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Shantideva’s Bodhicaryavatara: An Internal Pilgrimage to Universal Peace and Compassion

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SIT Study Abroad

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SHANTIDEVA’S BODHICARYAVATARA: AN INTERNAL PILGRIMAGE TO

UNIVERSAL PEACE AND COMPASSION

‘The heart that cherishes others’, drawing by Meghan Barwick

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ABSTRACT

A study of the ideas presented in 8th century Buddhist monk and scholar Shantideva’s text called the *Bodhicaryavatara* or *The Way of the Bodhisattva*. The paper discusses the historical background of the text: 8th century India and its Buddhist rulers as well as the culture surrounding the large university and monastery that Shantideva attended called Nalanda. The ideas presented in his text illustrate the path to becoming a bodhisattva and developing universal compassion—the path of Mahayana Buddhism. It text discusses the need for these qualities for those who wish to become enlightened for the benefit of all sentient beings (a Buddha). This paper will address preparing for the path, dealing with anger, becoming enthusiastic, and practicing meditation. In order to understand the topic fully and to get more insight into the modern-day relevance of the text, the paper will also mention my experiences with the 10-day Introduction to Buddhism course and meditation retreat at Tushita Meditation Center. This paper will touch upon the ninth chapter of the *Bodhicaryavatara*, Wisdom, which is the Buddhist philosophy of emptiness and dependent arising, but will not go into detail on the complicated subject.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This paper would not be possible without the help of my knowledgeable advisor, Chok-la, and the resources at the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives; my Introduction to Buddhism teacher, Venerable Joan Nicell, and all of the staff and teachers at Tushita Meditation Center who have taught me what I needed and more about the practice of meditation in Buddhism. To Venerable Kabir Saxena at Tushita in Delhi for speaking with me about my topic and giving me books to read on Buddhism in the Western world. To my wonderful Hindi teachers Savita-ji and Prahalad-ji for giving me the skills to navigate myself in India. Thank you to Guy-ji for helping with the books and staying patient even when I emptied the bookshelves; for keeping me healthy and sane throughout the semester. To our Academic Director Storm-ji for all of her support in choosing topics and putting together this paper and for being an excellent role model of strength in the midst of chaos. Lastly, I want to thank Mrs. Malik, my Indian Nani for making me feel comfortable and helping my make my way around India; I would have felt so lost without her caring for me and making sure I was healthy for the past semester.
DEDICATION

To my parents John and Marcie Barwick who have enabled me to come to India for the semester to study and travel; to my classmates in Delhi for going through the whole India experience with me; and to all of my friends and family at home who have been following my adventures and supporting me from afar. To my fellow meditators at Tushita who became inexplicably close despite 10 days of silence, and banded together to learn about Buddhism and how to stave off vicious monkeys. To Eryn for letting me hug her after my encounter with said monkeys. Sometimes a near death experience is better than meditating on death for an hour.
“Just as a flash of lightning on a dark, cloudy night/ For an instant brightly illuminates all,/ Likewise in this world, through the might of Buddha,/ A wholesome thought rarely and briefly appears.”

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this research paper is to explore the modern relevance of the 8th century Buddhist monk and scholar Shantideva’s text, the *Bodhicaryavatara*. The paper will discuss the historical context for his work with information about his life, his association with the large monastery and university Nalanda, and the text’s role in the Buddhist path. Shantideva was an Indian scholar at an Indian university; but his teachings became a major text in Tibetan Buddhism and have moved beyond the borders of India.

The text was written to guide practitioners through the steps of becoming a bodhisattva, one who is on the path to becoming a Buddha. Though most modern people do not have this lofty goal in mind, the steps and ideas presented in the text are timeless and have related to humans’ inner workings for centuries. The paper will speak about the experience of a the 10-day Introduction to Buddhism course at Tushita Meditation Center in Mcleodganj, India. This center is a part of the FPMT, the Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition, and was founded by Lama Thubten Yeshe in 1972. It was taken over by his main student Lama Zopa Rinpoche after Yeshe’s death in 1984. The center has students and teachers from all around the world; the FPMT has 160 centers in 36 countries. The attendees may become practicing Buddhists or they may just want to learn and consider another

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spiritual path. Either way, the ideas contemplated in the meditations and in Shantideva’s text can be useful to everyone—regardless of religion.

**MOTIVATION**

Traditionally before any Buddhist teaching, practice or writing, a motivation is made to direct the efforts and energy of the work. Mahayana Buddhism concentrates on enlightenment for the benefit of all beings (the Buddha path), and this is the topic of Shantideva’s *The Way of the Bodhisattva* or *Bodhicaryavatara*. When a motivation is made in this tradition of Buddhism, it almost always reflects this focus on compassion and loving-kindness for all. Buddhism is split into two paths: Mahayana, the higher or universal vehicle, and Hinayana, the lesser vehicle. Often, Theravada is seen at the second path, but this is part of Hinayana. In practice, Hinayana Buddhists aspire to attain nirvana, but are doing so in order to escape the cyclical rebirth of samsara. Those on the Mahayana path work towards enlightenment so they can reincarnate and free other beings from samsara as well.

I dedicate the efforts of reading, studying and writing this Independent Study Project to the happiness of all beings. Though I am just an undergraduate attempting to learn about Buddhism, I hope this text will inspire others, or at least just myself. As Shantideva put it, “There is nothing here that has not been explained before/ And I have no skill in the art of rhetoric;/ Therefore, lacking any intention to benefit others, / I write this in order to acquaint it to my mind.”

Shantideva says this to express humility, which is common among Buddhists, but it is not to be confused with low-self esteem; he is using this as an antidote to pride.

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3 Shantideva, 1.
Likewise, I am happy to be coming to a clearer understanding of his ideas, so that I can integrate them into my life.

**HISTORICAL CONTEXT**

*Nalanda*

It was during the 7th century that the great university-monasteries like Nalanda were thriving in India. An early Gupta ruler who was a “great patron of Buddhism” built the monastery in the beginning of the fifth century. At the monastery, there were around 10,000 students, and 1,000 teachers who all contributed to the prestigious reputation of the institution. Yuan Chwang, who traveled to India, recorded that “in the establishment were some thousand brethren, all men of great learning and ability, several hundreds being highly esteemed and famous…Hence foreign students came to the establishment to put an end to their doubts and then became celebrated and those who ‘stole’ the name (of Nalanda) were all treated with respect wherever they went.” The establishment was wealthy and expansive. A high wall surrounded the entire complex, and many new kings would build an addition to it when they came into power. The visitors and monks at Nalanda had a high standard of living and jewels and precious metals were given for the decoration of the monastery and for the personal use of the priests. “Sometimes the endowments and provisions exceeded the needs of the monasteries so they could have great wealth, granaries full of rotten corn, many servants, male and female, money and treasures hoarded in the treasury.” Tibetans (along with travelers from other countries) came to Nalanda to study and translated major texts into

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7 Goyal, 353.
Tibetan. This is what started the move of Buddhism to Tibet, and eventually to translate *They Way of the Bodhisattva* into Tibetan.⁸

Venerable Joan Nicell, a nun and teacher at Tushita, explained that the Buddha more often taught the Hinayana path to students, because different groups of people who were suited to the teaching. The Mahayana path was practiced at Nalanda, and spread to Tibet as well. Shantideva’s work, which further illustrates the universal path, is also extremely important to Tibetan Buddhists, and it was translated to Tibetan in the 11th century.⁹ “For the religious practitioner it became an important scripture outlining the essential practices of the Mahayana Buddhist path to enlightenment,” writes Geshe Thumpten Jinpa in an introduction to the Dalai Lama’s commentary on the text.¹⁰

Nalanda continued to thrive until end of the Pala Dynasty and “with their death ended the royal patronage of Buddhism.” Therefore when Muslim rulers invaded, there was no one to protect the university or its resident monks.¹¹ After the destruction of the monastery with the end of the dynasty, Buddhism in India declined and Brahmanism took its place.¹²

**Shantideva**

Shantideva was born a prince in India, but decided to give up his throne for monkhood. There are many stories surrounding his life and time at Nalanda, but most of them are legends and exaggerations. In one version, the night before he would become king, 

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¹⁰ Ibid., xiii.
¹¹ Hazra, 395.
¹² Ibid.
Shantideva had a dream where Manjushri, the bodhisattva of wisdom “appeared to him and
told him to renounce worldly life and seek ultimate truth.”13 Another story says that his
mother gave him a ceremonial bath with scalding water saying, “Son, this pain is nothing
compared to the pain you will suffer when you’re king.”14 Shantideva was attending Nalanda
in the 8th century, and as a monk he had a reputation for doing nothing: only eating, sleeping,
and using the bathroom.15 The other monks asked him to give a talk in front of the entire
monastery in order to teach him a lesson, assuming he really did not know anything of his
studies. Some stories say they hoped he would leave the establishment out of embarrassment,
and others say they hoped he would learn to study more.16 Instead of standing in front of
thousands of monks with nothing to say, Shantideva gave the teaching that we now call the
*Bodhicaryavatara*. During chapter nine while teaching on the subject of wisdom, Shantideva
was said to begin to float higher and higher until only his voice remained. After the
completion of the teaching, he disappeared, spending the rest of his life as a yogi.

**Bodhisattvas and Bodhichitta**

The purpose of the *Bodhicaryavatara (The Way of the Bodhisattva)* is, as its name
suggests, a guide those who want to follow the path of a bodhisattva. A bodhisattva is
someone who wishes to become a Buddha for the sake of all sentient beings. There are two
end goals associated with the traditions of Buddhism as mentioned above. In Mahayana to
become a Buddha, and in Hinayana to become an Arhat. Having the desire to become a

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13 Chodron, xi.
14 Ibid.
15 Ibid.
16 Taranatha, *History of Buddhism in India*, trans. Alaka Chattopadhyaya Lama Chimpa
Buddha is seen as the highest goal to have. As Shantideva says, “Do even fathers and mothers/ Have such a benevolent intention as this?/ Do the goads and sages?/ Does even Brahma have it?” He is questioning if even the god of creation, Brahma, has the desire to free all beings from suffering, and the wish for them to attain nirvana, or the end to cyclical existence (samsara).

**Samsara and Karma**

Buddhists believe that every being is born over and over, and they can only exit this cycle when they have attained nirvana. The events and conditions of a beings’ birth depends on the karma they have amassed throughout all of their previous lifetimes. Karma is the law of cause and effect; bad actions create the causes for bad events or conditions and good actions do the same. Many of the rituals, offerings, confessions and meditation are done with the purpose of wiping out the seed of bad karma or creating good karma. In terms of understanding the *Bodhicaryavatara*, Shantideva puts most of his instructions in the context of karma; if one is angry or unethical; they will be reborn in hell, and so on. For Westerners, it is sometimes difficult to accept karma and rebirth as an imperative to act better. Luckily Shantideva not only writes reasons to be compassionate in terms of karma, but also in terms of immediate situations; causes and effects.

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17 Shantideva, 5.
MODERN-DAY RELEVANCE

Though *The Way of the Bodhisattva* was written in the 8th century, commentaries on it have been continuously produced starting from the 14th century. Pema Chodren, a American nun produced *No Time to Lose: A Timely Guide to the Way of the Bodhisattva* in 2005, explaining how the ideas of the text are still relevant today, not just for Dharma (Buddhist) practitioners but also unaffiliated Westerners. In order to “officially” be a Buddhist, a person takes refuge in the Three Jewels: the Buddha (the enlightened one), Dharma (teachings), and Sangha (religious community), which means that they have decided take their primary teachings from the Dharma and they wish to become enlightened and exit samsara. However, we do not have to take refuge to take Shantideva’s advice. What Shantideva offers us are ideas that can help us understand our own mind better.

BENEFITS OF THE AWAKENING MIND

Developing Compassion

In the Dalai Lama’s teaching in Mcleodganj on March 31, he quoted Shantideva saying, “Whatever joy there is in this world/All comes from desiring others to be happy./ And whatever suffering there is in this world./ All comes from desiring myself to be happy.” The Dalai Lama, a proponent of peace in the world advises that the only way to create this is to have peace within our smaller communities and ourselves first. How can we end wars if we are warring with others and ourselves through negative emotions like anger, jealousy, greed

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19 Shantideva, 111.
20 14th Dalai Lama Tenzin Gyatso, "Medicine Buddha Teaching" (Mcleodganj, March 31, 2014).
and more? Following the path set out by Shantideva will lead to greater compassion within, and therefore, a more cohesive and beautiful relationship with our world and fellow beings. Shantideva teaches how one can develop bodhichitta, or a wise, open and enlightened heart, and set forth on the Buddha path for the good of all. “The mind is like a seed;” writes the Dalai Lama, “when cultivated, it gives rise to many other good qualities, such as forgiveness, tolerance, inner strength and the confidence to overcome fear and insecurity.”\(^{21}\) The first step in the journey to develop compassion is to understand the benefits and create the motivation to endure the work and suffering that comes along with the trip.

**Internal pilgrimage to implement bodhichitta**

There are journeys to be made in life, both externally and internally—yet many Westerners never seize the opportunity to expand their knowledge and understanding of the world or themselves. Shantideva seemed to have an answer to many questions, and his writing has been influential and relevant since it was spoken 13 centuries ago. Dr. Chok Tenzin Monlam Peltsok, Head of Translation and Research at the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives in Dharamsala, India, says that it is important for those looking for answers not to accept what they are being told, but to go and study, read, and question things. Only then he says, can we be sure of our knowledge.\(^{22}\) This exploration is a pilgrimage; one must leave their home (and the comfort of accepted beliefs, friends, and culture) in order to come to a deeper understand about the nature of life that is common to all humans. Bruce Chatwin,

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\(^{22}\) Dr. Chok Tenzin Monlam Peltsok, interview by Meghan Barwick, *Research and Translation Department Head, Library of Tibetan Works and Archives*, Dharamsala, Himachal Pradesh (March 31, 2014).
quoted in Phil Cousineau’s book, *The Art of Pilgrimage*, wrote about this push to go into the unknown by saying, “I have a vision of the Songlines” stretching across the continents and the ages; that wherever men have trodden they have left a trail of song (of which we may, now and then), catch an echo; and that these trails must reach back in time and space, to an isolated pocket in the African savannah, where the First Man opening his mouth in defiance of the terrors that surrounded him, shouted the opening stanza of the World Song ‘I AM!’”

Every person has this urge for adventure because tough work is rewarded in knowledge, which in turn leads to peace and happiness. “I AM,” is something that rings true in every human, maybe because this is all we know—we know we exist, but why and how is the question we want and need to explore. Shantideva investigates this too, and asks us to look at our own natures and reflect. Lama Yeshe often says that Buddhism does not ask us to believe in the supernatural, but to focus on the reality of things. He says Buddhism is much more “in the realm of philosophy, science or psychology.” In our shrinking world, it is growing more important to see each other as part of a global community, because in the end we are all humans trying to understand the reason and purpose of our lives.

In the 8th century version of 21st century slang ‘#YOLO’ (you only live once), Shantideva says, “For these very reasons, the Buddha has said/ For as difficult is for a turtle to insert its neck/ Into a yoke adrift upon the vast ocean,/ It is more difficult to attain the human

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24 Cousineau, 43.
26 Ibid., 5.
state.”  

Shantideva tells about how to make this life worth its brevity; if we work with his words, we can reduce our suffering and the suffering of those around us. According to the Dalai Lama, “Shantideva composed this text in the form of an inner dialogue. He turned his own weapons upon himself, doing battle with his negative emotions. Therefore when we teach or listen to this text, it is important that we do so in order to progress spiritually, rather than making it simply a subject of academic study”.  

Buddhist teachers and practitioners will always the same thing; it is not about reading ideas and immediately adopting them, but rather checking your own mind and experiences and testing them out. The process of checking the theories involve analysis and meditation; observing how and why the mind reacts to the ideas. Lama Yeshe, said that, “you can find nice ideas in every book in the world, but how do these nice ideas relate to you mind?”  

The next step in developing Bodhichitta is to put the ideas to test within our lives and ascertain their truth.  

**PREPARING FOR THE BODHISATTVA PATH**  

The first three chapters of *The Way of the Bodhisattva* focus on preparation: having a clear goal, owning up to our past selves, and accepting this chosen goal. The first focuses on why it beneficial to become a bodhisattva and how to develop the aspiration to follow these goals. This section was touched upon in the introduction to this paper, but the next two sections are also extremely important in order to set a successful path that leads to action, and not simply aspiration. As Shantideva says, “As is understood by the distinction/ Between  

27 Shantideva, 28.  
aspiring to go and (actually) going./ So the wise understand in turn/ The distinction between
these two.” This idea is especially pertinent to Westerners, as they often announce they will
set on a path, but never actually go down the road. This may have to do with Westerners
expecting an immediate result from saying this, rather than truly understanding the breadth of
the practice they have chosen. For example, one cannot pick up a guitar and learn in a day; the
process is life-long and may never be completed. Lama Yeshe always mentions this idea to
his Western audiences: “because you regard these new ideas materialistically, you try to make
radical changes to your everyday life…You can only change your mind gradually…to abandon
your basic nature and try to change yourself according to some fantastic idea, as if you were
changing clothes—that’s really hallucinating.” Once we have accepted that we want to make
changes to our lives, and how we relate to the world, we must be patient and diligent.

**Motivation for Practicing Bodhichitta**

In order to prepare oneself for developing this quality, Shantideva presents the practice
of offering, prostration, confession and refuge. They are important aspects of Buddhist
practice. In his text, Shantideva makes offerings to various Buddhas, with descriptions of
beautiful and comfortable things: crystal floors, warm baths, sweet-smelling flowers, incense,
and fluffy towels. According to Chodren, “the act of giving so runs against the grain of our
habitual selfishness that the effect is liberating.” Instead of fantasizing about all of the
beautiful things in the world, which inspires greed, we can imagine giving them away. In

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30 Shantideva, 3.
31 Yeshe, “Peaceful Stillness”, 15.
32 Shantideva, 10.
33 Chodron, 26.
Buddhism, these offerings go to those who have already attained nirvana in order to become like them one day.

In Tibetan Buddhism, when one makes a prostration, the hands are first folded in a prayer position with the thumbs tucked in. Next, they are placed at the forehead, then the throat, and lastly the heart. This represents body (head), speech (throat), and mind (heart). Then the prostrator puts his or her hands on the ground, flowed by knees, and then forehead. This entire process is not to worship teachers or deities, but as a sign of respect to the ideas that have helped you and others. The Dalai Lama says that “prostrations are an antidote to arrogance and conceit.” A display of humility, in the case of a teacher, shows that none of the teachings were their own, but rather all learned from their own gurus.

Shantideva next confesses his past evil deeds. Chodren writes that he engages in the “four powers of confession”: recognition of misdeeds with ‘positive sadness,’ reliance on basic wisdom, remedial action, and the resolve to do our best to not keep making the same mistakes.” Modern teachers often say that the point is not to be feeling guilty, as Westerners are pushed to feel in other religious traditions, but to understand the action, its disadvantages and make a genuine effort to stop the actions. “Buddhism stresses going beyond any fixed identity,” says Chodren, “good, bad, or in-between.” If bad actions are perceived like this, people are more likely to make changes rather than feeling down and discouraged because of their ‘sins’. Shantideva also addresses the fact that at death, nothing will remain but the consequences of one’s past deeds. During the meditation retreat, there was a practice to meditate on death; focusing on how we would feel if we knew we would die soon. Shantideva

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35 Chodron, 37.
36 Ibid., 39.
is constantly mentioning death; perhaps he wants his audience to be familiar with the idea and be spurred to action. The first action is to confess what we have already wrong, and the second a strong determination to not make the same mistakes in our short lives.

In Buddhist terms, refuge is taken in the Three Jewels as mentioned earlier; but Shantideva also makes specific references to Buddhist deities; who do not exist for the purpose of worship, but as reminders of the ideal qualities that practitioners strive for. Two of these deities are Avalokiteshvara, the Buddha of compassion, and Manjushri, the Buddha of wisdom. By recognizing ideal qualities like compassion or wisdom, we know what to aspire to and have roles models to base it off. Personally, when asked to visualize a certain Buddha in meditation, I instead visualized someone I respect for that quality—for example the Dalai Lama for the wisdom and love he possesses. This ties into prostration; when we understand and rejoice in what others have achieved, we create more cause for our own happiness.

Acceptance and rejoicing in bodhichitta

When the Buddha first achieved enlightenment, he did not begin to teach his ideas because he thought that the world was not ready for them. It is said that the Gods Indra and Brahma had to ask him to turn the Wheel of Dharma and teach. Shantideva asks that those who have achieved enlightenment stay with us in samsara in order to help all beings attain the same bliss. In a similar way, he makes the dedications for his own efforts; “May I be the doctor, the medicine/ And may I be the nurse/ For all sick beings in the world,/ Until everyone is healed.” We should aspire to help everyone in whatever way they need; regardless of

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38 Shantideva, 20.
whether or not it is possible. Shantideva says that this wish is the “universal bridge” that will help us and other to experience lasting happiness.\textsuperscript{39}

\textit{Methods to stave off laziness and procrastination}

In order to stay focused on our goals, we need to always remember their purposes and our own transient nature. Shantideva again mentions death and the unlikelihood of a human birth. According to Buddhism, a human birth provides a better chance for enlightenment. Though there are god realms, the gods are said to have too much pleasure, and therefore never focus on exiting samsara. Humans suffer enough to have a reason to change the way they understand themselves. The Dalai Lama writes that “negative emotions have been harming us from time without beginning. They are truly the worst enemies.”\textsuperscript{40} As long as we understand this, we can keep a strong goal in mind and slowly progress towards it.

\textbf{ANGER AND PATIENCE}

Shantideva acknowledges that anger is the most destructive state of mind in his teaching about patience: “Whatever wholesome deeds,/ Such as venerating the Buddhas and generosity,/ That have been amassed over a thousand aeons,/ Will all be destroyed in one moment of anger.”\textsuperscript{41} If anger has the power to destroy ages of merit, than it is vital that humans resist and challenge this negative state. Again, placed in the context of rebirth, anger creates bad karmic imprints for our future lives. However, anger has tangible effects in this

\textsuperscript{39} Shantideva, 24.
\textsuperscript{40} Dalai Lama, “A Flash of Lightning”, 37.
\textsuperscript{41} Shantideva, 53.
life too: “My mind will not experience peace/ If it fosters painful thoughts of hatred.”

Looking back on the times where anger or hatred has been present, it is impossible to find any happiness or peace. Instead of looking at this idea on the scale of many lifetimes, it might be easier for modern day practitioners to think about it on a smaller scale. In a relationship, one negative moment overpowers hundreds of happy ones. The Dalai Lama comments, “under the influence of anger, people of normally good character change completely and can no longer be counted on.”

The effects of anger last much longer than we think, as we get attached to the emotion and used to using the feeling of anger.

Not only does this lash of anger destroy our happiness, but others’ as well. Those who are often angry or hateful are more in danger of being hated, or even being killed; it’s a waste of energy for all parties involved. Shantideva asks, “Why be unhappy about something/ If it can be remedied/ And what is the use of being unhappy about something/ If it cannot be remedied?”

If this question was in our minds when things or people annoy us, we would be seeing many more peaceful people walking the streets. If people continue to be angry, they will be running away from their chance at happiness.

Attachment to anger

If anger is such a negative and destructive emotion, why are there so many angry people around? First, anger, like patience, suffering, attachment and more get easier as they are repeated. Anger is habitual; it is important to remember that others suffer through much worse. Shantideva mentions the ascetics of Karnapa, who injure themselves or cut off their

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42 Shantideva, 53.
43 Dalai Lama, ”A Flash of Lightning”, 54.
44 Shantideva, 54.
own heads to attain a spiritual goal; and asks why he cannot deal his own with minor annoyances. “I should not be impatient/ With heat and cold, wind and rain,/ Sickness, bondage and beatings;/ For if I am, the harm they cause me will increase.”

A prime example is when one needs to call the bank to fix a mistake they made. First, they play utterly irritating elevator music, interrupting it every nine minutes to say, “Please hold.” Next, one gets switched from representative to representative. After 30 minutes of this, the phone loses signal and cuts the call. While this may seem extremely annoying and a perfect reason for an angry rant, it is not really that bad in the scheme of sufferings. We are missing the patience for suffering that causes anger, and attachment occurs when we think that anger is the easiest solution. Humans stuck in cyclical existence might also continue to anger easily because they do not acknowledge that this is a problem or that they have the power to curb this feeling. For this, Shantideva elaborates, “there is nothing whatsoever/ That is not made easier through acquaintance./ So through becoming acquainted with small harms,/ I should learn to patiently accept greater harms.”

Though this may be a daunting task, simply putting effort into patience can make things easier.

**The necessity of suffering and practicing patience**

In the same way that anger becomes a habit, patience can also become second nature, but only if it is practiced. Shantideva elaborates on why we should be thankful for those who anger us in our lives; they give us a chance to practice patience. If people surround themselves with those whom they get along with, they might not be testing their true abilities. The Dalai Lama comments, “the practitioner, at the initial stage, chooses an isolated place. However this

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45 Shantideva, 55.
46 Ibid., 55.
is not a long-term solution; it’s a temporary method.\textsuperscript{47} The path of Mahayana Buddhism has the goal of eliminating not only the conscious form of emotions and the seed of that emotion, but the imprint of it as well.\textsuperscript{48} There’s a big difference between pretending to be patient and genuinely not having a feeling of anger arise. According to the Dalai Lama, “If we have the realization that tolerating immediate hardship can have long-term beneficial consequences, we are more likely to be able to tolerate everyday hardships.”\textsuperscript{49} Not only does suffering help us get used to other sufferings, but it also lessens the feeling of arrogance, and connects us to others with deeper empathy and compassion.\textsuperscript{50} The Dalai Lama as mentions that when we actively practice patience, it is the best way to gain respect because even our enemies can appreciate us.\textsuperscript{51} “We Tibetans, for example, have undergone great difficulties at the hands of others. But if we get angry with [the Chinese], we can only be the losers.”\textsuperscript{52} Not only does the Dalai Lama speak these qualities of non-aggression and patience, but actively promotes and lives them with the real life situation of his people, who have been oppressed whose culture has been destroyed by the Chinese government.

\textit{The absence of self and other ways to think through anger}

Shantideva spends a few verses discussing the idea of ‘Self’ which has much to do with the ninth chapter of the text on wisdom. He refutes the existence of a permanent, non-changing self and argues that if this were true, it would not be possible to affect its nature with

\textsuperscript{47} Dalai Lama, “Healing Anger”, 81.  
\textsuperscript{48} Pelsok, (March 31, 2014).  
\textsuperscript{49} Dalai Lama, “Healing Anger”, 2.  
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., 39.  
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., “A Flash of Lightning”, 68.  
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., 74.
any conditions.\textsuperscript{53} Since it is clear that phenomena are constantly being affected by other phenomena, “nothing governs itself./ Having understood this, I should not become angry/ With phenomena, which are like apparitions.”\textsuperscript{54} By understanding that the actions of an individual are motivated by their own set of circumstances, we become less angry with them. If one was hit with a stick, we would get angry at the person who holds the stick, not the object itself. In the same way, anger should not be directed towards a person for an action that was indicated by some illogical emotion of anger, suffering, jealousy, hatred and so on.\textsuperscript{55}

In Buddhist thought, when someone harms another it is the harmer who is actually hurt because they will gain poor karma and be reborn in hell for it. In this way, they need to practice compassion and not retaliation. Regardless of belief in a hell, it is easy to see that becoming angry and taking revenge can only cause a cycle of negative emotions and suffering. Shantideva says that the mind is not physical, therefore no words can harm it. “Since disrespect, harsh speech/ and unpleasant words/ Do not cause any harm to my body./ Why, mind, do you become so angry?”\textsuperscript{56} Two of the Eight Worldly Concerns are gaining praise and avoiding a loss of reputation, so we often place our happiness in the hands of what others think of us. Likewise, we are often displeased, annoyed or even angry when someone else, especially an enemy is praised or receives good fortune.\textsuperscript{57}

Anger comes in many forms: from its mild symptoms of irritation and annoyance all the way to deep hatred. Not matter how it comes, it is an illogical emotion; its antidote is patience and wisdom. When we thinking through why we are angry, we find that the anger no

\textsuperscript{53} Shantideva, 57.  
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., 58.  
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., 59.  
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., 61.  
\textsuperscript{57} Nicell, (April 9, 2014).
longer exits or makes sense. We understand that it harms others and ourselves, and we practice peace in our lives. This is the path of a bodhisattva: first to eliminate the conscious form of the emotion (yelling at someone or taking revenge), and then to work on ridding oneself of the seed of the emotion (the potential for anger to rise), and next the imprint (the lasting wisp of the emotion).  

ENTHUSIASM

“What is enthusiasm?,” writes Shantideva, “It is finding joy in what is wholesome/ Its opposing factors are explained/ As laziness, attraction to what is harmful/ and despising oneself out of despondency.”  

Shantideva is writing this chapter to encourage against laziness in spiritual practice, but it is still helpful in other aspects of our lives as it is directed against apathy in all forms. Shantideva uses reality as a motivation in the sense that there will come a day where we will look around and think, “what have I done all my life?.” Like some of his previous statements, Shantideva mentions that death will come to us all, “Relying upon a boat of a human (body)/ Free yourself from the great river of pain!/ As it is hard to find this boat again./ This is no time for sleep you fool.”  

Today, most people grow up within a system: get through primary school, possibly finish secondary schooling in university, and go immediately into the work force. This time does not usually include exploring the mind and understanding the ultimate nature of reality. According to Shantideva, this is integral to living a full and ethical life, and this is important even if we are not aspiring Buddhas.

58 Peltsok, (March 31, 2014).
59 Shantideva, 76.
60 Ibid., 78.
Shantideva quotes the Tathagatas saying, “If they develop the strength of their exertion./ Even those who are flies, mosquitoes, bees and insects/ Will win the unsurpassable awakening./ Which is so hard to find.” Like patience and anger, the more one practices enthusiasm, the easier it becomes to create bodhichitta. Laziness is cyclical as well—students in university might develop a habit of leaving their work until the night before, for example, and have a hard time breaking out. Likewise, if a student starts to change this habit, each time he or she puts effort into the work in a timely fashion, it becomes easier to do this on the next assignment. The Dalai Lama writes that, “laziness has three aspects: having no wish to do good, being distracted by negative activities, and underestimating oneself by doubting one’s ability.” It may be tempting to binge watch Netflix instead of meditating or reading, but building good habits is extremely important to our spiritual practice.

**Self-Confidence**

Without self-confidence, enthusiasm is diminished. Thinking that it is possible to attain a goal, whether is be liberation or improving on a personal skill, is vital to one’s success. “When crows encounter a dying snake,/ They will act as though they were eagles./ (Likewise,) if (my self-confidence) is weak,/ I shall be injured by the slightest downfall.” Like he mentioned earlier, even tiny ants can attain enlightenment if they try—lacking self-confident means most times that actions never come to fruition. My brothers and I used to say things like, “but I can’t do it! I don’t know how!” and my mother would respond by quoting *The Little Engine That Could*: “I think I can, I think I can!” How many times have people

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61 Shantideva, 77.
62 Dalai Lama, “A Flash of Lightning”, 76.
63 Shantideva, 84.
said, “oh no, I couldn’t do that, I don’t understand science, or I read too slowly; I couldn’t possibly do this, I don’t have the qualifications, and there are just too many things going on right now.” These are all excuses to delay success, which according to Shantideva, is always possible. Excuses are the manifestation of laziness: to conquer these feelings we need self-confidence and joy in the efforts we are making. The Dalai Lama advises, “do not be too stubborn or push yourself too hard. If you practice in accord with our individual capacity, little by little you will find more pleasure and joy from it. As you gain inner strength, your positive actions will gain in profundity and scope.”64 Again, it is said that results will not be immediate, no matter what you do, they will come slowly; we should not lose faith for this reason.

MEDITATION

Much of the meditation chapter in the Bodhicaryavatara focuses on getting rid of distractions in order to allow concentrative meditation. The purpose of this concentration is to be able to control the mind and remove the seed of negative emotions. In the case of a large group of 8th century monks the biggest distraction from their contemplation was sexual arousal and romantic love. For this reason, Shantideva includes a large number of verses on the body, and more specifically the human body. In these morbid verses, Shantideva asks his readers to visualize the human body without skin. Like these instructions, Shantideva’s instruction to go live in a cave65 for a few years should also be taken with context; monks may have time to go spend years of their life in solitude, but most of the lay people do not.

64 Dalai Lama, “A Flash of Lightning”, 87.
65 Shantideva, 93.
“Because of the obsession one transient being/ Has for other transient beings,/ They will not see their beloved ones again/ For many thousands of lives,” states Shantideva. Even if we are not ready to give up our strong attachments to serious relationships, it is beneficial to examine the nature of the attachment. Nicell noted that one of the most common reasons that monks or nuns give up their robes is for a relationship. In Buddhist philosophy, attachment works like this: we perceive an object, concept, or being as attractive, good, or beneficial and the mind exaggerates these good qualities, making negative emotions like anger and jealousy arise. Shantideva noted that even in his time, the love one has for their partner is akin to an obsession. This doesn’t mean that Buddhists are against love, but that Buddhist define love as wanting someone else to be happy, and attachment is wanting someone else (or a thing) to make you happy.

The first way to combat the grasping of individuals is recognize their transient nature; friends become enemies and strangers, and the other way around. One of the meditation practices on this idea is visualizing a stranger, friend, and enemy (someone disliked) and analyzing the reasons behind why each one is categorized as such. This meditation is useful in building equanimity between people, and eventually to have equal compassion and loving-kindness for all beings. We find that how we see others is a reflection on our self-cherishing heart, which loves those who help us and dislikes others. The self-cherishing heart only cares for “my happiness”.

66 Shantideva, 89.
68 Ibid.
69 Ibid.
Practice in Today’s World

For Westerners, it seems that there is never an opportunity to be alone. In fact, sometimes when people start to feel alone, all they have to do is pick up their phone or open their computer to get in contact with their attachments—friends and family. Chodren wrote that “in order to work with difficult outer circumstances, we need to gather our inner strength. If even ten or twenty minutes of meditation a day helps us to do this, let’s go for it!” Meditation gives us time to focus on our minds and disconnect from the things that stress us out.

Tushita Meditation Center runs several courses, many that are 10 days, that focus on meditation and solitude. While you may be participating with 20 to 50 others, it is important that silence is kept within the period to focus inwards and on the teachings given each day. If people can learn to be okay with being alone, their attachments will be looser and therefore healthier. Signs like jealousy in a relationship should remind people of the negative aspects of attachment, and can help us to train people out of these constant negative and illogical emotional responses. Meditation and solitude are simply tools to help us focus on developing our compassion and wisdom, free from distractions.

Personally, I felt that I gained insight into my inner workings by going into retreat. I was not able to put my thoughts and issues out to others for answers, but was forced to look inside for the solution. It is not that communicating with others is not helpful, but that looking inward gives us self-confidence and personal truths.

70 Chodron, 277.
Shamatha and Vipassana

There are two main types of meditation, Shamatha and Vipassana. Shamatha means “calm-abiding” and is a focusing meditation to train the mind to be still in single point concentration. Vipassana is analytical meditation and means, “special insight” and uses logic and reasoning to gain answers.\textsuperscript{71} Vipassana is common in Asia and centers offer 10-day courses in the technique on a donation basis. The Tushita course was neither Shamatha based nor Vipassana, but an introduction to both methods and an overview of the teachings that go along with them. Though many Westerners complete beginner Vipassana courses in Asia, they are not the easiest introduction into Buddhist meditation. For Shamatha meditation there are specific steps in order to master the process, and it could take a lifetime (or lifetimes) to master such a strong focus. For more information of the process and a common illustration, see the appendix (page 35).

Wisdom

Often times in shorter teachings or commentaries on the Bodhicaryavatara, the Wisdom chapter is left out because of the complexity of its contents and the amount of time it would take to cover the subject. The subject will likewise be left out of this paper, but it is important to comment on it. The Wisdom chapter revolves around the Buddhist philosophy of emptiness (shunyata) and dependent arising. The philosophy says that nothing has inherent existence and our consciousness places labels on objects and concepts that makes them seem to exist from their own side. This is the idea of emptiness; objects and concepts do exist, but they exist in the manner they do because of the perception by the average being (aka non-

\textsuperscript{71} Nicell, (April 8, 2014).
enlightened beings). Buddhas and Arhats aspire to be enlightened and this is the way to nirvana. A contemplator who can directly perceive this concept has gained enlightenment. This concept is intertwined with relieving suffering; once one can perceive emptiness, they will also understand that suffering is a creation of the mind, and anger and attachment become impossible concepts.

DEDICATION OF MERITS

I will again dedicate the merit accumulated in studying this subject to the benefit of all beings. I hope that this writing and presentation will inspire others to read more and explore their minds in order to create happiness within themselves and in the world. The benefits that could come about in our society if each of its members took time to learn about themselves and erase anger, attachment and other negative emotions would be innumerable. The Dalai Lama says that, “every destructive action goes against our basic nature; building, being constructive, is the human way.”\textsuperscript{72} We can all hope that the positive energy of our efforts can cause a cycle of evolution in how we relate with each other in the face of globalization, nationalism, and power struggles.

\textsuperscript{72} Dalai Lama, “The Global Community”, 13.
GLOSSARY

Shantideva- Indian monk and scholar from the 8th century who attended Nalanda University and gave a lecture that became *The Way of the Bodhisattva* or *Bodhicaryavatara*.

Bodhicaryavatara- A Sanskrit poem organized in 10 chapters which talks about the processes of attaining enlightenment and developing bodhichitta; also known as *A Guide to the Way of the Bodhisattva*.

Bodhisattva- An enlightened being that could attain enlightenment, or bodhi, but want to first help others achieve the same goals.

Bodhi- enlightenment, wisdom

Bodhichitta- an open heart, relating to enlightenment

Buddha- The enlightened one; or reference to the historical Buddha (Siddhartha Gautama)

Dharma- Buddhist teachings

Nirvana- The goal of Buddhists; to “extinguish”; the end of existence and the end of the cycle of rebirths

Nalanda- Ancient university and monastery that was located in Bihar, India, which was supported by the Pala Empire; destroyed in the 12th century

Mahayana- Major school of Buddhism, originated from India, focuses on attaining enlightenment for the good of others (see Bodhisattva) in Sanskrit it means “the higher or universal vehicle”

Mind/Consciousness- That which is clear and knowing

Vajrayana- Tantric Buddhism, which is a path to enlightenment; originating in India

Vipassana- A type of meditation meaning ‘special insight’

Sangha- The community of Buddhist practitioners; includes nuns, monks, and lay people

Shamatha- A type of meditation to develop single point concentration

Shunyata- Sanskrit for emptiness, often applied to a meditative state

Three Jewels- Buddha, Dharma, Sangha

Pala Empire- Buddhist rulers of northeast India between the 8th and 12th centuries
**Prostration**- Offering respect and thanks to Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, or teachers; can be physical movement, verbal or mental.

**Wisdom**- Referring to the Buddhist theory of emptiness and dependent arising

**Yogi**- An ascetic who lives isolated from others and contemplates; one who lives in retreat

**SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

There could be a project done on simply the 9th chapter of the *Bodhicaryavatara*. The Buddhist philosophy of emptiness is fascinating and complicated. Historically, it seems that Buddhism in India was vibrant and thriving—I would be interested to understand more of the downfall of Buddhism in India and what it was like during this peak time; even a larger project could be done on the university-monasteries. There could be some research done on Vipassana in India, and the culture surrounding the courses—so many Westerners are looking to study these things. On that note, Westerners come from around the globe looking for spiritual answers. This in itself has many possibilities: how Western tourists have affected the local culture; how they perceive India’s art, clothing, and music; or the experience of those travelers on a pilgrimage to India.
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APPENDIX

Shamatha is attained by progressing through the nine stages, relying on the eight antidotes to abandon the five faults. This is accomplished through the six powers and the four mental engagements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fault</th>
<th>Antidote</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. laziness</td>
<td>1. faith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. forgetfulness</td>
<td>2. aspiration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. laxity and excitement</td>
<td>3. effort</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. non-application</td>
<td>4. piousness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. over-application</td>
<td>5. mindfulness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6. introspection</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7. application - intention</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8. equanimity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. The first stage is attained through the **power of bearing**.
2. **Stage 1 - Setting the mind**
3. Mindfulness
4. Introspection
5. From here until the seventh stage the flame progressively decreases in size until it becomes absent. This difference denotes the measure of the strength of effort required regarding mindfulness and introspection.
6. The elephant is the mind and the black colour symbolises laxity.
7. The monkey is the proliferation of thoughts and the black colour symbolises excitement.
8. The second stage is attained through the **power of thinking**.
9. **Stage 2 - Continuous setting**
10. Excitement has the five sense pleasures as its objects.
11. From here, the black colour progressively becomes white. This symbolises the factor of clarity and the factor of stability progressively increasing.
12. The third and fourth stages are attained through the **power of mindfulness**.
13. **Stage 3 - Resetting**
14. The rabbit is subtle laxity. From here, one can individually identify coarse and subtle laxity.
15. Looking back means that having recognized that the mind has wandered, it is again directed back to the object.
16. **Stage 4 - Close setting**
17. The fifth and sixth stages are attained through the **power of introspection**.
18. The potential for excitement to arise prior to meditation has weakened.
19. Since virtuous thoughts are an interruption at the time of shamatha meditation, it is necessary to stop them. At other times it is not necessary.
20. Due to introspection the mind does not fall into scattering and through being uplifted, it is drawn into concentration.
21. **Stage 5 - Disciplining**
22. **Stage 6 - Pacifying**
23. The seventh and eighth stages are attained through the **power of effort**.
24. **Stage 7 - Thorough pacifying**
25. At this stage it is difficult for subtle laxity or excitement to arise and even if they do arise a little, they are immediately eliminated with the slightest effort.
26. **Stage 8 - Making one-pointed**
27. The ninth stage is attained through the **power of familiarity**.
28. **Stage 9 - Setting in equipoise**
29. Physical pliancy
30. Mental pliancy
31. Attainment of shamatha
32. The root of samsara is cut by the union of shamatha and vipashyana observing emptiness.
33. Equipped with mindfulness and introspection, seek the correct view of emptiness.

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