

CHAPTER SIX

THE PERFECTION OF PATIENCE



The sixth chapter of the *Bodhisattva's Way of Life* is concerned with the methods for preventing bodhichitta from deteriorating. The main obstacle that causes deterioration of bodhichitta is anger and the remedy for anger is the perfection of patience.

In interviews, many people have asked me how to counteract anger, and this seems to be a great obstacle for the majority of practitioners. Therefore I hope that this explanation on patience will be of great help for everyone. The reason it is necessary to relinquish anger is given in the following verses:

THE FAULTS OF HAVING ANGER

1. Whatever wholesome deeds.
Such as venerating the buddhas, and generosity,
That have been amassed over a thousand eons
Will all be destroyed in one moment of anger.
2. There is no evil like hatred,
And no fortitude like patience.
Thus I should strive in various ways
To meditate on patience.
3. My mind will not experience peace
If it fosters painful thoughts of hatred.
I shall find no joy or happiness,
Unable to sleep, I shall feel unsettled.
4. A master who has hatred
Is in danger of being killed

Even by those who for their wealth and happiness
Depend upon his kindness.

5. By it, friends and relatives are disheartened;
Though drawn by my generosity they will not trust me,
In brief there is nobody
Who lives happily with anger.
6. Hence the enemy, anger,
Creates sufferings such as these,
But whoever assiduously overcomes it
Finds happiness now and hereafter.
7. Having found its fuel of mental unhappiness
In the prevention of what I wish for
And in the doing of what I do not want,
Hatred increases and then destroys me.
8. Therefore I should totally eradicate
The fuel of this enemy;
For this enemy has no other function
Than that of causing me harm.
9. Whatever befalls me
I shall not disturb my mental joy;
For having been made unhappy, I shall not accomplish what I wish
And my virtues will decline.
10. 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?
11. For myself and for my friends
I want no suffering, no disrespect,
No harsh words and nothing unpleasant;
But for my enemies it is the opposite.

We might decide anger is a destructive emotion and decide not to become angry ever again. Even though we may be determined in this decision, it is not possible simply to will anger away because we do not have this kind of control over the course of events. So it isn't really possible to prevent being angry by simply suppressing it.

Eastern psychology suggests that to reduce our anger, we must first develop an understanding of the negative effects of anger. After understanding this, we will naturally develop a dislike for anger and be able to work on it.

Usually when we are harmed by someone, we automatically become very angry. On the other hand, if we have examined the effects of anger carefully, we will realize that the harm brought about by someone else is very slight in comparison with the harm to us from our angry mind. Therefore we should understand that our own anger is the actual enemy, not the person who has harmed us. Having identified the real enemy, we should then resolve to overcome our anger and carefully consider the negative results from having given into that anger. Developing the aspiration to relinquish anger will result in happiness and comfort for ourselves and also for other beings. The way we relinquish our anger is by engaging in patience which occurs mainly in three different situations.



THE THREE TYPES OF PATIENCE NEEDED

So there are nine different causes listed in the *Bodhisattva's Way* for us to become angry. The first three causes where we have to be patient relate to ourselves: not being patient with our own personal suffering, not being patient when being disrespected by others, and not being patient when being spoken to unfairly or harshly. The next three causes of anger in which we need patience are the situations of having persons who are dear to us or our relatives who experience personal suffering, are being disrespected, or are being treated unfairly. Finally, there are the three situations in which we need patience and that is when someone that we don't like or respect and believe is totally undeserving receives great respect from others or who becomes famous or who receives great rewards.

For all these types of situations that cause us to become angry, the remedy can be boiled down to being patient when we are suffering. This can be called the "forbearance of suffering." Then we can be patient with those people who treat us badly, humiliate us, or say negative things about us. We also need to have patience with ourselves so we do not become discouraged in our spiritual practice thinking that we will never realize the true nature of our mind or of phenomena. Of these, the overcoming anger towards those people whom we don't like and who frustrate us, called "enemies" in the text, is the most important practice to cultivate. We begin a discussion of the forbearance of suffering.



HAVING PATIENCE WHEN WE ARE SUFFERING

12. The causes of happiness sometimes occur
But the causes for suffering are very many.
Without suffering there is no renunciation.
Therefore, mind, you should stand firm.
13. If some ascetics and the people of Karnapa¹
Endure the pain of cuts and burns for no reason,
Then for the sake of liberation
Why have I no courage?
14. 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.
15. Who has not seen this to be so with trifling sufferings
Such as the bites of snakes and insects,
Feelings of hunger and thirst
And with such minor things as rashes?
16. 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.
17. Some when they see their own blood
Become especially brave and steady,
But some when they see the blood of others.
Faint and fall unconscious.
18. These (reactions) come from the mind
Being either steady or timid.
Therefore I should disregard harms caused to me
and not be affected by suffering.
19. Even when the wise are suffering
Their minds remain very lucid and undefiled;
For when war is being waged against the disturbing emotions
Much harm is caused at the times of battle.

1. This refers to extreme ascetic practices such as starving or inflicting burns and cuts upon oneself.

20. The victorious warriors are those
Who, having disregarded all suffering,
Vanquish the foes of hatred and so forth;
(Common warriors) slay only corpses.
21. Furthermore, suffering has good qualities:
Through being disheartened with it, arrogance is dispelled,
Compassion arises for those in cyclic existence,
Evil is shunned and joy is found in virtue.

Our main goal as a bodhisattva is to be able to eliminate our disturbing emotions. To obtain good results in our Dharma practice, we will have to go through many difficulties and exhibit great diligence. When we encounter these difficulties, we must be patient with them. Otherwise, we will not be able finally to attain the fruition of our practice. So to attain enlightenment, we need to have forbearance with the difficulties we encounter in our practice.

22. As I do not become angry
With great sources of suffering such as jaundice,
Then why be angry with animate creatures?
They too are provoked by conditions.
23. Although they are not wished for,
These sicknesses arise;
And likewise although they are not wished for,
These disturbing conceptions forcibly arise.
24. Without thinking, "I shall be angry,"
People become angry with no resistance,
And without thinking, "I shall produce myself,"
Likewise anger itself is produced.
25. All mistakes that are
And all the various kinds of evil
Arise through the force of conditions:
They do not govern themselves.
26. These conditions that assemble together
Have no intention to produce anything,
And neither does their product
Have the intention to be produced.

27. That which is asserted as Primal Substance²
And that which is imputed as a Self,
(Since they are unproduced) do not arise after having purposefully
thought,
"I shall arise (in order to cause harm)."
28. If they are unproduced and non-existent
Then whatever wish they have to produce (harm will also not exist).
Since (this Self) would permanently apprehend its objects,
It follows that it would never cease to do so.
29. Furthermore if the Self were permanent
It would clearly be devoid of action, just like space.
So even if it met with other conditions
How could its unchanging (nature) be affected?
30. Even if when acted upon (by other conditions) it remains as before,
Then what could actions do to it?
Thus if I say that this (condition) acts upon (a permanent Self),
How could the two ever be (causally) related?
31. Hence everything is governed by other factors (which in turn) are
governed by (others),
And in this way nothing governs itself.
Having understood this, I should not become angry
With phenomena that are like apparitions.
32. (If everything is unreal like an apparition) then who is there to restrain
what (anger)?
Surely (in this case) restraint would be inappropriate—
It would not be inappropriate, because (conventionally) I must maintain
That in dependence upon restraining (anger) the stream of suffering
is severed.
33. So when seeing an enemy or even a friend
Committing an improper action,
By thinking that such things arise from conditions
I shall remain in a happy frame of mind.

2. Verse twenty-seven mentions the primal substance (Tib. *chi tso*) which according to the Samkhya school is a substance that is permanent and underlies all material. The Samkhya school also holds that there is a permanent self (Skt. *atman*). Buddhist do not believe that these concepts are correct.

HAVING PATIENCE WITH ONE'S ENEMIES

There is no person who has control over the course of all these events that happen to them. All beings are under the influence of various factors or conditions. We should then understand that when an enemy harms us, this is due to the person's improper thinking or confusion because he or she is not in control of his anger. Therefore there is no real reason to be angry with a person who tries to harm or hinder us.

So whoever harms us, whether it is an enemy or relative or close friend, we shouldn't think badly of that person. Instead we should think that this person can't really help what he or she is doing, since this person has no control over the course of events. Those who harm or slight us are, after all, influenced by disturbing emotions that cause them to act that way towards us. So when slighted or harmed, we should try to relax rather than becoming angry. Similarly we can be patient with those who treat us badly or block our desires and progress.

34. If things were brought into being by choice,
Then since no one wishes to suffer,
Suffering would not occur
To any embodied creature.
35. Through not being careful
People even harm themselves with thorns and other things,
And for the sake of obtaining women and the like
They become obsessed and deprive themselves of food.
36. And there are some who injure themselves
Through the unmeritorious deeds
Of hanging themselves, leaping from cliffs,
Eating poison and unhealthy foods.
37. If, when under the influence of disturbing emotions
People will even kill their treasured selves,
How can they be expected not to cause harm
To the bodies of other living beings?
38. Even if I cannot develop compassion for all such people
Who through the arising of disturbing emotions,
Set out to try and kill me and so forth,
The last thing I should do is to become angry with them.
39. Even if it were the nature of the childish
To cause harm to other beings,

It would still be incorrect to be angry with them.
For this would be like begrudging fire for having the nature to burn.

40. And even if the fault were temporary
In they who are by nature reliable,
It would still be incorrect to be angry.
For this would be like begrudging space for allowing smoke to arise in it.
41. If I become angry with the yielder
Although I am actually harmed by his stick,
Then since he too is secondary, being in turn incited by hatred,
I should really be angry with his hatred.
42. Previously I must have caused similar harm
To other sentient beings.
Therefore it is right for this harm to be returned
To me who is the cause of injury to others.
43. Both the weapon and my body
Are the causes of my suffering.
Since he gave rise to the weapon and I to the body,
With whom should I be angry?
44. If in blind attachment I cling
To this suffering abscess of a human form
Which cannot bear to be touched,
With whom should I be angry when it is hurt?
45. It is the fault of the childish that they are hurt,
For although they do not wish to suffer
They are greatly attached to its causes.
So why should they be angry with others?
46. Just like the guardians of the hell worlds
And the forest of razor-sharp leaves,
So is this (suffering) produced by my actions;
With whom therefore should I be angry?
47. Having been instigated by my own actions,
Those who cause me harm come into being.
If by these (actions) they should fall into hell
Surely isn't it I who am destroying them?

48. In dependence upon them I purify many evils
By patiently accepting the harms that they cause,
But in dependence upon me they will fall
Into hellish pain for a very long time.

49. So since I am causing harm to them
And they are benefitting me,
Why, unruly mind, do you become angry
In such a mistaken manner?

50. If my mind has the noble quality (of patience)
I shall not go to hell,
But although I am protecting myself (in this way)
How will it be so for them?

51. Nevertheless, should I return the harm
It will not protect them either.
By doing so my conduct will deteriorate
And hence this fortitude will be destroyed.

These eighteen verses explain why we should have patience dealing with those who want to harm or hinder us. As already mentioned everyone lacks freedom and control over events of samsara. We should develop patience by concentrating on this fact again and again. There is no being that desires suffering, so if beings had freedom to choose whether they will suffer or not, there wouldn't be any suffering. We know that all beings do suffer, so we must conclude that there is no choice of whether we suffer or not. In the context of anger which is a specific emotion not wanted by anyone, but it does arise in the minds of beings because they have no control or freedom. Understanding this is the first reason to have patience for those who harm us.

Beings are totally under the influence of various factors such as disturbing emotions. Most human beings consider themselves to be the most important person. However, an angry person could harm us at any point. When this happens, we should think that we should not become angry in return and instead try to develop compassion for that person.

Individuals are naturally concerned with their own welfare and will do anything to bring about their own personal comfort. When they do this, they can cause harm to others in the process. When harmed by an individual, there is no real reason for being angry with that person. For example, the nature of fire is that it burns, and if we stick our hand into the fire, we will be burned. But we shouldn't become angry at the fire, because heat is just a characteristic of fire. Similarly, ordinary individuals naturally act out of ignorance, so there is no reason to become angry

with them because that is their nature. If we are harmed by somebody, we should just withdraw and relax, and not respond to their aggression. In this way, the harm will be pacified and there's no reason for becoming angry with the person. It is that person's anger that pushed him or her to act in this way, so we should not become angry with another person's anger.

If we, for example, are stabbed with a knife, we could really suffer. Again, it's improper to become angry with the person with the knife because the suffering is brought about by the weapon. Without such a weapon, we wouldn't have this physical suffering. On the other hand, there would also be no physical suffering if we had no physical body. So the weapon harming us and our own body are the real cause of our suffering. In fact, it's not the enemy. So maybe we should get angry with the weapon or our own body. But the real reason we are harmed by an enemy is because of the karma that we accumulated in the past. So we are responsible for what takes place due to the power of our own personal karma. In the future, the enemy having harmed us will begin to suffer greatly, maybe in extreme cases even being reborn in the hell realm. So rather than becoming angry, we should develop patience in this situation. In fact, if we are able to do this, our enemy has benefited us because our enemy gives us the opportunity to develop patience and accumulate great and vast virtue by forgiving him or her. As a result of this we should experience happiness and comfort.³

In terms of practice we should aim at accumulating merit. The best way for doing this is by contemplating and developing patience. It is not possible to practice patience without someone harming us because if we aren't harmed, then there is no reason for engaging in patience. So, those who harm us are the principal cause for us developing patience. In other words, our enemies are our main benefactors.

There are two methods for accumulating merit: to practice generosity and to develop patience. Practicing generosity is very easy since it's not difficult to find someone to be generous towards. It's more difficult to find somebody to be patient with. So when encountering someone who is angry with us or wants to harm us, we should realize that in actual fact we are very fortunate.



PATIENCE WITH THOSE WHO SLANDER US

We will now discuss of having patience in relation to persons who criticize us.

3. Thrangu Rinpoche is often asked whether we should just not react and accept our karma in situations where we are falsely imprisoned or in which someone is about to greatly harm us. He generally answers that we should not just accept an injustice so we can hire a lawyer if falsely imprisoned. Or we can take away the knife or gun or run away from someone going to hurt us. If these actions are intended to prevent harm to us or to someone else, protecting oneself is simple common sense as long as we are not motivated by aggression or anger, but the desire of preventing that person from committing more negative karma.

52. Since my mind is not physical
In no way can anyone destroy it,
But through its being greatly attached to my body
It is caused harm by (physical) suffering.
53. Since disrespect, harsh speech
And unpleasant words
Do not cause any harm to my body,
Why, mind, do you become so angry?
54. "Because others will dislike me"
But since it will not devour me
Either in this or in another life
Why do I not want this (dislike)?
55. "Because it will hinder my worldly gain"
Even if I do not want this
I shall have to leave my worldly gains behind
And my evil alone will remain unmoved.
56. Thus it is better that I die today
Than live a long but wicked life;
For even if people like me should live a long time,
There will always be the suffering of death.
57. Suppose someone should awaken from a dream
In which he experienced one hundred years of happiness,
And suppose another should awaken from a dream
In which he experienced just one moment of happiness;
58. For both of these people who have awoken
That happiness will never return.
Similarly, whether my life has been long or short,
At the time of death it will be finished like this.
59. Although I may live happily for a long time
Through obtaining a great deal of material wealth,
I shall go forth empty-handed and destitute
Just like having been robbed by a thief.
60. "Surely material wealth will enable me to live,
And then shall be able to consume evil and do good"

But if I am angry on account of it
Will not my merit be consumed and evil increase?

61. And what use will be the life
Of one who only commits evil,
If for the sake of material gain
He causes (the merits needed for) life to degenerate.
62. "Surely I should be angry with those
Who say unpleasant things that weaken other beings" (confidence
in me)
But in the same way why am I not angry
With people who say unpleasant things about others?
63. If I can patiently accept this lack of confidence
Because it is related to someone else,
Then why am I not patient with unpleasant words (about myself)
Since they are related to the arising of disturbing emotions?

Patience is required in situations of being disrespected or yelled at with harsh and unpleasant words or being criticized and belittled. It is meaningless to become angry when someone makes disrespectful or belittling statements about us. Even if cruel words showing disrespect are unpleasant to hear, they will not hurt us. So we should not become angry with those using merely words. We might argue, "Yes, words criticizing me do not really affect me, but actions being disrespectful and belittling me and my friends are intolerable." But again, whether other people like or dislike you cannot affect you. By understanding this, we can develop patience with unkind, disrespectful, or belittling words.



PATIENCE WITH THOSE WHO INSULT THE DHARMA

We should also be patient with those who insult the Dharma or hurt spiritual teachers, relatives, or friends.

64. Should others talk badly of or even destroy
Holy images, reliquaries and the sacred Dharma.
It is improper for me to resent it
For the buddhas can never be injured.

65. I should prevent anger arising towards those
Who injure my spiritual masters, relatives and friends.
Instead I should see, as in the manner shown before,
That such things arise from conditions.
66. Since embodied creatures are injured
By both animate beings and inanimate objects,
Why only bear malice to the animate?
It follows that I should patiently accept all harm.
67. Should one person ignorantly do wrong
And another ignorantly become angry (with him),
Who would be at fault?
And who would be without fault?
68. Why did I previously commit those actions
Because of which others now cause me harm?
Since everything is related to my actions
Why should I bear malice towards these (enemies)?
69. When I have seen this to be so,
I should strive for what is meritorious
(In order to) certainly bring about
Loving thoughts between all.
70. For example, when a fire in one house
Has moved into another house,
It is right to get rid of straw and such things
That will cause the fire to spread.
71. Likewise when the fire of hatred spreads
To whatever my mind is attached,
I should immediately get rid of it
For fear of my merit being burned.
72. Why is a man condemned to death not fortunate
If he is released after having his hand cut off?
Why am I who am experiencing human misery not fortunate
If by that I am spared from (the agonies of) hell?
73. If I am unable to endure
Even the mere sufferings of the present,

Then why do I not restrain myself from being angry,
Which will be the source of hellish misery?

74. For the sake of satisfying my desires
I have suffered numerous burnings in hell,
But by those actions I fulfilled the purpose
Of neither myself nor others.

75. But now since great meaning will accrue
From harm which is not even (a fraction) of that,
I should indeed be solely joyful
Towards such suffering that dispels the harms of all.

For example, patience is necessary when we become angry with those who destroy images of the Buddha or other enlightened beings. When people destroy stupas and try to destroy the Dharma, it's not necessary to become angry with them because these images and teachings are simply symbolic objects of having confidence in Buddhism. Those who destroy stupas and the sacred Dharma teachings will not actually harm or affect the enlightened beings, nor will they harm the Dharma itself. So it is not proper to be angry at these persons.

This teaching of Shantideva is really quite current because the Communists destroyed the temples, monasteries, the sacred images, relics, stupas, and burned many sacred Dharma texts in Tibet. Having heard about this, many persons were very angry at the Chinese for these actions. But, based on this teaching it is not correct to become angry for what they have done, what they have destroyed, because this act did not actually hurt Buddhism itself.

Likewise, we should not become angry or develop hatred towards those who try to harm our teacher, our relatives, or our friends because these persons are also under the influence of the disturbing emotions, defilements, and ignorance. It is not proper to be angry at them.

Several years ago someone asked me, "Didn't you develop any anger or hatred toward the Communists who invaded your country, destroyed your monastery, and drove you out of your native land?" With a lack of alertness, mindfulness, or stability of mind at the time I could have become angry and would say, "Yes, I am angry." But by realizing the teaching of the Dharma, I realized that there is no solid, firm person known as a "Communist." But there were some units of the Chinese army who chased me and shot at me. I did not become angry at them because I did not know them and they did not know me. They shot at me because it was their job to do so and it was my job to try to escape; so there was no hatred between us. This example explains fairly vividly what it means to adopt the dharmic attitude towards those who try to harm our friends, relatives, and teachers.

When an enemy expresses aggression towards us, it's proper not to react with anger or aggression because we must have done something to make the other person angry at us. So we are also involved in the interaction and problem. Knowing that we are not pure, we try not to become angry.



PATIENCE WITH PRAISE GIVEN TO THE UNDESERVING

The next ten verses concern patience we need when we become upset because someone has praised or given an award to an individual whom we don't like or a person whom we feel doesn't deserve the praise.

76. Should someone else find joyous happiness
Upon praising (my enemy) as an excellent person
Why, mind, do you not praise him too
And likewise make yourself happy?
77. That joyous happiness of yours
Would be a source of joy, not something prohibited,
A precept given by the Excellent Ones
And a supreme (means) for assembling others.
78. It is said that others are made happy through (being praised) in this way.
But if, in this way, you do not want (them to have) this happiness,
Then, (since it makes them happy), you should cease giving wages and
the like (to your servants).
But you would be adversely affected both in this and future lives.
79. When people describe my own good qualities
I want others to be happy too,
But when they describe the good qualities of others
I do not wish to be happy myself.
80. Having generated bodhichitta
Through wishing all beings to be happy,
Why should I become angry
If they find some happiness themselves?
81. If I wish for all sentient beings to become
buddhas worshipped throughout the three realms,