JUMP-START YOUR PRACTICE

Cultivating Joyful Effort (*Vīrya*)

Verses from Master Shantideva's Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life
Lama Marut · Prana House, Melbourne · January 6 & 7, 2010

READING ONE

Your Only Real Enemies: Getting Medieval on the Mental Afflictions

Even in temporary situations
Where someone does me some minor harm,
I feel anger, pride comes, and until I ruin them
I do not even stop to sleep.
Therefore I must exert myself,
Without letting up in my effort for even a moment,
Until such time as I have directly,
And finally, destroyed this enemy.
(4.36)

There are poor deluded ones who are willing to suffer
For those who are going to die by their very nature;
They advance to war with fanatical hopes of destroying:
Completely ignoring the pain of being hit,
Never to turn back, never to withdraw from the field,
Until they have achieved their aim.
(4.37)

With the true enemy, an enemy who is an enemy by nature,
Who is the cause of all of our sufferings, all the time,
There is no need to say that I must be the same.
Whatever comes, I must never become discouraged,
I must never lessen in my resolve,
Even if it brings me hundreds of sufferings.
(4.38)

Even fishermen, butchers, farmers, and the like
Endure willingly all kinds of harms
Such as cold or heat, thinking of nothing
More important than their livelihood.
Why then shouldn't someone like myself
[Work hard] for the sake of living beings' happiness?
(4.40)

I should therefore never turn back
Even for a single moment from the task
Of destroying the mental afflictions.
I should get attached to them,
And learn to hate and make war.
These kinds of mental afflictions
Act to destroy the mental afflictions
And so are not counted among them.
(4.43)

The Perfection of Joyful Effort

Once you have practiced patience, begin
Your practice of effort, for enlightenment lies
In making these kinds of effort.
Without a breeze they never flicker,
And just so in the absence of effort
Merit can never occur.
(7.1)

What is effort? It is joy in doing good.
Here I will explain the things
That work against it: these are
Laziness, an attraction to what is bad,
And the feeling of being discouraged—belittling yourself.
(7.2)

What promotes the feeling of laziness
Is sloth—the sweet enjoyment of
Some pleasure—as well as craving
For time spent sleeping, all leading to
A failure to feel a sense of disgust
For the pain of the circle of life.
(7.3)

READING TWO

Getting Stoked and the Obstacles to It

Laziness, and the Remedy of Remembering Death

Lured by the kleshas,
You have been entrapped in rebirth.
Why don't you realize
You have entered the jaws of death?
(7.4)

Haven't you even got eyes to see
How those in the world with you
Have gone steadily to the slaughter?
To sit here still and enjoy your sleep
Is just the same as the oxen
Waiting for the butcher.
(7.5)

When you are under observation by Death,
With escape routes blocked off on all sides,
How can you enjoy eating, sleeping, and fornicating?
(7.6)

Death is coming to take you, moving
At incredible speed; in the time
You have left, try to amass good karma.
When the moment arrives it's true you may
Give up your laziness, but what good
Can it do at a time so wrong?
(7.7)

Seeing one's relatives so despondent they can't eat,
Their faces red and swollen from crying,
In intense anguish and sorrow,
And also seeing the faces of Death's emissaries,
(7.9)

What is it that you imagined you'd do
At that moment, tormented by the memory
Of the wrongs you've done, and with the roar
Of the hell realms in your ears bringing
Such terror that you cover your body in shit,
And reach the depths of insanity?
(7.10)

Attraction to Diversions

You must make use of this boat,
The human life you have, to cross over
The great river of suffering.
The boat is hard to find again later;
Do not sit then, ignorant one,
At this moment there asleep.
(7.14)

You give up the highest kind of pleasure,
The holy Dharma, infinite numbers
Of causes that bring you pleasure.
Why is it you are attracted so much
To being distracted by causes for pain,
To busyness and the like?
(7.15)

Never Be Discouraged

Never allow yourself to feel discouraged,
Having the thought, "How could I ever become enlightened?"
About this, those who have gone thus,
Who speak the truth, have spoken
The following words of truth:
(7.17)

Those beings who are flies and gnats,
Or bees, and even those
Who live as worms as well
Can reach unmatched enlightenment,
So difficult to reach,
If they develop the force of effort.
(7.18)

Little by Little

At the beginning the Guide directs us
To acts of charity such as giving
Vegetables and the like.
Once we have grown accustomed to these,
Then gradually, in good time, we find
We can offer even our flesh.
(7.25)