



Bodhicharya

AWAKEN THE HEART BY OPENING THE MIND

4: HEEDFULNESS

Teachings on the *Bodhicharyavatara*, by Ringu Tulku Rinpoche
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Note on Part Two: chapters four, five and six

As we mentioned, the first three chapters explain how to make bodhicitta arise in our minds. Now the fourth, fifth, and sixth chapters explain how not to let this bodhicitta decrease or wane.

Explanation of the chapter title

The title of the fourth chapter is *pag-yü* in Tibetan. It is translated as "Awareness" in the Padmakara translation. In other translations, it's called "Carefulness," "Conscientiousness," or "Teachings on Heedfulness." In this text, we translate *pag-yü* as "heedfulness."

Chapter structure

This chapter has two parts: a summary and a detailed explanation.

I. Summary

The whole of the Mahayana Buddhist practice can be categorized into two parts: the aspiration, generating this bodhicitta, and the action, the practice of the six perfections. The aspiration bodhicitta has been taught in the first chapter. Regarding active bodhicitta: generosity has been taught in the first three chapters; discipline is taught in chapters four and five; and the other four chapters teach the remaining four perfections.

***The importance of discipline*ⁱ**

Regarding disciplineⁱⁱ, in his *Letter to a Friend*ⁱⁱⁱ, Nagarjuna said:

Discipline is said (by the Buddha) to be the basis of all qualities
Just like the earth (is the basis) of the animate and inanimate.

Vasubhandu said:

Abiding in discipline and being endowed with study and contemplation,
One should intensively engage in meditation.

Thus, discipline is the root or basis of all qualities.

In regard to genuinely maintaining discipline, Patrul Rinpoche said:

How embarrassing are those who brag about maintaining discipline, but do not even
know what to maintain.

The means of keeping discipline

The means of keeping discipline are:^{iv}

Heedfulness^v, which is a meticulous concern for what is to be engaged in and what is to be avoided;

ⁱ The text in this section (The importance of discipline) is included from the Padma Karpo translation.

ⁱⁱ Tib. *tsultrim*, Skt. *shila*; "...this is not discipline in the normal sense...it's the discipline that awaken[s] our heart by dissolving deep-seated habits of negativity and pain." Pema Chodron, *No Time to Lose*, page xv.

ⁱⁱⁱ Skt. *Suhrl-lekha*

^{iv} These definitions are from *The Sun of Brilliant Clarity*, by Patrul Rinpoche, translated by Adam Percy, lotsawahouse.org.

^v Tib. *pag yü*, Skt. *apramada*; also translated as conscientiousness, cautious intelligence, and attentiveness. "I feel the most descriptive translation is *attentiveness*: paying attention with intelligent awareness of what's happening. A traditional analogy is walking along the edge of a deep crevasse: we're attentive and keenly aware of the consequences of carelessness." Pema Chodron, *No Time to Lose*, page 76

Mindfulness^{vi}, which means not forgetting what should be adopted and abandoned;

*Introspection*ⁱⁱ, which involves continually checking the status of your body, speech and mind.

These must be generated in one's mind by repeatedly meditating upon them, just as explained here. Heedfulness is taught in this chapter, and mindfulness and introspection are taught in chapter five.

The importance of heedfulnessⁱⁱⁱ

If one merely imprisons body and speech as one wishes, without heedfulness in one's mind, [then keeping discipline] becomes a heavy burden. Eventually, although one pretends to [keep discipline], since phenomena are deceptive, the mind fickle, and objects skilled at deluding, one will not succeed. Thus, relying on heedfulness, it is crucial to endeavor in maintaining discipline, the basis for all qualities of study, contemplation, and meditation.

First of all, once one has understood properly the training about what to avoid and how to act, such trainings as the eighteen root downfalls and so forth, and has also understood that the essence of heedfulness is to pay careful attention to the points one should adopt and avoid, then one must develop heedfulness in one's mind and endeavor in what to accept and what to reject.

In the *King of Meditation Sutra*^{iv}, it is said:

Discipline, learning, generosity, patience and so forth—

As many virtuous qualities as can be named—

Heedfulness is the root of them all.

Thus has the sugata shown (heedfulness) as 'what brings about (all) these (qualities)'.

Affirming our commitment

The children of the Conqueror who thus
Have firmly grasped this bodhicitta
Should never turn aside from it
But always strive to keep its disciplines. (1)

[In Chapter 3, Shantideva explains the bodhisattva vow: making a firm commitment to practice bodhicitta. Now in this verse, Shantideva is saying that once we have made this commitment, we should hold on to it, and never let it go.]

It's important to understand that when you take the Bodhisattva's Vow, you are not making a commitment to become a great bodhisattva right away. You are committing *to begin* to work towards this goal, step by step, slowly and gradually. No matter how uncertain or confused you feel, no matter how low you are, you have to start where you are. You cannot start from the middle; you must start from where you are.

Part of the bodhisattva training is to acknowledge and accept the way we are—that we are deluded, and we are under the influence of these mind poisons^v, if not all the time, then most of the time. And these mind poisons are very strong and very difficult to overcome. But if we don't work on them, then we will never get rid of them, and we will suffer more and more. So there is no other way, but to work on this. This acceptance is the ground, the first level of

^{vi} Tib. *trenpa*, Skt. *smrita*

ⁱⁱ Tib. *sheshin*

ⁱⁱⁱ The text in this section (The importance of heedfulness) is included from the Padma Karpo translation.

^{iv} Skt. *Samadhi-rajya-sutra*

^v The mind poisons are: ignorance, attachment, aversion, jealousy, pride, and so on. They are also referred to as negative emotions, afflictive emotions, emotional obscurations and so on.

understanding. If you don't have this understanding, and then think that, "Oh, I have received the Bodhisattva's Vow from this great lama! And I have received so many teachings and so many empowerments, now I am something!" then it doesn't work.

From the Buddhist point of view, all these mind poisons are a temporary acquirement; they are not part of our true nature. The root of all these poisons is our delusion, which is actually a misunderstanding, a wrong way of seeing. Therefore, if it is a misunderstanding, then it could be understood. If it's a wrong way of seeing, then you learn to see more clearly. So it's as easy as that, theoretically!

But the problem is that these poisons and habitual tendencies are so deeply ingrained in us, we are so accustomed to them, and there are so many different kinds of traps around it, that we really don't want to get out of it too much.

Therefore we have to have this firm [determination] to renew this understanding again and again, and the conviction and the confidence that we will not turn aside from this task, no matter how difficult it may be. It's not an easy thing to do. There will be lots of hardships on the way, but we will do it because it is the only way that's good for ourselves and for other beings. Unless we do that, then we are going to be in this state of continuous suffering and problems all the time. That's the Buddhist understanding of samsara: this continuous—sometimes more, sometimes less—problems, pain and suffering. Therefore if you really want to get out of it, and help others do the same, then we have to do something.

Therefore, when you take the vow for the first time, you should think, "I have become a small bodhisattva, a beginner." But a beginner with a very strong direction, and lots of determination. As it says in the vow, "like the buddhas of past, I generate this bodhicitta, and I will work and I will train myself on this path, in the practices of the bodhisattva, gradually, step by step."

II. Detailed explanation

This section has three parts: A) practicing heedfulness by reflecting on the training to be accomplished; B) practicing heedfulness by reflecting on the support (the freedoms and advantages); C) practicing heedfulness by reflecting on the mind poisons to be abandoned.

An internal dialog

[In the remaining stanzas of this chapter, Shantideva is engaging in an internal dialog.] He is talking to himself, in a way persuading himself to be more heedful and so on.

The first thing is to try to understand what is the right thing to do, and what is the wrong thing to do. What is the good way, what is the beneficial way for us and for everybody. It's important to understand that from the Buddhist point of view, right and wrong, positive or negative actions, are not the same as reward and punishment. There is no one sitting in judgment of you, and taking notes of all the things that you are doing, and then deciding that you must be punished or rewarded.

But we need to have an understanding of cause and effect, of what is causing what: that if you do this kind of action, this kind of reaction will come. Then depending upon the result that you want, you act accordingly. So it's up to you. If you want one type of result, then you go for that, and if you want a different kind of result, then you go for that.

So first, we need to have some understanding of what is causing what. But then that is not enough. Because even if we know what is the most beneficial action for myself and for others, it is not always easy to do the right thing. We often don't do the right thing because we are overpowered by our mind poisons, and we are too habituated, or too addicted, to

doing the wrong thing. Therefore we need to build up some kind of will power, the strength in our mind, the intention, the strong aspiration for doing the right thing. [This is the purpose of the internal dialogs in this chapter: we are talking to ourselves to encourage ourselves to do what is right and to stiffen our resolve to fight against our laziness, bad habits, and mind poisons.] [T4:2:53:00]

II.A. Practicing heedfulness by reflecting on the training to be accomplished

This section has two parts: how to prevent your aspiration from waning; and how to prevent your diligence from waning.

II.A.1. In aspiration, don't let the generated bodhicitta wane

So here Shantideva [begins his internal dialog by] reflecting on the commitment he has just made in taking the bodhisattva's vow.

Reflecting on a promise made

Whatever was begun without due heed,
And all that was not properly conceived,
Although a promise and a pledge were given,
It is right to hesitate—to press on or draw back. (2)

If you just go into something without the proper understanding, or without having all of the facts, then even if you have made a promise, it's good to hesitate and decide whether you should really go forward or not. Even if you have promised to do something, you should not think that you have to go along with it whether it's right or not. That's not the way.

Yet all the buddhas and their heirs
Have thought of this in their great wisdom;
I myself have weighed and pondered it,
So why should I now doubt and hesitate? (3)

Should I go forward and continue on this path of bodhicitta, or not? Well, bodhicitta has been examined by all the buddhas and the bodhisattvas, and they have discussed it, and practiced it, and achieved great freedom and enlightenment through this way. They have proved through their experience that this is the way that is most beneficial to oneself and others.

And I myself have weighed and pondered it. As we discussed in the first chapters, we have to reflect on whether this is the right path or not, whether this path is beneficial to myself and beneficial to others, or not. What are the points that are not beneficial to myself and not beneficial to others? And we think about it, we try to find out through experience, and from other people who have done this kind of practice and gone this way, and then only we decide.

This is a fundamental point in Buddhism: that one should not go into anything blindly. One should try to find out, one should try to understand it as much as possible. One should be certain that one does not fall into the negative or wrong way. If, after reflecting, after examining and testing, we see that there is nothing wrong with this path, there is nothing that will make us more negative, but there are many positive benefits, then there is no need to hesitate and doubt. Then we should go forward and work on this path. Of course, it's not possible to completely get rid of doubt, because when you are completely rid of doubt, then you are completely enlightened. But we have to see as much as possible that there is nothing really negative.

Betraying every being

For if I bind myself with promises,
But fail to carry out my words in deed,
Then every being will have been betrayed.
What destiny must lie in store for me? (4)

I have thought again and again about this bodhisattva path, and I have determined that if I work on my mind poisons, and I try generate compassion and wisdom, then it is only good for myself and others, and no harm can come from this. With this understanding, if I take the bodhisattva vow and make a commitment to work on this bodhisattva's path, then it is as if I have made a great promise to all the sentient beings—I have invited them all to a great feast of enlightenment. Therefore, if I don't keep this promise, it is as if I have betrayed all the beings. If that is the case, then the karmic law of cause and effect will make me go into the lower realms and have even more problems and become very miserable. Therefore I should heed my promise and work on this path.

Promising to give, and then withholding

If in the teachings it is said
That one who in his thought intends
To give away a little thing but then draws back
Will take rebirth among the hungry ghosts (5)

How can I expect a happy destiny
If from my heart I summon
Wandering beings to the highest bliss,
But then deceive and let them down? (6)

The Buddha taught that if you promise to give something and then don't give it because of your stinginess, then you can be born in the hungry ghosts' realm. If that is the case, then if you promise to bring enlightenment to all the sentient beings, and then don't do anything towards that end, then it will be very bad, not only for me, but for everyone.

Here it is important to understand the Buddhist theory of karma. According to the theory of karma, if you give, you become rich; but if you are stingy, then you become poor, and you may even become a hungry ghost. Many people take this literally and therefore they give lots of money to lamas, because they want to become rich! But I think it's very important how you look at this: what is rich and what is not rich? For example, many people in the world believe that everything is getting better and better and better. But when you look into the Buddhist prophecies, or even other prophecies, then things are not going too well; in fact, they are getting a little bit worse. Some time ago I was thinking that one of these points of view must be totally wrong. But I think it's not really necessary that one of them is totally wrong, because they are looking at the situation from two different angles.

From the modern Western point of view, everything is getting better because they have more things. If you have one car or one house, you are rich; but if you have two cars or two houses, you are richer. In this view, the more things you have, the richer you are. But from the spiritual point of view, being rich means something different; it means that you are satisfied—you don't need anything more. Therefore the more contented you are, the richer you become. As Nagarjuna said in *Letter to a Friend*, "contentment is the greatest treasure."

What about those who give up bodhicitta, but still gain liberation?

And as for those who, losing bodhicitta,
Nonetheless attain to liberation,
This is through the inconceivable effect of karma,
Only understood by the Omniscient. (7)

We have just said that losing bodhicitta is the worst thing that can happen. But it is also said in the teachings that some people have given up on bodhicitta and left bodhisattva's path, but they still were able to become liberated from samsara later on. How can this be? Shantideva is saying that if someone loses bodhicitta and still attains liberation, this is due to the individual karma of that person, and this karma can only be understood by the Buddha. So it can happen in this way, but it is very rare. The right way is if you make a promise you should keep it; if you work in this way, you can see the benefits for yourself and for others.

Greatest of all downfalls

This failure is indeed the gravest
Of all bodhisattva downfalls.
For should it ever come to pass,
The good of every being is cast down. (8)

The worst kind of downfall is giving up the bodhicitta, and taking the attitude that, "I don't want to help even if I have the chance to help. I don't want to do anything good even if I have the chance to do good." If that kind of change should happen in your mind, then "the good of every being is cast down", meaning your ability to work for the benefit of the other beings becomes very weak.

Obstructing the activity of a bodhisattva

And anyone who, for a single instant,
Halts the merit of a bodhisattva
Will wander endlessly in states of misery,
Because the welfare of all beings is brought low. (9)

If you create an obstacle to the positive deeds of a bodhisattva, then you are obstructing a great benefit for all other beings. In the same way, if you create obstacles to your own bodhisattva's intentions, if you lose your bodhicitta, then you are obstructing the work of a bodhisattva, and you are preventing the seed that you have sown [from growing into a great] tree that will give great results and happiness to countless other beings.

Destroying the happiness of all beings

Destroy a single being's joy,
And you will work the ruin of yourself.
But if the happiness of all beings is brought to nothing...
What need is there to speak of this? (10)

think everyone can accept that if you destroy a single person's joy or happiness, then it's

something very negative that will cause very bad karma for you. If that is the case, then if you lose your bodhicitta and “the happiness of all beings is brought to nothing,” then of course you don’t have to speak about it, it is something totally wrong. Therefore we should try to keep this bodhicitta up.

Losing and renewing the vow

And one who wanders in samsara,
Who time and time again embraces bodhicitta,
Only to destroy it through his faults,
Will long be barred from bodhisattva groundsⁱ. (11)

Now you might think, “If I break my Bodhisattva Vows, I can confess it and I can renew it. And then if I lose it again, then I will just renew it again. So there’s no problem.” But here Shantideva is saying that if you repeatedly break the precepts and then cause them to arise again, alternating between one powerful negative thing and one powerful positive thing, then even though you may not be born into the negative realms, it will take you a very long time to reach enlightenment.

Reaffirming the vow

Therefore I will act devotedly
According to the promise I have made. (12, first half)

Therefore we try to keep this bodhicitta alive by contemplating on the disadvantages of losing the bodhicitta, and the advantages of developing the bodhicitta. Because as we all know, our mind is very fickle. We can be very inspired in one moment, and have the best intentions and a very compassionate way of thinking and being, but then the next moment it is gone. It is easier to have negative thoughts and emotions than to have positive thoughts and emotions. Therefore, you have to work to keep this bodhicitta alive. And how do you keep this alive? There’s only one way: through reflecting and being heedful of the advantages and disadvantages of things.

One of the main Buddhist ways of practice is that if you want to become something, you have to try to be that. For example, if you want to generate compassion, then you try to be compassionate. Then little by little, the more and more you concentrate on that, focus on that, and think about that, then the more you actually feel it. Then the more and more you feel it, the stronger, more vibrant, and more present it becomes. On the other hand, the more we concentrate on the negative side—like sadness, fear, or anger—the more and more we do that, the more and more we are in it, the more and more we exercise it, the stronger that side becomes. Therefore the main thing is to practice. To practice means to exercise the positive qualities more and more.

II.A.2. In action, don’t let your diligence wane

For if I fail thus to apply myself,
I’ll fall from low to even lower states. (12, second half)

From...today onward, if I make no effort in the points of what to accept and what to reject—the trainings that I must practice—then, due to the power of my downfalls, I shall descend constantly from lower to lower states, from this realm to animal realms and so on, from one miserable state to the next miserable state, and shall experience suffering.

ⁱ ‘Bodhisattva ground’ means the first bhumi, which is a stage on the path to enlightenment.

Striving for the benefit of all that lives,
Unnumbered buddhas have already lived and passed,
But I, by virtue of my sins, have failed
To come within the compass of their healing works. (13)

Yet one might think, “Even if I cannot make an effort, the buddhas, bodhisattvas and masters will not send me to the miserable states but will lead me on the path to the higher realms and to liberation.” But although previously, countless buddha bhagavans, who, without considering their personal welfare, exclusively worked for the benefit and happiness of all beings, have appeared, worked for the benefit of beings, and passed on; yet, because of my own mistakes, the negative deeds and non-virtue that I have committed, I did not come into the domain of their healing care, of being benefited and guided, for example, in the same way physicians cannot help a person who has an incurable disease.

Thus, it is just like the example of Devadatta, who could not be saved from publicly falling into the (avici) hell right in front of our teacher, the master of the three worlds, devoid of all defects and endowed with all qualities.

And this will always be my lot
If I continue to behave like this,
And I will suffer pains and bondage,
Wounds and laceration in the lower realms. (14)

If I...continue to act out misdeeds and non-virtue, without practicing (any) virtue, in the same manner as (my) previous inferior conduct, I shall likewise sink, not just once, but again and again, from lower to lower states, and take rebirth in miserable states.

[The nature of samsara]

It is important to understand that as long as we are in the samsaric state of mind, there is suffering. Because usually most of us think that, “Well, I have this problem now, but when I solve this problem, then everything will be alright.” And then we try to solve that problem, but then, something else comes up. And then we think, “Oh, I’m tired of all this, one thing after another!”

But actually, that’s the way it is in samsara! As long as we are in the samsaric state of mind, that’s normal. We cannot have a time when we have solved all our problems. There will be smaller problems, and there will be bigger problems, but something will always be there. The teachings say there are three different kinds of suffering:

1. The first kind of suffering is a real problem: we are sick, we have pain, we get something that we don’t want, we don’t get something that we want, and so on.

2. The next kind of suffering is that even when everything seems to be alright, and we seem to have everything that we want, we are still not completely satisfied. There is still a little bit of fear that maybe something will happen and everything will change. That fear is always there.

[3. The third type of suffering is a sense of vulnerability, a sense of the frailty of our human condition.]

If we can understand that the samsaric state of mind is like that, [then as long as we are still in samsara, we can learn to be less overwhelmed by the difficulties that arise]. Of course, that’s why I want to get out of the samsaric state of mind. But [that may take some time. So in the meantime,] while I am still in the samsaric state of mind, I have to accept that it is like that. Therefore, within that, I should relax, and I should not think, “After I solve this problem, then I will enjoy my life.” I should say that this is the best [it’s going to get while I am still in

samsara]. I will keep on having problems, but if I want to enjoy my life, I'll have to do it within this. Because maybe it's not possible to be completely free of all the troubles.

This [acceptance can] make people quite happy actually. For example, many Tibetans have this attitude that, "Oh there is this problem, but the problem is there anyway. As long as we are in samsara, there's problems. So therefore, why not enjoy?" This attitude might make some people a little bit less serious, but at least it makes some people a little more jolly. The problems are still there, but you don't take the problems too seriously, or too sensitively in a way. Because you already expect that some kind of problems or troubles will be there. If not this one, then maybe something else. So your aversion to the problems is slightly lessened, because you have accepted. Therefore your mind becomes more open, and not completely overwhelmed by these problems. You have problems, but you can still enjoy life.

Because sometimes we can take a small problem too seriously. If you just concentrate on one problem, and you focus only on that, then you become totally blinded by the problem, totally overwhelmed by the problem, because you don't see anything else but this problem. And when you *see* nothing but the problem, then you *have* nothing but the problem. Therefore if you can see the problem, but see other things as well, then the problem doesn't become smaller, but seems smaller, because you have other things also. So [if we can develop this way of understanding, then we can change] our way of seeing, and this will change the way we react to things.

II.B. Practicing heedfulness by reflecting on the support (the freedoms and advantages)

This section has three parts: 1) practicing heedfulness by reflecting on the difficulty of finding the freedoms and advantages; 2) practicing heedfulness by reflecting on the difficulty of gaining liberation from the lower realms; 3) the need to strive to be virtuous once one obtains the freedoms and advantages

II.B.1. Practicing heedfulness by reflecting on the difficulty of finding the freedoms and advantages

Precious human birth

The appearance of the buddhas in the world,
True faith and the attainment of the human form,
An aptitude for good: all these are rare.
And when will this all come to me again? (15)

Here Shantideva is reflecting on the difficulty of obtaining this precious human birth with the freedoms and advantages to practice the dharma. This topic is described in detail in *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* and other texts.¹ We try to reflect and be heedful that this human existence we have now is very precious, and to appreciate the great good circumstances and the opportunities that we have now, so that we can take good advantage of that.

As this stanza says, *the appearance of the buddhas in the world* is very rare. And to have the Buddha's teachings still alive, not completely lost or degenerated, is also very difficult. It is important not only that there has been a buddha in this world, maybe 2,500 years ago, but the Dharma is still there.

True faith refers to the faith or belief in the Dharma, the teachings of the Buddha. This means having some understanding or faith or trust that we can improve and we can become an enlightened being. That understanding comes from somebody who has already done that. In our case it is Buddha Shakyamuni who attained this enlightened state; and he said "this is my understanding and my experience, and anyone who follows this path can also get this experience." Then all his students and followers worked on that path, and many attained different levels of realization. So we know that it is something that is possible.

The most important thing is that we see or hear about someone who has certain understanding, certain experience. Then we can see that this kind of experience is not something that is completely unattainable, but something that could come to me also, because I also can connect with it somewhere. That is the importance of reading the teachings of the Buddha and the great masters, or reading about the experiences of the great masters—because when you read them, you get inspired. Because we know there is truth in it; we know that there is something there that what we want, that we admire, that is good to attain and is attainable.

So if the Buddha never came, then these things could not happen. Or even if the Buddha had come, but then his teachings were lost or forgotten, we would not get any benefit. Even if the Buddha himself is remembered, but we just have a figure without any knowledge of his teachings, then we still wouldn't get any benefit. But in this case, we still have certain

¹ Most texts speak of five circumstantial advantages, five individual advantages, and eight freedoms. Khenpo Kunpal says that "the appearance of the buddhas in this world" corresponds with the five circumstantial advantages, "true faith" corresponds with the five individual advantages, and "the attainment of human form" corresponds with the eight freedoms.

lineages, and certain experience and understanding of the Dharma, so this is something that we can really do, something we can practice.

Attainment of the human form is also rare. In this way of seeing, human existence is regarded as one of the highest forms of life. I think there is not much debate on this from any point of view. Human beings are very intelligent, they have heart, and they have tremendous capacity for good or bad. Human life is full of potential, for positive or negative. Therefore, when we have this human form, we have to appreciate this. If we don't appreciate this and take the advantage of this, then we might just completely waste it.

An aptitude for good is also necessary. Even if we have a human form, if our mind is totally going the wrong way, only wanting to do negative things, to do something that is destructive or harmful, or that is really not good for the whole world and not good for our selves, then it is very sad and unfortunate. But we are actually trying to do something good for ourselves and others. Therefore we have at least some aptitude for good.

So all these circumstances we have are very fortunate and very rare. Now I have such a great opportunity, when all these circumstances have come together, but it is not certain that I will get this opportunity again. I might get one good circumstance to happen again, but it's much more difficult to get many good things together. Therefore, when I have this good opportunity, I should use it to do something that is really beneficial for myself and other beings, now and in the long run.

Impermanence

Today indeed, I'm hale and hearty,
Have enough to eat, and without affliction.
And yet this life is fleeting and deceptive.
This body is but briefly lent to me. (16)

Now I have all these opportunities where I can do something beneficial. I am in good health at the moment; I am not too ill, or too old, and I'm not completely out of my mind. I have enough to eat and I am not destitute. I have a good situation, and everything is all right.

And yet, even if I am in good shape at the moment, nobody can say anything about the future. People who are very healthy now can become sick in the next moment, and they can even die tomorrow. This life is not only fleeting, but it is deceptive: meaning it can change at any time. You can't depend on it, you can't be sure that your current situation will last until tomorrow. The body that we have, this precious life, is like something you have borrowed from somewhere for a short moment, and you have to give it back. It is certain that we will lose our body. It is certain that our situation will change. Thinking like this, we should reflect on impermanence.

Reflecting on the precious human existence (stanza 15) and impermanence (stanza 16) often go together in the Buddhist reflective meditations. First, reflecting on this precious human life is very important, because unless we appreciate what we have, then we waste it. We don't enjoy it, we don't even make good use of it. But then, to just appreciate what you have and then become totally complacent is not good either. You can become completely lazy. You need to understand that the good circumstances that we have will not remain with us forever; that makes us appreciate them even more. Then we really make good use of it. When we know right from the heart that this life is impermanent, then we will take this opportunity and do something much more fruitful for the future also.

Seizing this opportunity

And yet the way I act is such
That I shall not regain a human life!
And loosing this, my precious human form,
My evils will be many, virtues none. (17)

If I look at the way I act, it seems as if I will not be able to regain this human life, because I do all the things that I am not supposed to do. I let myself be completely overpowered by my mind poisons. I don't do things that will bring a positive result or good karma, and I always give in to bad habits that bring a negative result. If I continue this way, I will lose this opportunity, and I will not get this precious human form in the future. And if I don't get these good opportunities again, then I could become worse and worse and worse.

In the Buddhist way of seeing, good things lead to more good things, and bad things lead to more bad things. If you are angry or hateful and you do something very negative, then that will bring you more and more hatred, and then make you much worse off. If you can divert from that path a little bit, and bring some little bit of compassion and joy, then those qualities can grow and you can become something else. So it's not as if you do something negative and then you suffer the consequences from that, and then it's finished. When you think or act negatively, you are reinforcing a negative pattern and making it stronger, and causing your positive side to grow weaker.

Here is now the chance for wholesome deeds,
But if I fail now to accomplish virtue,
What will be my lot, what shall I do,
When trapped in lower realms, enmeshed in misery? (18)

If I want to get rid of these mind poisons and get out of samsara, then I have to do something positive right now. Because we all know it is very difficult to overcome our mind poisons and get out of the deeply ingrained patterns of our mind. Sometimes even if we want to get out of it, we can't get out of it. For example, if we have a small depression and we don't want to get engulfed in it, it can be difficult to resist because it's a force that has built up for a long time. So when it has completely ripened, it's very difficult to get out of it.

Therefore we have to start now to work on the small things. There is no magic, where you do this and then everything is good; and you do some else and everything is bad. Everything is interdependent and has its own causes and conditions. Therefore, small positive things can have a big effect, and really get you into completely different circumstances. On the other hand, if you do some small negative things, then you could again go into another negative cycle.

Never, there, performing any virtue,
Only ever perpetrating evil,
Thus for a hundred million eons,
Happy states will never come to me. (19)

If I don't do anything good, but always do something bad, then even after a hundred million eons, I will never reach this happy state that is free from the suffering of samsara. It can't be. It's not true that if I just sit here and wait, then everything will change. From the Buddhist point of view, we have to do something, we must take some action.

Example of the turtle: demonstrating the near impossibility of obtaining a human birth

This is why the Lord Buddha has declared
That like a turtle that perchance can place
It's head within a yoke adrift upon a shoreless sea
This human birth is difficult to find! (20)

The Buddha gave this example of how difficult it is to get a precious human body and all these good opportunities that we have just mentioned. Suppose, he said, there was a blind turtle at the bottom of the sea who came up to the surface just once every one hundred years, for a few moments only, and then went down again. And if there was a wooden yoke floating on the surface of this sea, that never stayed in one place for a single moment, but was constantly driven by the waves from the north sea to the south sea, from the south to the north and the north to the west, west to the east—always moving at a very great speed. And in this in this yoke, there is a small hole.

Now suppose that when this turtle comes up on the surface of the sea, that the yoke comes at that very moment on this point where the turtle comes up, and then the turtle's neck becomes hooked by the yoke. The Buddha asked: "How difficult is it for that to happen? Is it very easy?" And everybody said it's really almost impossible. Then Buddha said, "To get this precious human body is that difficult." So I think he was not saying it was impossible, but he was saying there are so many causes and conditions that need to come together for this to happen, that it is not easy.

II.B.2. Practicing heedfulness by reflecting on the difficulty of freeing oneself from the lower realms

This section is reflecting on how difficult it is to get out of the samsaric state, especially the lower realms.

If evil acts of but a single instant
Lead to deepest hell of many ages,
The evils I have done from time without beginning—
No need to say that they will keep me from the states of bliss! (21)

It is said that the positive deeds that we have done for one thousand kalpas can also be completely destroyed by one instant of a very strong anger. Even one instant of complete overpowering negative emotion can make you do something totally negative, and therefore make you fall into a very bad situation. In that instant of anger, you can do something really destructive, and also destroy the work of positive deeds that you have done for many years.

One student of mine told me that when she first heard this, she did not believe it. "This is not possible," she thought. "If you always do many good things over lots of years, it's not possible that all that can be destroyed in just one instant of anger." Then she went to visit Scotland and stayed in some type of a caravan with poor screening. When she tried to sleep at night, she was bitten by midgesⁱ all night, and she couldn't sleep. After three or four days of this, she got so angry that she just slapped and killed all the midges, and then she put some covering on all the windows. And even then she was not satisfied, so she left.

So she said that now she realizes how strong it can be. She thought she was quite good in not harming people and not harming things, but she got so angry that she was completely out of control. So she said, "Now I understand. It is possible." So I think it is a little bit like that.

And mere experience of such pain
Does not result in being freed from it.

ⁱ Midges are called gnats in the U.S.

For in the very suffering of such states,
More evil will occur, and then in great abundance. (22)

Some people think, "If I have pain, then that will get rid of all my negative karma, so then I will be purified." Actually, that is not the case. Suffering alone does not clear the bad karma. Indeed, suffering often has the opposite effect. If you don't know how to react to suffering, then when suffering or difficult circumstances arise, you might become angry and frustrated, and in this way accumulate more bad karma that will be the cause of future suffering. Of course, if you can learn to take this suffering in a positive way, then maybe it will help to purify some of your negative karma. But just the suffering by itself does not do it.

Sometimes people think that if they see someone else suffering, then that person is just going through their bad karma, so you should not help them, because you should not interfere with others' karma. That's not the way. Actually, if you help somebody who is having a bad time, it's not interfering with someone else's karma. For example, if I am suffering, that doesn't necessarily mean that the more I suffer the more karma I get rid of. It may be that the more I suffer, the more negative I become, and therefore I create more bad karma for the future. Therefore, if somebody helps me to have a little bit better way of seeing, or better way of feeling, that could help me to work on my karma and dissolve my karma. Therefore, it is very important to try to help people, especially those who are having bad karma.

II.B.3. The need to strive to be virtuous when one has the freedoms and advantages

Training

Thus, having found reprieve from all these things,
If I now fail to train myself in virtue,
What greater folly could there ever be?
How more could I betray myself? (23)

Understanding all this (the difficulty of finding the freedoms and advantages and of freeing ourselves from the lower realms), then if I don't increase my positive way of being, if I don't work in the right direction and do something positive, then how can I be more foolish than this? And I am not just being foolish, but I am completely betraying myself. So if I want good things for myself and if I want to do something that is valuable, then I should take advantage of this opportunity and practice virtue.

From the Buddhist point of view, discipline is not something that is imposed from the outside but it is something that comes from seeing the cause and effect. If I do this, this will happen; if I do that, that will happen. So if I do something positive, something more positive will happen. If I do something negative, then I will become more negative. Therefore, if I want to have a more positive life, more good things, more joy, more happiness, and so on, then I will have to act in a positive way. If I want something good, but I do something that will give me more suffering and pain, then that is very foolish.

And though all this I understand,
But later waste my time in foolish idleness,
Then when my time to die comes round,
My sorrows will be black indeed. (24)

I should not be idle. I should work on positive deeds with diligence and joy, because otherwise I will have regrets. When the time has passed, then even if you regret, you can't go back and change your past. It's too late. Therefore we have to think now and make a wise decision. That can only come if we are heedful of our training.

Regret

And when my body burns so long
In fires of hell so unendurable,
My mind likewise will also be tormented—
Burned in flames of infinite regret. (25)

If I always act in a negative way, then I will be reborn in the lower realms, even in the hell realms. There my body will suffer, and my mind will suffer even more, because I will be tormented by regret. I will have lost this great chance, because I didn't take advantage of it. To avoid this type of regret in the future, I should do something beneficial for myself and others right this moment.

If I don't know what is the right thing to do and what is the wrong thing to do, then I should research and study and try to understand. I should ask people who are a little bit more experienced and wise than me, and I should find out what to do. I should find out as soon as possible what kind of causes and conditions are bringing more suffering, problems and pain; and what kind of causes and conditions are bringing more happiness, peace, and other good things. I must investigate that and understand it. Then I should act on what I have learned.

Choice

For it's as if by chance that I have gained
This state so hard to find, wherein to help myself.
And now, when freedom—power of choice—is mine,
If once again I'm led away to hell, (26)

I am as if benumbed by sorcery,
My mind reduced to total impotence
With no perception of the madness overwhelming me.
O what is it that has me in its grip? (27)

I have gained this precious human body, all these positive circumstances, which are difficult to find. And I can help myself now. I have lots of power, lots of potential, lots of intelligence. I can do something very good for myself and others, or I can do something very bad for everyone. We have the freedom to choose; if now if I do something totally bad and totally wrong and totally negative, then I will fall into negative realms, such as the hell realms and so on.

From the Buddhist point of view, a positive deed is something that is done with the aspiration, the drive of a positive mind: with the motivation of compassion, love, joy, faith, and so on. Anything that is done with that kind of positive thought or intention is positive. A negative deed is something that is done under the influence of the mind poisons like anger, pride, jealousy, and so on. If you do something in which you are pushed or driven or overpowered by your mind poisons, that is a negative deed. If you do a negative deed, then that increases the strength of the mind poisons and brings more of these negative thoughts and emotions, which means more suffering. The more angry you become, the more suffering you have; the more hatred you have, the worse you feel. Negative actions result in suffering.

Conversely, the more you do things that are inspired by positive thoughts and emotions, the stronger these positive emotions become. Therefore, the more compassionate you become, the happier you are. Positive actions result in happiness.

If I understand this, but even then I don't follow this training, and I completely let myself be driven by my mind poisons and negative emotions, then it's very unfortunate. I should not let my mind poisons completely drag me everywhere, like a yak being led by its nose. A yak is a very strong, very stubborn animal. But if you put a ring in its nose, and then put a rope

through the ring, then you can lead the yak where ever you like. So if you let yourself be led like that by your mind poisons, then you become their slave. Then they will ride you, the way a person rides a yak.

II.C. Practicing heedfulness by reflecting on the mind poisons to be abandoned

This section has three parts: 1) Explaining the shortcomings of the mind poisons; 2) Enduring the hardship of overcoming the mind poisons; 3) Explaining how to get free from the mind poisons.

II.C.1. Explaining the shortcomings of the mind poisons

Formless enemies

Anger, lust—these enemies of mine—
Are limbless and devoid of faculties.
They have no bravery, no cleverness;
How then have they reduced me to such slavery? (28)

These enemies of mine, refers to the mind poisons. These mind poisons are supposed to be the worst enemy, but they don't have any hands or feet, or a big scary head. They don't have big claws, or lots of fangs, or anything like that. They are not even brave. They don't come at us with armor or weapons and so on; they are invisible. And they are not very diligent or hardworking or intelligent; they have more of the nature of ignorance, of dullness. So there's nothing clever, nothing brave, nothing fierce, not even a body. They seemingly have nothing with that kind of power. So how then have these poisons reduced me to such slavery?

They harm me because I welcome them

I it is who welcome them within my heart,
Allowing them to harm me at their pleasure!
I who suffer all without resentment.
Thus my abject patience all displaced! (29)

It's not as if these poisons overcome me because they are so fearful, and so fierce, and so powerful. They overcome me because I invite them in. I welcome the poisons into my heart, and then I suffer. But when I suffer I don't blame my mind poisons. I blame somebody else, or I blame myself maybe, but not these poisons. So I suffer without resentment to the real cause. I am very patient with these enemies. I am not patient with many things, but I am really patient with my mind poisons. Shantideva is saying that this patience is completely misplaced patience. There are many things that are good to be patient with, but there's one thing with which it is not good to be patient, and that is these mind poisons.

No other enemies can throw me into hell

If all the gods and demigods besides
Together came against me as my foes,
Their mighty strength—all this would not avail
To fling me in the fires of deepest hell. (30)

And yet, the mighty fiend of my afflictionsⁱ,
Flings me in an instant headlong down
To where the mighty lord of mountains
Would be burned, it's very ashes all consumed. (31)

Nobody else can throw me into hell; but my mind poisons will lead me there. Even if all the gods came together, and all the demigods and all other beings also, and they really wanted to harm me, and do their worst to me, they would not have the power to throw me into the deepest hell. Because hell is something of my own making; it is produced by my own mind,

ⁱ Mind poisons.

and my own deep hatred and negative emotions. My mind poisons can throw me into the deepest kind of hells, where the fires are so hot that they could turn a mountain into ashes within an instant. So these mind poisons can really do me the most harm. They can harm me in ways that cannot be done by any other being, if I allow them to.

No other enemies have harmed me so long

No other enemy indeed
Has lived so long as my defiled emotions—
O my enemy, afflictive passion,
Endless and beginningless companion! (32)

Not only will these poisons harm me more than any other enemy, but they have been harming me for longer than any other enemy. I have had enemies before, maybe there were people and other beings who tried to harm me before, but they did it for a short time and then they finished. Either they went away or I went away, or they died or I died, or whatever. There was never ever any being who was constantly with me, and constantly harming me. But these mind poisons have been harming me for a long, long time, as far as I can remember. They have been [my constant *companion* from *beginningless* time].

These enemies can not be appeased

All other foes that I appease and wait upon
Will show me favors, give me every aid,
But should I serve my dark defiled emotions,
They will only harm me, draw me down to grief. (33)

I can appease all other enemies who are angry at me or who try to harm me. I can submit to them, and surrender to them, and I can wait up on them. I can say “Please, now I give up resisting you. I’m your slave and I’ll do whatever you like.” Then if you really become your enemies slave, if you become totally submissive, then they might even show you favor, they might even change, and try not to harm you any more, because now you are doing whatever they are saying. And they might even help you.

But if I do the same to my mind poisons, they will only cause me more harm and grief. However much I serve them, however much I act according to their wishes, however much I submit to them, however much I appease them, they don’t become my friends. Appeasing them just gives me more and more negativity, more and more harm, more and more grief, more and more suffering. It’s not in their nature that they will ever change and say “It’s alright, now I will help you.” That’s not the way.

As long as I allow them in, I will find no peace

Therefore, if these long-lived, ancient enemies of mine,
The wellspring only of increasing woe,
Can find their lodging safe within my heart,
What joy or peace in this world can be found? (34)

These mind poisons have not just now become my enemies, but they have been with me for a long, long time. They are *ancient enemies of mine*. And they are my enemies by their very nature, always harming, always the source of increasing problems, suffering, and pain.

As long as I allow these poisons to lodge within my mind, within my heart, within my being— as long as they are there—then I cannot find any joy and peace in this world. As long as the mind poisons overpower me, they create more fear, they create more anxiety, they create more aversion and attachment, and all these things which make me unsatisfied, nervous,

anxious, tense, sad, depressed, and miserable. I can never have any peace as long as they are there.

If I understand this, then what should I do? There is only one thing to do. That is to get rid of them. It may be not so easy, and it may take a long time, but this is my one and only alternative. This is my commitment, my intention, my objective, my purpose—I need to get these poisons out of my heart. Only then will I have peace, joy and happiness; and only then will I be able to help others achieve the same. Therefore, from now onwards I know what to do, and that is to work on these mind poisons. In a real sense, Dharma practice is actually nothing else but working on these mind poisons.

And if the jail guards of the prisons of samsara,
The butchers and tormentors of infernal realms,
All lurk within me in the web of craving,
What joy can ever be my destiny? (35)

If I remain attached to these mind poisons, and I don't make an effort to work on them, or to try to uproot them, then it's as if I let all *the jail guards of the prisons of samsara, the butchers and tormentors of infernal realms, all lurk within me*. It's as if I am making all these butchers and tormentors stay, and I hold them inside me. So if I do that, how can there ever be any joyful destiny? How can happiness ever come to me? So I must work on this very ardently.

II.C.2. Enduring the hardship of overcoming the mind poisons

We should be very patient when working on our mind poisons. If we have to get something that is very important, and very precious, then it's not likely that we will be able to accomplish this very easily; we might have to go through some hardships to reach our goal.

Hardship of battle

I will not leave the fight until, before my eyes,
These enemies of mine are all destroyed. (36, first half)

Now, although it's difficult to get rid of these mind poisons, I will endure any hardship to do it. *I will not leave this fight* is of course a poetic metaphor. As we have said, this fight against the mind poisons is not fighting with tension; rather we have to learn the skilful means [to get rid of them]. Here we are saying that I must uproot these mind poisons. I will not leave, I will not rest, until I completely destroy these enemies. I will make this commitment.

For if, aroused to fury by the merest slight,
Incapable of sleep until the scores are settled, (36, second half)

In our usual way of being, we are very sensitive to people harming us. If somebody insults us or causes us even a little harm, then we become so angry, so aroused, that we can't even get to sleep before settling this score. We think, "First I will settle this score, I will give back what I got from him..." and so on. If that is the case, then if you have something that is bothering you so much, for so long, and in such a negative way, then how can you sleep, and how can you be so completely relaxed and not work on uprooting that?

Foolish rivals, both to suffer when they die,
Will draw the battle lines and do their best to win,
And careless of the pain of cut and thrust,
Will stand their ground, refusing to give way, (37)

This is the usual way in the human society: the two rivals. It's a foolish thing to do, he says, but still we do it like that. When two rivals fight each other, they know that both will suffer, and maybe one or both of them will die. But they fight and do their best to win. And in the midst of

the battle, they don't care how much pain they have to undergo. They will go against bullets, spears, and swords, and never run away; they just charge straight into the battle. However much pain is thrust on them, however much insult, or however many wounds they get, they don't want to get away, because they want to win.

No need to say that I will not lose heart,
Regardless of the hardships of the fray. (38, first half)

These human enemies would naturally die anyway, at least within a hundred years. And even then you take so much pain and even risk your life in order to harm them, and they can't do that much harm to you anyway, but still you go through so many difficulties, and you sacrifice so much of your own in order to defeat them. So in that case, why shouldn't we take the same stand, or even a stronger stand, against our mind poisons. Because they are much more harmful, and harmful for much longer. Therefore I will not lose my heart, whatever hardship there may be on the way.

These natural foes today I'll strive to crush-
These enemies, the source of all my pain. (38, second half)

These natural foes are the mind poisons, the enemy which naturally harms us. We cannot make them into friends, we cannot do anything to make them help us, therefore they are natural enemies. So today I will start to crush these enemies, because they are the source of all my pain; and they are not the source of only *my* pain, they are the source of *all* the pain of all sentient beings.

The wounds inflicted by the enemy in futile wars
Are flaunted by the soldier as a trophy.
So in the high endeavor for so great a prize,
Why should hurt and injury dismay me? (39)

Sometimes when soldiers are wounded in are battle, they might take satisfaction in their sacrifice and might even boast about it afterwards. "I got this scar from so and so war, and so and so battle! I was really brave!" In the same way, if we have to go through some hardships while fighting with our mind poisons, we should not be discouraged. We can look on these hardships as wounds received in battle, and even take them as a badge of honor.

Common hardships

When fishers, butchers, farmers, and the like,
Intending just to gain their livelihood,
Will suffer all the miseries of heat and cold,
How can I not bear the same to gain the happiness of beings? (40)

Fishermen, butchers, farmers, and people from all walks of life, have to go through so many hardships. The fishermen have to go into the sea and even risk their lives in rough weather. Many other people have to go through so many hardships and do such hard work just to earn their living. They have to suffer heat and cold and many other things, and they don't mind it; they just do it.

If that is the case, if people have to go through so many hardships just to survive and get a livelihood, then how can I not bear some kind of hardship, some kind of hard work, in order to gain much more benefit—that is completely eradicating the source of all my unhappiness and sufferings; and not only my own suffering, but that of all the other beings too. That's a big purpose. If I know how to deal with my own mind poisons, then I may be able to even show others how to do that. Therefore it is not only for my sake but for others too. So for the complete and everlasting happiness of myself and others, why can't I make some sacrifice or

go through certain hardships?

Commitment

When I pledged myself to free from their affliction
Beings who abide in every region,
Stretching to the limits of the sky,
I myself was subject to the same afflictions. (41)

Thus I did not have the measure of my strength—
To speak like this was clear insanity.
More reason, then, for never drawing back,
Abandoning the fight against defiled confusion. (42)

When I made this promise, I myself was subject to these same mind poisons as the beings whom I have vowed to help. [Was I insane to make this vow? It is like promising to save other people from drowning when I myself can't even swim. Even so, I made this promise, so I must follow through.] If I don't strengthen my commitment and do something about this, then my promise was just talk, just wagging my tongue.

It's not only for myself that I need to do this, but also because I made a promise and commitment to help others. Therefore I must use all my strength to work on this; I must use all my resources, all my intelligence, all my skilful means, and all my energies. Because this is the most important objective that anyone can have, the most far-reaching, the most crucial, because it is the source of our everlasting happiness for myself and others.

II.C.3. Explaining the way to get rid of the mind poisons

Waging war

This shall be my all-consuming passion,
Filled with rancor I shall wage my war!
Though this emotion seems to be defiled,
It halts defilement and shall not be spurned. (43)

My only objective is to get rid of my mind poisons, and *filled with rancor I will wage my war* on them. You might think that having this strong hatred towards the mind poisons is also a problem; that it is just another form of aversion and should be eliminated. But the teachings say that this aversion towards the mind poisons is not the same as having aversion towards other things. For beginners, this kind of aversion can be a motivation to work on the mind poisons.

All this building up against our mind poisons is very necessary because we are so used to our mind poisons and so accustomed to having them around, that without some strong impetus, we won't want to act against them. Therefore it's particularly important for beginners to see them as the root cause of all our problems.¹

Root mind poisons

There are three root mind poisons: ignorance, attachment and aversion. The Buddha said that out of these three, the ignorance, or the unknowing, is the root cause of the other two. It is the deepest and the most difficult to deal with. Its negative effect is more general and more widespread than the other poisons, but it is also more subtle; there is no single strong effect that is immediately apparent. So this is something that you have to work at for a long time, persistently and constantly, but slowly, at its own pace.

Attachment is the next most difficult mind poison to get rid of, especially in human beings, because our attachment is one of the main reasons that we are born as a human being. So human beings are a kind of an embodiment of attachment. But attachment can have positive as well as negative effects. For example, love and compassion contain elements of attachment. This is especially true for a beginner who is learning to develop these qualities. And some element of attachment remains in love and compassion until you become completely enlightened. Therefore attachment is not all bad, it can have some positive effects. The only problem is that in its nature, deep down it is very much related to aversion, and therefore it causes problems. So you can work on it, but slowly, and increase the positive side of it.

The next mind poison is aversion or anger or hatred. This is the most harmful and destructive mind poison for human beings. It is also easier to deal with than ignorance or attachment, because it's nature is like a fire or flame. It goes up, and then burns, and then quickly dies. But this poison has no positive elements in it. If you have more hatred, more anger, the more you keep it, the more you burn yourself and others. Therefore, this is something that we should deal with first, and with all our force and attention, and as quickly as possible.

Seeing this through

Better that I perish in the fire,
Better that my head be severed from my body
Than ever I should serve or reverence
My mortal foes, defiled emotions!ⁱ (44)

So I am very stubborn now. I have made my commitment and I will follow through no matter what happens. Even if my head is cut off, or if *I perish in the fire*, it doesn't matter. I will never ever give in to these mind poisons, *my mortal foes*. The determination is actually the most important thing here. It comes from understanding, from seeing clearly. Then when you are determined to do something, you may do it slowly, but it happens more peacefully. If you are doing something doubtfully, something without any determination, without making a strong decision, then you can't do it.

For example, I have often heard people say, "I want to give up smoking, but I can't do it. I've tried many times, and I was not able to." But then some people can do it. Why is that? I think that it's making the decision. Those who said that, "I will give up smoking from today. Whatever happens I will stop," they succeed in giving up smoking because they've made a decision, and they are determined to follow it through. But those people who come and say, "I will try...maybe...maybe not..." don't succeed. As long as you have this doubt in you, you never succeed. If you don't make a firm decision, if you are just wavering and thinking, "Maybe...maybe not..." then it can't happen.

But then even if we make a decision, that doesn't mean that from that moment on, everything will go smoothly. It doesn't work like that. But when you make the decision, then you work on it with a different foundation, with a different style; you are really going into this, so sooner or later it's done. This type of determination, a complete unwavering decision, is what is necessary.

Eye of wisdom

Common enemies, when driven from the state,
Retreat and base themselves in other lands,
And muster all their strength the better to return.
But our afflictions are without such stratagems. (45)

ⁱ Mind poisons.

Defiled defilements, scattered by the eye of wisdom!
Where will you now run, when driven from my mind?
Whence would you return to do me harm?
But oh—my mind is feeble. I am indolent! (46)

Although in the beginning it may seem very difficult to work with these mind poisons, actually it is not necessarily very difficult, because once you get rid of them, they are gone forever. They not like other enemies. If you drive your human enemies out of your country, they might go and base themselves in another land and regain their strength. Then when they are strong enough, they will come back and attack you. This is very common in human history. For example, Napoleon, Robert the Bruce, and others from history did this.

But the mind poisons are not like these human enemies. If you can drive them out of your mind, they have no place to go. This is because the root of the poisons is ignorance, which is the wrong way of seeing. Therefore if we can develop the right way of seeing, or look at these mind poisons with *the eye of wisdom*, this will scatter them. There is no way that these poisons can run away to another land and build an army and come back, because there is nothing there to begin with—they don't exist. So they just disappear.

This is the main understanding from the Buddhist point of view, that with all these mind poisons and habitual tendencies, it is possible to get rid of them because they are based on a misunderstanding. And because it is based on a misunderstanding, it can be understood, and the moment it is understood, it's finished.

A mind poison such as anger isn't something hard like a stone, where you really have to crack it with a hammer. It is not even material—it's a misunderstanding! You don't need to have an operation to remove the misunderstanding. There is nothing to remove, because there is nothing there. It's just a misunderstanding. In the same way, if you enter a dark room, and you switch on the light, then the darkness is gone. It's no longer there. There is nothing called darkness anymore.

Knowing their nature

And yet defilements are not in the object,
Nor yet within the faculties, nor somewhere in between.
And if not elsewhere, where is their abode
Whence they might wreak their havoc on the world?
They are simple mirages, and so-take heart!
Banish all your fears and strive to know their nature.
Why suffer needlessly the pains of hell? (47)

Here Shantideva is saying that we don't have to be too timid about these things. The mind poison is in our mind and it's in our system. So why not look at it and see what it is? What is it's nature? Where is it? What is it's strength?

So when a mind poison such as anger arises, try to look at the anger, and ask yourself, "Where is it?" For example, if you hate this cup: where is the hatred? Is the hatred in this cup, or in my eyes, or somewhere in between? Is it in my liver, or my heart, or my brain? Where is it?

If you look at it this way, you can't really find it. You can't really say this is *here*, or this is *there*; so it doesn't have an *abode*. Where is the abode? So something that you even can't find that is completely overpowering you. This is not right. Something that's not even there, in a way, is wreaking all this havoc on the world, on yourself, and on everybody. You can't let that happen.

This is how I should reflect and labor,
Taking up the precepts just set forth. (48, first half)

This is how I should think and reflect again and again. Then I should take up the right kind of training and work to put the training into practice. Khenpo Kunpal says here that I should train in and practice the three trainings of discipline, meditation and wisdom.

Doctor's instructions

What invalid in need of medicine
Ignored his doctors words and gained his health? (48, second half)

If you are sick and you go to a doctor, but then you don't take the medicine that the doctor gives or don't do anything that the doctor prescribes, then even if the doctor is a good doctor, it is not likely that you will get better. In the same way, we know what the problem is, we know the cause of the problem, and we have instructions that have been given to us by those who have successfully worked on this, like the teachings of the Buddha and the great masters. If you follow these instructions and work on yourself, then it is not only possible, it is definite that you will be able to get rid of these mind poisons. But if you don't follow the instructions, then it is not possible.

So first we need to know what the problem is. Then we must learn the cause of these problems. Then we must learn what is the best way to deal with these problems. Then if we know that, then we have to practice that. If we know, but we don't practice, then we can't get anything out of it.

Applying heedfulness

So here we are developing heedfulness. In the beginning, this means knowing what the problem is and what to adopt and what to avoid. Then the next point is knowing how urgent it is to work on this, because this state of being we have now, which is very rare and has so many positive circumstances, may not come again so easily. The next point is knowing there's no reason why these problems should not be solved, why it should not be worked on.

So take this determination of working on this, and then work on it with heedfulness. Because if we are not heedful, then we can never change this situation, because our minds will be overpowered by these mind poisons and we will be carried away by our usual habitual tendencies. But by slowly and steadily applying heedfulness, and a certain kind of determination, we can begin to change. Of course it is not something that you can just rush around and do something in a short time, but with the long view, we can change.

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¹ This type of aversion towards the mind poisons is called *clinging to the antidote*. Eventually, this type of clinging must also be overcome; but it can be very helpful for beginners. As mentioned in chapter 3, there are two kinds of obscurations, the emotional obscurations (mind poisons) and the wisdom obscurations (habitual tendencies). This *clinging to the antidote* can be considered a wisdom obscuration, which must be eventually purified.