasures. As the *Bodhicharyāvatāra* was originally addressed to a community of monks, this section deals especially with the defects of the female body, but it should be understood that a woman practitioner can apply the same method of reflection to men's bodies.

8.40.
You send your go-betweens, both boy and maid,
With many invitations for the prize,
Avoiding, in the quest, no sin,
No deed that brings an ill renown,

8.41.
Nor acts of frightful risk,
Nor loss and ruin of possessions—
All for pleasure and the perfect bliss,
That utmost penetrating kiss

8.42.
Of what in truth is nothing but a heap of bones
Devoid of self, without autonomy!
Is this the only object of desire and lust?
Sooner pass beyond all suffering and grief!

Think about it: the person to whom we are so attracted, and for whom we have undergone so many ordeals, is only a mass of flesh and organs and rather unpleasant substances. What is it then that we are attached to; the person's body or mind? If we check carefully, we find that we cannot point at, any real thing that is the source of our attachment.

8.54.
"But it's the skin and flesh I love
To touch and look upon."
Then why do you not wish for flesh alone,
Inanimate and in its natural state?

8.55.
The mind that you perhaps desire,
You cannot hold or look upon.
Whatever you can hold or see is not the mind—
Why copulate with something it is not?

Let us examine the body. First of all, it originates from the procreative fluids of the parents. Once mature, it is made up of blood, flesh, organs, and bones. Were we to find any one of these things left on the ground, we would be utterly revolted. Why then are we not repelled by the body, which is wholly made up of disgusting elements?

8.63.
If still you doubt such filthiness,
Though it is very plain for all to see,
Go off into the charnel grounds;
Observe the fetid bodies there abandoned.

A large part of what we eat and drink to sustain this body ends up as an unending stream of urine and excrement, filling the sewers we find so offensive. But the very reason there are sewers is that our bodies are full of excrement. The body is no different from a sewer! As we have seen, it originates from filth, consists of filth, and churns out filth. Only when we think about the body from this point of view, says the *Garland of Jewels*, will our attachment to the body begin to diminish, if not entirely disappear.

Again, take someone with a very beautiful body. Suppose the skin were removed and the body opened up. Even in a living person, the internal organs are a gruesome sight. Our desire would soon give way to revulsion. Attachment to the body is illusion on top of illusion, and we should do our best to undo it.

8.70.
When you saw the heaps of human bones,
You felt revulsion in the charnel ground.
And will you take delight in cities of the dead
Frequented by such skeletons that live and move?

We experience endless difficulties trying to find the ideal partner, and once we have done so, we do not always get on well together. We cannot have children, or we have too many, and bringing them up adds to our problems. Of course, in the beginning the novelty is enjoyable, but if we examine things closely, we find that suffering just follows on suffering. This is why the sutras refer to "the malady of household life."

As for wealth, we go to great lengths to-obtain it, and are even prepared to lose our lives for it. Once we have it, we are forever afraid of losing it. Because of wealth, brothers and sisters are set at odds, couples break up. When we do not have it, we suffer; when we have it, we also suffer!

8.79.
The pain of gaining, keeping, and of losing all!
See the endless hardships brought on us by property!
For those distracted by their love of wealth
There is no chance for freedom from the sorrows of existence.

8.80.
They indeed, possessed of many wants,
Will suffer many troubles, all for very little:
They're like the ox that pulls the cart
And catches bits of grass along the way.

For the smallest of pleasures, people waste their human lives that have cost them a disproportionately greater effort to obtain.

8.82.
All that we desire is sure to perish,
On which account we fall to hellish pain.
For what amounts to very little
We must suffer constant and exhausting weariness.

8.83.
With but a millionth part of such vexation
Enlightenment itself could be attained!
Those who crave are plagued far more than those engaged upon the path,
Yet Buddhahood is not what they attain!

So we should examine the things that excite our distracted thoughts. Gradually these thoughts will become less strong, and our minds will become more calm. Then we will be able to meditate one-pointedly on bodhichitta.

The main meditation on bodhichitta consists of considering oneself and others to be equal and then exchanging oneself with others. As Shāntideva says:

For many aeons deeply pondering,
The mighty Sages saw its benefits,
Whereby unnumbered multitudes
Are brought with ease to supreme joy. [chap. 1, v. 7]

The masters of the Kadampa tradition left detailed teachings on different ways of practicing bodhichitta. By generating bodhichitta through such practices, we can purify all our obscurations and accumulate positive actions. It is said that we have to accumulate merit over three uncountable kalpas, but these terms are relative. With the attitude of bodhichitta such enormous amounts of merit are quickly and easily achieved. All the learned and accomplished masters, from the Buddha through Nagarjuna and his disciples down to our own present teachers, took the practice of considering others more important than themselves as the foundation of their own practice. Through this they were able to benefit themselves and others on a vast scale.

Anyone who has good thoughts, who does a lot to help others, and who leaves behind good memories is respected by people all over the world, regardless of whether they are religious or not. On the other hand, the ignorance, arrogance, and obstinacy of certain individuals, whether their intentions were good or evil, have been at the root of all the tragedies of history. The mere names of these ruthless tyrants inspire fear and loathing. So the extent to which people will like us naturally depends on how much or how little we think of others' good.

Speaking of my own experience, I sometimes wonder why a lot of people like me. When I think about it, I cannot find in myself any specially good quality, except for one small thing. That is **the positive mind, which I try to explain to others and which I do my best to develop myself.** Or course, there are moments when I do get angry, but in the depth of my heart, I do not hold a grudge against anyone. I cannot pretend that I'am really able to practice bodhichitta, but it does give me tremendous inspiration. Deep inside me, I realise how valuable and beneficial it is, that is all. And **I try as much as possible to consider others to be more important than myself. I think that's why people take note of me and like me, because of my good heart.**

When people say that I have worked a lot for peace, I feel embarrassed. I feel like laughing. I don't think I have done very much for world peace. It's just that **my practice is the peaceful path of kindness, love, compassion, and not harming others.** This has become part of me. It is not something for which I have specially volunteered. **I am simply a follower of the Buddha, and the Buddha taught that patience is the supreme means for transcending suffering.** He said, "If a monk harms others, he is not a monk." I am a Buddhist monk, so I try to practice accordingly. When people think this practice is something unique and special and call me a leader of world peace, I feel almost ashamed!

A good heart is the source of all happiness and joy, and we can all be good-hearted if we make an effort. But better still is to have bodhichitta, which is a good heart imbued with wisdom. It is the strong desire to attain enlightenment in order to deliver all beings from suffering and bring them to Buddhahood. This thought of helping others is rooted in compassion, which grows from a feeling of gratitude and love for beings, who are afflicted by suffering.

Traditionally there are two methods for developing this sort of care and gratitude. One is to reflect on the fact that all beings have at some time in the succession of their lives been our parents, or at least close friends, so that we naturally feel grateful to them and wish to take on their suffering in exchange for our happiness. The other method is to understand that others suffer in the same way as we do, to see that we are all equal, and to reflect on what is wrong with egotism and on the advantages of altruism. We can use whichever of these two methods suits us best or practice them both together.

In either case, it is necessary first to understand what we call suffering. It is easy enough for us to feel compassion for people who are starving, in pain, or in great distress and for animals who are maltreated. But when we think of human and celestial beings who are very happy, we tend to feel envious. This is because we have not really understood what suffering is and that all beings suffer. Apart from the more obvious torments of *suffering added to suffering* and *suffering of change*, there is *all-pervading suffering*.[41] Because of all-pervading suffering, as long as we are in saṃsāra, we can never have lasting happiness. Once we have reflected on and understood this for ourselves, we can apply this understanding to others. Then we start to feel compassion and think, I must free all these beings from suffering. However, to actually do so, we have to change our approach to this life and to our future lives. First we must reflect on impermanence, on the certainty of our own death, and on the fact that we can never know how soon we might die. After death, we will not simply vanish: the positive and negative actions we have done will determine how we are reborn. Our negative actions might cause us to be reborn in the lower realms, for example as animals; exploited, maltreated, and butchered by humans or devoured by other animals.

So to free ourselves from the ocean of suffering, we should begin to study and practice the path of liberation. We might hope to see some result after a few years, but speaking realistically, we should plan on probably having to continue our practice over many lives to come. In each of these lives we are going to need a proper support for practice, namely, a human body, without which it will be impossible to make progress. The first stage on the path, therefore, is to ensure a good human rebirth. So although our final aim is to achieve enlightenment for all beings, we have to begin the path by following the discipline of avoiding the ten non-virtuous actions and practicing the ten virtuous actions. [42]

To summarise, we start by getting rid of our attachment to non-spiritual goals, first in this life and then in future lives. Having seen the suffering inherent in saṃsāra, we resolve to free ourselves, and as we extend this attitude to other beings, we develop compassion and generate bodhichitta. We have to go through these stages of training the mind in the right order, like going up some stairs or like building the foundation before we build a wall. If we follow the path gradually in this way, the result we have will be stable. But if we simply say, "For the sake of all beings …" however strong our wish to help beings might be at that moment, it will not be stable unless it is well founded on the correct practice of the earlier stages.

In the beginning we should have a clear, overall view of the path, so that we know what we are aiming at in our practice and can recognise the level we have reached. Then, as we practice regularly, we may experience profound changes in our minds, but these experiences only occur when we are concentrating in sessions of meditation. Later, after meditating for a long time, we find that these experiences occur spontaneously when we encounter particular circumstances, without our needing to concentrate in meditation.

Take the example of bodhichitta. After we have meditated on bodhichitta for a while, a change occurs in our minds, but only when we are actually thinking of bodhichitta. This is what is called a 'fabricated experience'. It is not the bodhichitta of a real Bodhisattva. As we maintain progress, however, we reach a point where the mere sight of an animal or bird causes the thought to well up from the depth of our hearts; When will I ever attain enlightenment for this being? This is what we call a natural experience, and at this point true bodhichitta has taken root in us. We can genuinely call ourselves practitioners of the Mahayana and are then on the lesser path of accumulation.

Proceeding on the middle path of accumulation, we then begin the greater path of accumulation of merit, which lasts three uncountable kalpas. This is followed by the path of connection with its four stages of warmth, climax, endurance, and supreme realization. Then as we start on the path of seeing, we gain the wisdom of the first Bodhisattva level. In this way, we gradually traverse the five paths and ten levels and ultimately attain Buddhahood.[43] These paths and levels are therefore related to our own inner transformation through the practice of bodhichitta.

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[41] The three sufferings are as follows: (1) **Suffering added to suffering** is what all beings can perceive as undesirable and painful; in saṃsāra, sufferings follow each other in endless succession. For example, when one is already stricken with illness, one succumbs to another malady, or the loss of all one's possessions is followed by one's house being burnt down. (2) **Suffering of change** refers to the fact that any happiness and pleasure in saṃsāra is bound to change, sooner or later, into a state of suffering. For example, the gustative pleasure experienced during a delicious meal may give way to the discomfort of indigestion. (3) **All-pervading suffering** has been defined as suffering resulting from the very fact of having the five skandhas, or aggregates. As long as one takes conditioned existence in saṃsāra, there is suffering. Most ordinary beings are unable to perceive this clearly, just as one might not feel a hair on the palm of one's hand. But in the same way as a hair in the eye causes intense irritation and pain, realised beings experience this all-pervading suffering acutely. Further explanation is to be found in Gampopa's *The Jewel Ornament of Liberation*, trans. H. V. Guenther (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1986) and in Patrul Rinpoche's *The Words of My Perfect Teacher.* (See note 2.)

[42] See Advanced Glossary: Pāramitās - Perfections, Eleven Virtuous Mental Factors, Ten Non-virtuous Actions

[43] The five paths and ten levels: see Glossary below.

8.90.
Strive at first to meditate
Upon the sameness of yourself and others.
In joy and sorrow all are equal;
Thus be guardian of all, as of yourself.

In what way are others equal to us? Just like us, they naturally want to be happy and to avoid suffering. Although on analysis we are unable to find an "I" that truly exists, we are still convinced that it does exist, and we therefore consider that we have a right to be happy and a right to escape unhappiness. This is also the case for all other beings, so there is no particular reason why we should be any more important than them. Why should we accomplish only our own happiness and not be responsible for others' happiness? Why should we make an effort to avoid suffering for ourselves and not be responsible for doing the same for others?

When we try to protect our bodies, we also protect the parts of the body, such as our hands and feet. Similarly, since the happiness and suffering of others are all part of the same happiness and suffering that is ours, we must protect others from suffering just as much as we protect ourselves and strive for others' happiness just as we do for our own.

Our own sufferings, though not felt by others, are certainly hard for us to bear. So it is natural that we should try to protect ourselves from suffering. Similarly, others' pain, even if we do not feel it, is no less unbearable for them. But as we are related to all other beings, as we owe them our gratitude and they help us in our practice, let us try to dispel their suffering as well as ours. All beings equally want to be happy, so why should we be the only ones to get happiness? Why should we be protected from suffering and others not be?

8.94.
And therefore I'll dispel the pain of others,
For it is simply pain, just like my own.
And others I will aid and benefit,
For they are living beings, like my body.

8.97.
Since the pain of others does no harm to me,
I do not shield myself from it.
So why to guard against "my" future pain,
Which does no harm to this, my present "me"?

One might think that one has to protect oneself from future suffering because the "I" that suffers now and the "I" that will suffer in the future are the same. This is wrong, because what we think of as "I" is a succession of instants in a continuum of consciousness, and the "I" of the moment that will suffer in future is different from the "I" of the present moment.

8.99.
"It's for the sufferers themselves," you'll say,
"To shield themselves from injuries that come!"
The pain felt in my foot is not my hand's,
So why, in fact, should one protect the other?

If one were to think that everyone should take care of his or her own suffering, one could argue that the hand should protect only itself and no other part of the body: there is no reason why the hand should protect the foot. Although we might find this argument convenient, it is not at all logical. Let us stop being stubborn and thinking only of ourselves.

8.101.
Continua and gatherings, so-called,
Like garlands and like armies, are unreal.
So there is no one to experience pain
For who is there to be its "owner"?

8.102.
Suffering has no "possessor,"
Therefore no distinctions can be made in it.
Since pain is pain, it is to be dispelled.
What use is there in drawing boundaries?

When we talk about "I" and "beings," these are not independent entities. They are false labels applied to a continuum of impermanent elements, just as "necklace" is applied to a string of beads or "army" to a collection of soldiers. However, if beings have no real existence, who is in pain? Why try to dispel suffering? Although the "I" does not truly exist, in relative truth everyone wants to avoid

suffering. This is sufficient reason for dispelling the sufferings of others as well as our own. What is the use in discriminating?

8.103.
"But why dispel the pains of all?"
You cannot argue in this way!
If "my" pain is removed, so too should that of "others."
If theirs is not, then neither should be mine.

We might think, If I meditate on compassion and think of the suffering of others, it will only add to the intense pain I already have. We only think like this because we are narrow-minded. If we do not want to help beings, then their suffering will be endless. But if we can develop a little compassion and make an effort to dispel the suffering of others, then that suffering will have an end. Without our taking the responsibility to help others, there can be no limit to suffering. When we develop a broad mind and feel compassion for others, this is vastly beneficial. Any small difficulties we might experience are worthwhile.

8.105.
And if through such a single pain
A multitude of sorrows can be cured,
Such pain as this all loving people
Strive to foster in themselves and others.

The great Bodhisattvas are prepared to do anything, even lose their lives, if it will eradicate the misery of numerous other beings.

8.107.
Those whose minds are practiced in this way,
Whose joy it is to soothe another's ills,
Will venture into hell of Unrelenting Pain
As swans sweep down upon a lotus lake.

8.108.
The ocean-like immensity of joy
Arising when all beings will be freed,
Will this not be enough? Will this not satisfy?
The wish for my own freedom, what is that to me?

For a Bodhisattva who wears the armour of determination, the joy he has from alleviating the pain of infinite beings is sufficient on its own, even if he suffers a little himself. How could achieving liberation for ourselves alone, while abandoning our promise to liberate others, be better than that?

8.109.
The work of bringing benefit to beings
Will not, then, make me proud and self-admiring.
The happiness of others is itself my satisfaction;
I do not expect another recompense.

Let us never think, If I help others, I will accumulate positive actions. I will be a virtuous person and in the future I'll be happy. This is not the point. Let us do positive actions with profound compassion to relieve others' unhappiness, and let us dedicate these actions to their well-being, from the depth of our hearts, without the slightest notion of future personal reward.

We shall now discuss the exchange of self and others. This practice consists of putting ourselves in the place of others and putting others in our own place. If we train in this, we come to consider others more important than ourselves, so that their happiness and suffering become more important than ours, and when they are harmed, we feel it as acutely as when we ourselves are harmed. This is not difficult to do once we have realised the disadvantages of thinking only of ourselves and the benefits of cherishing others. Our exchange of self and others becomes so vivid and strong that it is easy for us to give our lives for others. And by others we mean all beings everywhere.

8.114.
Just as hands and other limbs
Are thought of as the members of a body,
Can we likewise not consider others
As the limbs and members of a living whole?

We should not be deterred by the difficulty of such a practice. It is a question of getting used to it through training. For example, it is possible to become used to a person whose mere name once made one afraid. One can even reach the point where one cannot bear to be separated from that person.

8.120.
Those desiring speedily to be

A refuge for themselves and others
Should make the interchange of “I” and “other,”
And thus embrace a sacred mystery.

This sure method for protecting others, including oneself, is nevertheless difficult for those with a limited understanding of bodhichitta. This is why Shāntideva refers to it as a “sacred mystery.” As he points out, the principal obstacle is cherishing oneself:

8.121.
Because of our attachment to our bodies,
Even little things alarm us.
This body, then, this source of so much terror—
Who would not detest it as the worst of foes?
8.122.
Wishing to relieve our bodies’ ills,
Our hungry mouths, the dryness of our throats,
We steal the lives of fishes, birds, and deer
And lie in wait along the road.
8.123.
And for the sake of profit and position
Some there are who even kill their parents,
Or steal what has been offered to the Triple Gem,
Because of which, they’ Il burn in hell of Unrelenting Pain.

To sustain our body to which we are so attached, we kill other beings. To make [this body] comfortable, we steal. To satisfy its ephemeral desires, we indulge in indiscriminate sexual activity. In short, because of the importance we attribute to our bodies, we accumulate a lot of negative actions. If we let our bodies do whatever they want, it can only be to our loss and detriment.

8.124.
Where are the wise and prudent then
Who cherish, guard, and serve the body?
Who would not perceive it as their foe,
And as their foe, regard it with contempt?
8.125.
“If I give this, what will be left for me?”
Thinking of oneself—the way of evil ghosts.
“If keep this, what will be left to give?”
Concern for others is the way of heaven.

If we harm and impoverish others to further our own interests, we shall be reborn in lower realms, such as the hells. On the other hand, if we forget ourselves in order to benefit others, if we are prepared to give our own lives to save the lives of others, giving them whatever is necessary for their welfare, then we shall gain happiness and all perfection.

The result of wishing to be superior to others, to be famous, will be lower rebirth or rebirth as an idiot, in abject misery, with an ugly body. On the other hand, true humility, treating others as more important than ourselves, will lead to our being reborn in the higher realms, where we will be respected and influential. If we force others to work for us and serve us, inconsiderately abuse them, in future rebirths we shall end up as their servants or even their servants’ servants. Whereas if it is we who spend our lives serving others, we shall be reborn as kings and leaders.

These, then, are the benefits to be gained from regarding others as more important than oneself and the disadvantages of giving oneself precedence.

8.129.
All the joy the world contains
Has come through wishing happiness for others.
All the misery the world contains
Has come through wanting pleasure for oneself.
8.130.
Is there need for lengthy explanation?
Childish beings look out for themselves;
Buddhas labor for the good of others:
See the difference that divides them!
8.131.
If I do not interchange
My happiness for others’ pain,

Enlightenment will never be attained,
And even in saṃsāra, joy will fly from me.

Our greatest enemy is to consider ourselves more important than others, which leads us and others to certain ruin. From this attachment to "I" arises all the harm, fear, and suffering in this world. What, asks Shāntideva, am I to do with this great demon?

8.135.
If this "I" is not relinquished wholly,
Sorrow likewise cannot be avoided.
If they do not keep away from fire,
People can't escape from being burned.

8.136.
To free myself from harm
And others from their sufferings,
Let me give myself to others,
Loving them as I now love myself.

8.137.
"For I am now beneath the rule of others,"
Of this you must be certain, O my mind.
And now no longer shall you have a thought
That does not wish the benefit of beings.

8.138.
My sight and other senses, now the property of others—
To use them for myself would be improper.
And it is likewise disallowed
To use my faculties against their owners!

As we have taken the vow to devote ourselves solely to helping other beings and from the depths of our hearts have given everything to them, we should consider that our bodies are no longer ours but belong now to them. So we must never use any part of our bodies to do anything that does not help others. Whatever we can see in ourselves that is good, let us snatch it away from ourselves and use it to serve others.

We come now to a practice that is special to the *Bodhicharyāvatāra*:

8.140.
Take others—lower, higher, equal—as yourself,
Identify yourself as "other."
Then, without another thought,
Immerse yourself in envy, pride, and rivalry.

Here we begin by evaluating our own good and bad qualities and, on this basis, comparing ourselves with others, distinguishing between those who are equal to us, those who are superior, and those who are inferior. To do this we make a distinction between our new, good side (which has seen what is wrong with considering ourselves more important than others and the benefits of regarding others as more important than ourselves) and our old, bad side, the egotistic "I." The new "I" now identifies itself with other beings and takes their side. The old "I" has three aspects: superior, equal, and inferior. And the new "I," which is now identified with others, has these three aspects as well. We shall use these two distinct "I's" to develop successively a sense of jealousy, competition, and pride.

First, we look at the good qualities in which we surpass others. Identifying ourselves (our new "I") with these inferior beings, we make ourselves jealous of the superior qualities of the old, egotistic "I." It is not fair, we cry, that he is respected while we are not!

8.141.
He's the centre of attention. I am nothing.
And, unlike him, I'm poor without possessions.
Everyone looks up to him, despising me,
All goes well for him; for me there's only bitterness!

8.142.
All I have is sweat and drudgery,
While he's there, sitting at his ease.
He's great, respected in the world,
While I'm the underdog, a well-known nobody.

If we find this comparison too humbling, we should not get discouraged at our lack of good qualities. Let us remember that all beings possess the potential for enlightenment and that we can attain Buddhahood if we make the effort. There is no reason, therefore, to be discouraged.

8.143.
What! A nobody without distinction?
Not true! I do have some good qualities.
Compared with some, he's lower down.
Compared with some, I do excel!

It is not our fault that we are inferior but the fault of negative emotions. These notions of superiority and inferiority are entirely relative. We tell the old "I": You are only superior because I am inferior, so if you want to stay superior, you will have to put up with me while I strive for enlightenment. **What use are your good qualities if they don't benefit me? In this way, when we see qualities in ourselves that make us better than others, we should exchange roles and destroy our feelings of superiority.**

Next we take those who are our equals, and again siding with them, we develop a sense of competition with our old "I," thinking only of getting the better of him and making him miserable.

8.148.
By every means I'll advertise
My gifts to all the world,
Ensuring that *his* qualities
Remain unknown, ignored by everyone.

8.149.
My faults I will conceal, dissimulate.
For I, not he, will be the object of devotion;
I, not he, will gain possessions and renown,
I will be the centre of attention.

8.150.
I will take such satisfaction
In his evil deeds and degradation.
I will render him despicable,
The butt and laughingstock of everyone.

Finally, **we think of those aspects in which we are inferior to others, and then looking at our old "I" through others' eyes, we develop a sense of pride.**

8.151.
People say this pitiful nonentity
Is trying to compete with me!
But how can he be on a par
With *me*, in learning, beauty, wealth, or pedigree?

8.152.
Just to hear them talk about my excellence,
My reputation on the lips of all,
The thrill of it sends shivers down my spine,
A pleasure that I bask and revel in!

8.153.
Even if he does have something
I'm the one he's working for!
He can keep enough just to survive,
But with my strength I'll steal the rest away.

8.154.
I will wear his happiness away;
I will always hurt and injure him.
He's the one who in saṃsāra
Did me mischiefs by the hundred!

Putting ourselves in the place of others is very helpful for seeing the faults of the egotistic "I," and we become deeply disgusted with it. When we practice like this, using jealousy as a tool, let us imagine that our old "I" is very good-looking, well-dressed, wealthy, powerful, and has everything he needs. Then we imagine ourselves as an impartial spectator in the midst of a crowd of paupers, dressed in rags, the lowest of the low. Now observe the old "I," who since time without beginning has thought only of himself and has never given a thought for others. To further his own interests, he has enslaved others and has not hesitated to kill, steal, lie, slander, and selfishly indulge in sex. He has been nothing but a burden on others' lives. When we look at the egotistic "I" in this way, true

disgust will well up in our hearts. And as we identify ourselves with these other beings, in all their misery, we will feel closer to them, and the wish to help them will grow.

We should make our practice on competitiveness and pride equally vivid and real. Let us remind ourselves of all the negative actions the "I" has made us do, all the harm it has done us, making us suffer and causing endless suffering for others, too. This is our real enemy. Would it not be wonderful to make it suffer more than we do, or even make it disappear altogether? Should we not be genuinely proud if we could break it and render it powerless?

8.156.
And therefore now most certainly
Apply yourself completely to the good of others.
The Buddha did not lie in what he said —
You'll see the benefits that come from it.

Having examined all that is wrong with considering ourselves more important than others, and having seen all the harm such an attitude brings, we should revolt against its domination and never let the thought of our own importance influence us.

8.170.
Let every thought of working for yourself
Be utterly rejected, cast aside!
Now that you've been sold to others,
Stop your whining, be of service!

8.171.
For if, through being inattentive,
I do not deliver you to others,
You will hand me over, it is certain,
To the guards and janitors of hell.

8.173.
And so it is that if I want contentment,
I should never seek to please myself.
And likewise, if I wish to guard myself,
Of others I should always be the guard.

Shāntideva stresses particularly the dangers of being attached to one's body.

8.174.
To the extent this human form
Is cosseted and saved from hurt,
Just so, just so, to that degree,
It dwindles to a weak and fretful state.

8.175.
For those who sink to such a pass,
The earth and all it holds
Are powerless to satisfy.
For who can give them all they crave?

Attachment to our body can only bring us suffering. If we cherish it because it is useful to us, then we should regard everyone else's bodies in the same way; their bodies are useful to them.

8.184.
Therefore, free from all attachment,
I will give this body for the benefit of beings.
And though it is afflicted by so many faults,
I shall adopt it as my necessary tool.

Until now, we have let ourselves be dominated by our clinging to "I." It is high time we put a stop to this childish behaviour and follow in the footsteps of the Bodhisattvas, recalling the instructions on carefulness, and warding off dullness and sleep. Like those compassionate Heirs of the Conquerors, we should patiently practice day and night. If we can do that, it is certain our suffering will come to an end.

8.187.
Thus to banish all obscuring veils
I'll bend my mind from the mistaken path;
And constantly upon the perfect object
I shall rest my mind in even meditation.