

**The Asian Classics Institute
Extension Course—
The Six Perfections of a Spiritual Warrior**

Reading One: The Perfection of Giving

The following reading is an excerpt from a book written by Geshe Michael Roach entitled The Garden—a story of a young man's conversations with the great spiritual masters of Buddhism in a special desert garden.

As always happened though I continued to be driven by the thought of my mother, and also by the intense wish to meet the Golden One again, an emotion which strangely never left me, but rather intensified as I began to make real inner progress. I felt instinctively that there must be some way through which I could transform the imagined action of the meditation on giving and taking into some more concrete way of life. And so I travelled again to the Garden, this time in the middle of autumn, which in the desert differed little from early fall, or even summer itself, except for the very gradual cooling of the night air.

I entered the gate there quite late in the evening, as was my usual custom, both due to the long ride in the coach to the town and also because this had been Her and my favorite time, since other visitors to the Garden and to the small stone chapel whose wall made up one side of the garden would have long since returned home to their families and evening meal. Her innocence was such that She was often simply unaware of how her clothing covered her or not, and her manner so completely free of any desire or guile that few people we ever encountered mistook this liberty for impropriety. Nonetheless She had been intensely private in the lessons she granted me, and when I saw the monk standing below the carob before me I realized that, in all the times She and I had ever entered here, there had never been another person present.

He stood looking at me frankly as I approached, and my eyes studied him as I passed the lovely desert roses on the left, and short fragrant plum trees on the right. The first impression was of the very size of his form: he was tall and robust, not thin and not stout, but glowing with some different kind of health—strong and sturdy. As I drew nearer though I saw the one thing that defined his entire presence, and this was the look of complete enjoyment in his face, the broad unabashed smile—not the kind of smile that made one wonder why the other person was smiling so broadly so soon, as if unbeknownst to ourselves we had a large stain stretching down the front of our shirt—but rather the kind of smile that immediately made you want to smile along. And I did, and he beamed even more.

How could I ever mistake the face of the glorious Shanti Deva, the master of the art of the daily life of compassionate action, who thirteen centuries before had left us with the ultimate guidebook for a meaningful life? But I had hardly time to dwell on the miracle of actually meeting him before he had bounded forth to meet me, halfway to the tree, and thrown his arm around my shoulders, leading me off towards the pleasant area where the spring from the fountain followed the eastern wall through the blooms of desert plants, enjoying a rare opportunity to dress themselves in rich purples and oranges daily, without the benefit of the infrequent thunderstorm that was usually the only excuse they ever had to appear, and then only for a few hours.

"I understand your frustration," he boomed in a deep, happy bass voice, looking over like an accomplice and spilling the warmth of his smile on me like a glowing lamp. "What's the use of always thinking about some trip you're going to take, but never getting to take the trip?"

I was somewhat accustomed to these impromptu outbursts from the masters of the Garden; I had come to expect that they would seem to know my thoughts, and I had learned as well that, given the extraordinary state of consciousness which they had apparently already attained, it was as good to speak in metaphors as in the realities these metaphors referred to. What I mean is, I understood that he understood that I wanted to learn some concrete ways in which I could act out the baby compassion which was beginning to burn within me; and that I wanted to get down immediately to the pressing business of actually finding and helping my mother, and of solving the mystery of the Lady of the Garden.

All of a sudden he stopped short and clasped my forearm in his, as if we were two soldiers making a pact to stand together, to the death. "You have found the heart," he said simply, "now become the Warrior."

His words and the sudden gesture caught me entirely off guard, for I had never in my life thought of the word "warrior" as applying to myself. "Excuse me?" I said, a bit timidly.

"A Warrior," he said with strength, "the ultimate warrior. The Warrior who kills death itself; your own death, and the deaths of others."

From my lessons in the Garden already I knew enough not to think that Master Shanti Deva was joking, or even exaggerating. I stood silent, and prepared myself to hear his words.

"The Warrior," he began, "acts in six different ways; that is, for himself. He acts in the way of the perfections."

"Please teach me these perfections," I replied simply.

"The perfections are deeds that make you perfect; on the day they are truly perfect, you become an Enlightened One, and can truly stop the sufferings of others, and find your own ultimate peace.

"We begin with the act of giving. A Warrior gives all that he has: gives all the things that he has to use, gives all the good he has ever done, gives even his or her own body."

My mind turned to giving. "I do give," I said. "More often than not, I can say honestly, I give what the people around me need, when they need it, from what I own."

"Own?" he said, as though he did not know the word.

"Own, possess. The things that I possess, my possessions."

Master Shanti Deva chuckled gently. "And what do you possess?" he asked.

"My things," I answered, "like my coat, or my books, or my bed or room or horse."

"Coat?" he asked, innocently.

"Yes, my coat, the coat that I wear when it's cold."

"And you possess your coat?" he continued.

"Of course," I replied, a bit impatiently. "If not me, who else?"

"Indeed," he said thoughtfully. "And how is it, that you possess your coat?"

"I own it, it's mine to keep or wear whenever I want, and no one else."

"Wear?" he echoed again, quizzically, again. "You can wear it whenever you want? Keep it and wear it, however you wish?"

"Of course," I repeated.

"And so you can say," he said insistently, "with certainty, that this coat will be with you tomorrow? That you control this coat, completely?"

I paused for a moment to think. Possession means control; I possess my coat because I control it, in the sense that I can keep it or give it away, and no one else can make this decision but me. But could I say that I would surely have the coat tomorrow?

I thought with honesty, and the truth struck me with force: "I cannot say that my coat will be with me tomorrow. The coat can be taken from me by force, or stolen in stealth. It can be torn as I pass an iron gate. It can be ruined by the elements on the road home. It can even," I thought a bit more deeply, "lose its owner. It is the very nature of all coats; they get old, they wear out, they fall apart, and so they are taken from us, or us from them, when we die, and other people pick up the coat and try it on, to see who it might fit, and the coat goes to find a new owner."

"So in fact," he said quietly, "you do not control the coat. Other forces control the coat. The coat comes to you, and the coat leaves you."

I nodded silently.

"And in fact you do not even own your own skin, or your own face or your own name, any more than you own the coat, for they come to you, and are torn from you, regardless of whether you want to keep them or not."

I nodded again.

"And this is why," continued the Master, "that I spoke of giving away the things you use, for you are only a user, a user for the time being, and no owner, not of anything. Give what you have, and give it now, while still you can give, for everything will be taken from you soon enough."

"What are the things to give?" I asked. "And how do I give them, if I am to be a Warrior?"

"Begin with material things," he replied. "Watch people carefully, put yourself in their place; watch their eyes, see what they seek. Begin with the simple things—a cup of tea, a pair of gloves, even a small piece of bread set out for a bird."

I thought to myself that feeding a small bird didn't seem to require a mighty Warrior; but almost before the thought sounded within my mind he had dropped the armclasp and raised his fist at me, almost threateningly. The first finger was outstretched, and strong tendons rippled up the length of his arm, to where the robe folded over his shoulder. "Only a Warrior," he said with vehemence, "could feed a bird, perfectly."

I looked at him blankly.

"Only a Warrior," he repeated, "could look at the bird, and understand truly the nature of the bird, and the nature of giving bread to the bird. Only a Warrior could understand, with perfect understanding, that the act of giving a piece of bread to a bird can be the perfection of giving, giving that brings all living kind, everywhere, to complete, total, perfection. The perfection of the act of giving, for a Warrior, is to give with the total awareness of how the act of giving will create paradise, beyond all death and suffering, for anyone who gives perfectly."

"And how do we give perfectly?" I asked.

"When we give with a perfect awareness that, if we give for the purpose of reaching our own perfection, and thus be of perfect service to all others, it plants a seed in us to become this perfection."

"And so if the heart is right, the giving is a perfection?" I asked.

"Exactly," he replied.

Something bothered me about this idea. "So it doesn't really matter what we give, as long as we give with this perfect intent?"

"If you give with perfect intent," he corrected me, "then naturally you also give the best you have; you give whatever is most helpful, and most desired by others, within all the means at your disposal, at any given moment. A warrior is a Warrior not only because he is ready to give his life, but because he does everything to give his life, when the time for giving has come."

"And so we must give everything?" I asked.

"Everything, but everything with wisdom. To give more than we are capable of giving, and then regret our giving later, is a great mistake, and so we must give as much as we can, perhaps more than we thought we could give, but never more than our heart can gladly give. Begin small, and build up steadily, and then eventually you will be able to give everything, for it is only by giving

everything, that we can reach everything, and then truly give all to all who need."

"And is it only things that we give?" I asked again.

"You need hardly ask the question, for you know yourself that the highest gift you can receive is the one which you have been granted here on this holy ground: the gift of understanding what it is that has created ourselves and this world, and of understanding how it may be turned into a world of bliss, rather than a world where every good thing is dragged down into loss and pain."

And then he took me by the arm, as if to lead me on past the dark corner of the Garden, out to where the moonlight cleared the eastern wall, and the spring fed the flowers. We had taken no more than a step when he suddenly released my elbow and pushed me a touch to the right; I nearly stumbled but caught myself, and turned in a bit of confusion. His powerful form was stooped low on the ground, his large, oval intelligent face peering intently into the grass. He reached down with his hand and brought up a lovely crimson ladybug, which turned a touch on the tip of his third finger, and spread its wings, and flew.

"There," he said with a laugh, rising up to meet me. "There is the third kind of giving, which is protection. You were about to step on our small friend there."

I stood still and looked down at the grass at my feet, for his words brought to mind a thought that had been rustling for some time in my mind. "But if I had stepped on her..." I began.

"Yes?" his body straightened slightly, with the instinct of a debater who had spent years on the battlefield of thinking itself.

"I could not have hurt her, unless she had some imprint in her own mind that would force her to see herself being hurt; an imprint that was planted in her mind, in fact, when she herself hurt someone in the past."

"Just so," he said with evident confidence, like a swordsman who already knew the next three moves his opponent would make.

"And if she did not have such an imprint in her mind, then I could not have hurt her; I would have stepped towards her, and missed her, and she would have flown away unharmed."

"Also true," he said, with a tone of fearlessness.

"And so really," I continued, "you gave her no gift at all, gave her no protection at all. Nothing depended on your action, there was no reason to push me

away: everything depended on the imprints she had in her mind already."

"Think more carefully," replied Master Shanti Deva, and he sounded like a man delivering a warning. "Is it any contradiction, that you have done all you can to save a being's life, that you have practiced the perfection of giving, without any real power to save that being's life at all?"

"It does seem a contradiction, a complete contradiction," I shot back immediately. "It seems like an action which is perfectly futile."

"And so do you mean to say," he continued, "that there are no Enlightened Ones at all, no one who has ever reached perfection?"

"I don't see how it follows," I snapped back, for this question did not seem like one that required any careful answer.

"Because according to your thinking," he continued, in a perfect flow, again like a swordsman who had planned his blows minutes in advance, "these beings have never been able to reach the final form of the perfection of giving."

"But of course they have," I replied. "You said it yourself; it is their ability to perform the six acts of giving and the rest perfectly which defines them as enlightened."

"But they have *not* perfected giving," he insisted.

"What are you talking about?"

"They have not, according to you, perfected giving; because there are still people in the world who are poor, and who want. How can They have perfected giving, how can their giving be perfect, if there are still people who desperately need to be given to?"

With this my stream of unexamined words was stilled. I began to think. It began to dawn on me then that the perfection of a virtue consisted not in the accomplishment of the external results of that virtue, but rather in the inner perfection of that virtue, necessarily accompanied by its perfect expression. What I mean to say is, I understood in that moment that if I ever learned to practice charity perfectly, it would not mean that every being's poverty would have to be removed, because the poverty that any particular person experiences is a direct result of their own lack of charity, and will not be changed until they can learn to give. All the same, I could within myself perfect the attitude of giving—I could learn to give all I had, and learn to give it to all who ever lived. But at the same time this did not imply that I could simply sit and think about giving, without ever trying to give, because no one could ever have the perfect intention of giving if this intention did not express itself in their every action and thought. And so to Master Shanti Deva I said simply, "I see, I see now."

"Remember it," he said, and moved on with me through the Garden. "Because it is true of all of the perfections; it is the way of the Warrior itself." We walked silently then for some minutes, and I reflected upon the fact that, the more I understood, the more I seemed capable of silence, for silence seemed itself to be a reflection of contentment, true contentment, an emotion that radiated warmly from the master at my side. As the quiet passed, I asked him about the next perfection of a Warrior.

The following reading is taken from the Entry Point for Children of the Victorious Buddhas (rGyal-sras 'jug-ngogs), a commentary by Gyaltsab Je Darma Rinchen (1364-1432) on the book called Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life (Byang-chub-sems-dpa'i spyod-pa la 'jug-pa) by Master Shantideva (c. 700 AD).

**The power of the virtue
Is so much more powerful
If done all the time,
Motivated by strong enthusiasm,
Only by the antidote, or performed
Towards objects of high spiritual qualities,
Those who've been of great benefit,
Or those who are suffering.**

Here is the first. Since *the power of the virtue is so much more powerful*, I should exert myself in the following kinds of virtuous activity:

- ◆ Giving which is done "*all the time*," meaning on a regular basis;
- ◆ That which is *motivated by strong enthusiasm*—performed with fierce good feelings;
- ◆ That which is *motivated only by* attitudes such as a lack of attachment—by thoughts which provide *the antidote* for negativities;
- ◆ That which is *performed towards* the highest objects: *objects of high spiritual qualities* such as the Three Jewels or the like, *and* objects who have been *of great benefit*, such as your parents;
- ◆ That which is performed towards objects which are *suffering*—the poor and the like.

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Reading Two: The Perfection of Ethical Living

*The following reading is an excerpt from a book written by Geshe Michael Roach entitled *The Garden—a story of a young man's conversations with the great spiritual masters of Buddhism in a special desert garden.**

"The second way of a Warrior," he mused in his deep voice, "is to live the good life: a perfectly ethical way of life, meaning a way of life that avoids any kind of harm to other living creatures."

"By this," I asked, "do you mean keeping ourselves from the ten hurtful deeds?"

"Yes," he replied. "And as you grow further, you must study and master still deeper and higher codes of life—you must learn daily more of what is good to do, and what is not."

"What other codes of life are there?" I asked.

"You already know the code of ten, and you have I know committed yourself to the lifetime code of five. When you are ready you must continue on to the code of leaving the world, a code where you own nothing, and own no one—no house, no family, no possessions except your commitment to the spiritual way of life.

"When you are strong in this code you must take on the entire code of the Warrior, a way of life which is driven by the wish to become an Enlightened One, a way of living in which you move through the world not as an isolated stranger in an unknown land, but rather as the Warrior, as a knight, travelling through your life as though it were a road through some deep forest, and staying constantly on the lookout for anyone who needs you, anyone whom you can help, anyone that you can serve, in any way, providing anything from the smallest assistance to the highest gifts of the spirit.

"And there is yet a higher code than this one, a code which you must in this life come to follow, but this is one which you can learn only from Another, from One to whom you are bound in ways you cannot now imagine. To take upon yourself this code you must find a nearly unbearable love for others, and an equal capacity of devotion."

By now we were well into the moonlight, and on the far side of the spring, even in the night, we could see the small red buds of bloom on tiny round cactus between the stones. We stood serenely together at the edge of the water, looking down, and I felt a deep sense of peace, my mind entering and flowing with the small trickle as though it were some deep sea moving itself to the sea. And then Master Shanti Deva nudged me again, as before, but this time I lost my balance completely, and went sprawling across the water, onto the rocks beyond, grazing my hand across thorns in between the stones. I cursed and turned to stand, and saw him back on the grass, his head turned up the stars, with deep bass belly-laughes sounding into the night. I felt a sharp twinge of hurt, and confusion, and exasperation with so unexpected events, from so unexpected a source. I stared at him, unmoving, my eyes demanding some explanation.

The following selection is taken from the Great Book on the Steps of the Path (Lam-rim chen-mo), written by Je Tsongkapa (1357-1419).

Here is the third section, a presentation on the consequences of the various kinds of bad deeds. We proceed in three parts, beginning with what are called the "ripened" consequences.

Now each one of the ten paths of karma can itself be divided into three kinds—lesser, medium, and greater—depending on the intensity of the three poisons. The *Main Stage of Levels* states that, from the ten greater instances of killing and the rest, one is born into the hells. It says that from medium instances of each of the ten you take birth as an insatiable spirit; and from the ten lesser instances, you are born as an animal.

The *Sutra on the Ten Levels* however states the consequences of two of the kinds of instances, the lesser and the medium, in reverse of this.

The "consistent" consequences are as follows. Even if you do manage to escape the realms of misery and take birth as a human, the following respective results occur to you:

- 1) Your life is short.
- 2) You don't have enough to live on.
- 3) You have problems keeping your partner from others.
- 4) People don't believe what you say, even when you're telling the truth.
- 5) You lose friends easily.
- 6) You hear things as bad sounds.
- 7) No one listens to you.
- 8) Your personality is dominated by desire.
- 9) Your personality is dominated by anger.
- 10) Your personality is dominated by stupidity

The *Chapter on the True* and the *Sutra on the Ten Levels* state that there are two such consequences for each of the ones given here; even if you do manage to take birth as a human,

- 1) Your life is short, and you get sick easily.
- 2) You don't have enough to live on, and what you do have is all just common property with others.
- 3) The people who work around you are "inconsistent," which here means unreliable, and you find yourself having a lot of competition for your partner.
- 4) No one believes what you say, even when you are speaking the truth, and others are always deceiving you.
- 5) The people around you are always fighting against one another, and have an undesirable character.
- 6) You hear many unpleasant things, and when others talk to you it always seems to you as if they want to start a fight.
- 7) No one respects what you say—no one thinks that what you say has any particular value, and you are afflicted with a lack of confidence.
- 8) Your personality is dominated by desire, and you are never satisfied with what you have.
- 9) You are always finding yourself without help, or never find the help you need; and you are always hurting others, or always being hurt by others.
- 10) You become a person who keeps harmful views, or a deceitful person.

Great lamas of the past have expressed the position that the "consistent" consequence is where, even if you do manage to take birth as a human, you enjoy killing things, and so on. They say then that experiencing the various results just listed is a "ripened" consequence [the second *rgyu mthun* here is likely a text error for *rnam smin*; this is the corrected reading].

Next is what we call the "environmental" or "dominant" consequence. Here for example the consequence of killing expresses itself in the outer world around you. Food, drink, medicine, the crops in the fields, and other such things have very little power; they are always inferior; they have little nutrition or potency; they are hard to digest, and they cause disease in you. Because of this the majority of the living beings around you die before reaching the end of a full life.

Because you have stolen, then the crops are few and far between; the crops have no power to remove hunger; they spoil; they never come up; dry spells stay on too long; it rains too much; the crops dry up, or die off.

Because you have done wrong sex, you live in a place where there is urine and feces all around, and mud and dirt and filth, and everything stinks, and everywhere seems unpleasant and distasteful.

Because you have lied, you live in a world where, when you undertake farming or some work in cooperation with other people, in the end the work fails to prosper, and the people can't work well together, and for the most part everyone is cheating one another, and is afraid, and where there are many things to be afraid of.

Because you have split people up with your talk, the very ground in the place you live is all uneven, covered with crags and gullies, full of highs and lows, so that you can travel only with difficulty, and where you are always afraid, and there are many things to be afraid of.

Because you have spoken harsh words, the ground where you live is covered with obstacles like the trunks of fallen trees, and thorns, and stones, and clods of dirt, and lots of sharp broken pieces of glass; it's rough, and dreary; no streams, or lakes, or springs of water; the whole earth is parched, poisoned with salt and borax, burning hot, useless, threatening; a place where there are many things to fear.

Because you have talked meaninglessly, fruits refuse to grow on the trees, or they start to grow at the wrong times, never at the right times, and seem ripe when they're still not ripe, or their roots are frail, or they can't stay long; there are no places to take your leisure, no parks, no glades, no pools of cool water, and many things around to make you afraid.

Because you have coveted what others have, then each and every good thing you ever manage to find starts to get worse, and less and less, never more, each one of them, with the passing of each of the four seasons, and in every month, and even day by day.

Because you have wished bad things on others, you live in a world of chaos, where diseases spread, and evil is everywhere, and plague, and conflict, and fear from the armies of other nations; where there are many lions or leopards or other dangerous animals; where there are everywhere venomous snakes or scorpions or poison biting worms; surrounded by harmful spirits, and thieves or muggers, and the like.

Because you have held wrong views, then you live in a world where the single highest source of happiness is steadily disappearing from the earth; a world where people think that things that are unclean and things that are suffering are actually nice, and happy; a world where there is no place to go, no one to help, nothing to protect you.

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**I should become a master, and learn
To have great faith and enthusiasm;
They will lead me to perform deeds at all times.
I will learn to accomplish all kinds of virtue
Even if there's no one else at all
On whom I can depend.**

I should become a master of engaging in those actions which are to be taken up, and of avoiding those actions which are to be abandoned. And I should learn to have great faith and enthusiasm for virtuous deeds. These then will lead me to perform virtuous deeds at all times. And I will not perform these good deeds only because others have induced me to do so; I will learn to accomplish all kinds of virtue even if there is no one else at all on whom I can depend to help me.

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Reading Three: The Perfection of Not Getting Angry

The following reading is an excerpt from a book written by Geshe Michael Roach entitled The Garden—a story of a young man's conversations with the great spiritual masters of Buddhism in a special desert garden.

"The third way of a Warrior," he boomed, "the third perfection, is just that: the art of learning not to be angry, at the very moment when anger begins to blaze. It is perhaps the most difficult of all the spiritual arts; it requires infinitely greater skill than many of the long meditations and similar practices which people are so easily impressed by."

"I think I could have understood the point," I said drily, "even if you had not almost broken my leg."

"There are two things here I wanted to teach you," said the Master, as though he had not even heard my words. "But come first, sit here on this bed of fronds, and dry yourself. Here, give me first those wet shoes."

I sat on the edge of the spring, removed my shoes, and handed them to Shanti Deva, who took them and walked over to a pile of yellowed sheaves beneath a date palm a short distance away; he turned, sat slowly, and waited for me. I stood and stepped towards him, then stopped short in pain, for he had led me across a small patch of briars, in my bare feet.

He regarded me with a mischievous smile and continued to speak, as though he hadn't noticed my predicament at all. "The first lesson is that, as you must certainly have noticed by now in your own life, painful situations can come to you at any moment. Things that upset you, people who make you angry, situations to try your patience, are everywhere, surrounding you, and they will strike at the moment you least expect, from the people and things you least expect."

I was making my way across the briars, hardly listening to his words. Too far into the patch to turn back, too far from where he sat to go forward. I stood still and waited for a pause, but none came.

"People whom you don't like are endless. Situations that make you upset are countless. If you got rid of the keeper of the library, there would be another person, inside of a week, believe me, to try your patience. Remember, they

they are being produced by the imprints in your mind: get rid of one, and another pops up. Escape from a relationship to avoid a bad partner, move to a new neighborhood to avoid some unwanted situation, or run away from work to avoid an unpleasant workmate; but within a short time they will all be replaced."

His prattle was becoming a bit too much for me; I was soaked, and the soles of my feet were afire with pain, and still he did not even look up to notice! "Perhaps," I said, "but I really do believe that my life would be much more pleasant if I could just get away from one or two people, like the keeper of the library, and if I could just make a bit more income, so I could improve my room."

"And what about the horse?" he asked.

"Oh yes, and the horse too; one just a bit more obedient, he is such a pain in the morning, trying to ready for the ride, when I'm already late," I replied, trying to shift out of the briars to the left, but finding the thorns there even drier, and sharper. I couldn't believe he wasn't helping me.

"And the road home?"

"You're right; I'd forgotten about that. Covered with dust half the time, and rocky going around a third the way home. Quite exasperating on a day when I'm already exhausted from trying to deal with the keeper of the library." I tried to see if I could clear the ground of thorns below one foot, and then prop up the other on my knee and at least pull out the ones from the heel and other places where I put my weight. I had nearly decided that Shanti Deva was not only fully aware of my problem, but was purposely trying to hurt me, and I glanced back towards the spring, with some idea of walking away, if I could get back that far.

"Did you forget that book of notes you've been trying to read?"

Despite myself I set down both feet firmly, with a bit of force. "That book! Who could write such a thing? And on such an important subject! I can't believe someone couldn't have organized it a little more carefully!" And with this thought my patience finally broke. "And couldn't you get up for a moment and help me please?" I demanded.

He was up in a flash, and leapt across the space between us; he really was quite tall, and strong, and the strength at that moment was all focused, upon me.

"What are you doing?" he roared.

"I'm trying to get across an entire lawn of thorns, with no help from you!" I hissed.

"No, not that. What are you doing in your mind?" he demanded.

"Trying to think of a way to get across these briars, obviously," I retorted.

"Not that! I mean, do you realize where your thoughts are going?"

I paused, and replied, "We were thinking of some problems of my life, we were thinking about a few major things that, if I could change, would make me a lot happier."

"But has it not occurred to you, that you are listing things from nearly every detail of your day? Haven't you noticed that the things which bother you, the things that upset or irritate you, form nearly every aspect of your life?"

Again I paused, and again saw he was right. Even if I removed what you might call the first layer, the entire first level of things in my life that irritated me the most, there would still be another layer behind it, and another layer behind that. It was endless and, as I realized in the back of my mind, the problem was not perhaps so much a function of the nature of my life as a reflection of my own mind, a state of mind that would find fault, eventually, with anything ever presented to it.

He stood before me and nodded, as though knowing what I knew then. And then he knelt in the briars and lifted my bare foot to his knee, and began to remove each sharp corner, with perfect attention and care. All this was done in silence, and so naturally that I had no time to reflect how strange it was for one of the greatest persons who had ever lived on this planet to be kneeling in front of me in a thorn patch, loving my wounds as a mother would. His hand brushed over my trousers at the calf, and I noticed they had dried, to a soft warm dry, and my feet felt warm and vibrant, cupped in his hand, as he slipped them into my boots, also completely dried and soft. He stood and said softly, "Walk now to the tree there, and sit with me some. I am sorry if I caused you any pain, but I want you to remember these thorns, and the soaking you had, and the sudden fall.

"The way you are thinking of your world is the way of a fool, and not the way of the Warrior. Stop seeing your journey through your day as some kind of obstacle course, littered with unpleasant people and things and situations that you must try to struggle against. You cannot defeat them all, you cannot confront each irritating person and remove them, any more than you could remove every stone from the road you take from your home to the library.

"This idea in the back of your mind that your life would be much better if you could just eliminate a few of the worst things is an endless trap. If you continue to let this idea stay in your thoughts it will certainly continue to make you unhappy, for it can never come true, and if you think about it for a moment you will be forced to admit this. Your world, at least your world as it stands now, is like this patch of thorns, and no amount of wishing can make it a bed of soft grass.

"Imagine some kind of fool, running here and there in this Garden in his bare feet, dragging behind him huge sheets of leather, throwing them over every patch of thorns, and over every patch of stones or dust, in the entire expanse of this place. And then look down now and watch your own feet, covered in simple leather boots, easily stepping over the briars and bringing you to that pleasant palm over there. You cannot struggle against every unpleasant object and person in the world, any more than you could cover the entire planet in leather; better to wear shoes, better to learn that exquisite art of defeating your own anger, better to learn equanimity."

He drew me then to the seat of dried palm leaves, and we enjoyed the night air briefly. Then a question came in my mind. "But oftentimes," I said, "it feels better, it seems like a release, to express our anger openly, and get it out of us."

He laughed his deep laugh, and looked me full in the face. "Of course there is a benefit to honesty, to informing someone in a sincere and appropriate way when they are hurting us or others, if we have some confidence that this will help the situation. But the idea that any thought or expression of anger could be something good..." he chuckled again. "I suppose you could only believe it if you knew nothing of how imprints are placed in the mind, or had failed miserably to realize how truly destructive anger can be.

"And this brings me to the second lesson I hoped to teach you with the briars. Not only must you learn to wear shoes, but you must learn to see clearly the devastation which anger leaves in its trail. There was a point in the briar patch when you were ready to forsake me, there was a point where you had stopped listening completely, where you were ready to throw away, in a minute, every good and pure thing that has passed between us on this holy night, and all because you felt a little uncomfortable.

"I want you to remember this; I want you to remember how you were ready to walk out of here a few minutes ago; and in the nights to come between you and holy beings who will walk with you further in this Garden, I want you to reflect how, in a moment of rage with Shanti Deva over a few small pricks in your feet and a damp spot on your parts, you nearly gave up what will prove to be the highest reward of a human life. No, you cannot allow anger, even for a moment, for in that moment it can destroy all you have built, and all that you could ever achieve."

He seated himself on the soft fronds, and I threw myself beside him, unconsciously releasing a deep sigh, for I was aware of the truth of what he had said, and how little strength I possessed. He clasped me on the shoulder and smiled, and looked out with me across the Garden; "Be patient, stop anger, stop even that anger which is frustration with what seems to be your own slow progress on this Path. Keep a level head, maintain a flow of equanimity, not only with the outer obstacles and problems, but even with yourself—be kind to yourself, encourage yourself: it is so much better for reaching where you want to be.

"The wise suffer during their spiritual studies, and if you seek only comfort you will never be wise. Be not overly attached to the small pleasures, but seek the highest ones. Learn not only to cope with pain, but to see it as a tool, as a path in itself—it keeps you honest, it keeps you humble, it allows you to feel for others who are less fortunate than yourself. Giving into frustration or anger can only destroy; learning to live with pain and to use it is a skill that will serve you in good stead all the way to that final day, when you are forever beyond all pain. A true Warrior learns to be unshakable."

The following contemplations are based on the Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life (Bodhisattvacharyavatara; Byang-chub-sems-dpa'i spyod-pa la 'jug-pa) of the Buddhist master Shantideva (circa 700 AD), and the commentary upon it by Gyaltzab Je Dharma Rinchen (1364-1432) entitled Entry Point for Children of the Victorious Buddhas (rGyal-sras 'jug-ngogs).

*Contemplation One
There is No Evil Like Anger*

**There is no kind of deed
As evil as the act of anger;
There is no spiritual hardship
Like patience. Practice it then,
Concentrate on patience,
In many different ways.**

There is no kind of deed as evil as the act of anger for the way in which it acts as an obstacle to prevent the growth of the spiritual path within us, and destroys our good karma. Nor is there any spiritual hardship like patience for breaking the relentless heat of the mental afflictions. You should practice it then, concentrate on the practice of patience, and use the method of finding many different ways, an entire variety of techniques, to do so.

Contemplation Two

Anger ruins our happiness and our relationships

**If you hold to the sharp pain
Of thoughts of anger, your mind
Can know no peace;
You find no happiness,
No pleasure. Sleep stays away,
And the mind remains unsettled.**

**Suppose there were a master
Who bestowed upon all those
Within his care both wealth
And honor as they wished;
Still they'd rise to kill him
If he lived in fury.**

**It leaves your friends and family
Tired of being with you;
They refuse to stay on even though
You may entice them with gifts.**

**To put it simply,
There is no one with anger
Who can be happy.
Anger our enemy
Brings us these
And other pains as well.**

We will discuss the problems of anger that you can see in two parts: how anger denies you any feelings of physical comfort or mental peace, and how it destroys friends, relatives, and the like. Anger is like a *sharp pain* in that it causes you a fierce feeling of suffering. *If you hold to thoughts of it then your mind can know none of the joy that one feels when he or she has reached the peace where suffering is gone.* A person with anger also *finds no happiness mentally, nor any pleasure in the body.* *Sleep stays away, and the mind remains unsettled, off balance.*

Suppose there were a master of an estate who bestowed upon all those within his care both wealth and honor as they wished; that is, who supported them, and gave them every help. Still if the master were the kind of person who lived constantly in the emotion of fury, then even these dependents would rise against him, and kill him.

It—meaning anger—leaves your friends and family tired of being with you, since you cause them so much trouble. Even though you may try to entice them with gifts, they will find it no pleasure to be around you, and will refuse to stay. This again is a reason why you should put forth great efforts to eliminate this state of mind.

To put it simply, there is no one with anger who can be happy, and so it is that our enemy, anger, brings us pains in the form of the problems just mentioned, and others as well—it is the perfect way to suffer.

Contemplation Three

Anger begins with being upset, and it is useless ever to be upset

**Anger feeds on the food
Of feeling upset, then strengthened
Turns to smash me.**

**And so then I will smash
The sustenance that feeds
This enemy of mine.**

**My foe knows no other
Kind of work at all
Except to cause me pain.**

**No matter what happens
I will never allow
My joy to be disturbed.
Feeling upset cannot accomplish
My hopes, and only makes me lose
The goodness that I have.**

**If there is something
You can do about it,
Why should you feel upset?**

**If there is nothing
You can do about it,
What use is being upset?**

Here is the first point, on the nature of the causes of anger, and the problems they bring. "Just how is it," one may ask, "that anger leads me to suffering?" Consider the emotion of becoming upset, when something you don't want to happen does happen, either to you, or to someone or something you consider yours. Consider this same emotion when something happens to prevent you from getting what you do want. This *feeling upset* is a kind of *food* that *anger feeds upon*. When anger finds this food, its body is *strengthened*—fortified—and *then it turns to smash me*, in both this and my future lives.

Here next is the point about making efforts in the methods of stopping anger. *And so then I will smash* the emotion of feeling upset, *the sustenance that feeds this enemy of mine*, this anger. I will put all my effort into destroying *my* anger, who is worst of *foes*, for he *knows no other kind of work at all except to cause me pain*.

The third point, on the actual methods for stopping anger, has two parts: a description of how very wrong it is to become upset, and then the reasons why it is so wrong. Here is the first.

"How can I get rid of the emotion of being upset?" you may ask. You should first contemplate the benefits of learning to accept suffering gladly. Then you must learn to think to yourself, clearly, "*No matter what happens, I will never allow my joy to be disturbed.*" Joy is the antidote for *feeling upset*; and no matter what happens that you don't like, doing something which is non-virtuous in return *cannot accomplish your hopes, and only makes you lose the goodness that you do have*, the goodness that can in fact produce the result you are hoping for. If this happens, then every other sort of suffering will come as well.

Let us consider any of the objects over which we feel upset. *If there is something you can do about it, then why should you ever feel upset at all?* You could take the necessary action to fix it immediately, and never need to feel upset. *If on the other hand there is nothing you can do about it, then what is the use of being upset?* It would be as useless as getting upset at empty space, at a place where nothing was.

Contemplation Four

Perfect patience is like any other habit, and can be developed with practice

**There is nothing in the world
Which does not come easily
If you make a habit of it;
Make then a habit
Of bearing the small pains,
And thus endure the greater.**

Here is the first point, which is establishing that patience is easy to rely upon once you have accustomed yourself to it. If you make a habit of patience, then you will be able to endure any kind of suffering. The way we think of anything is based primarily on how we have become accustomed to think, on our mental habits. As such *there is nothing in the world*—that is, no quality of the mind—*which does not come easily if you make a habit of it.*

For this reason *then you should* learn to think this way: "Suppose I can *bear*, and learn to accept gladly, *the small pains*—things like feeling too hot or too cold, or else situations like having someone say something unpleasant to me. If I *make a habit* of this, I will *thus* be able to *endure the greater* pains as well: things like the fire of the hell-worlds, and so on.

The sutra entitled *The Meeting of the Father and the Son* describes this in greater detail, for example in a section that begins:

Oh Victorious One, there is a kind of concentration called "living in happiness over everything that is." Any bodhisattva who attains this type of concentration feels a sensation of pleasure, and only pleasure, whenever they focus on any object at all; they never feel any kind of unpleasantness...

The sutra then continues with,

. . . These types of persons could even be assailed by the sufferings of the realms of hell, and yet still maintain their

perception of it as pleasure.

Contemplation Five

*What to do if someone tries to hurt
the teaching or a teacher*

**It's completely wrong for me to feel
Anger even at those
Who speak against or try to destroy
Sacred images, shrines, or else
The holy Dharma, since the Buddhas
And such cannot be hurt.**

**And even too when harm is done
To Lamas or relatives or the like,
And those who are our friends,
Turn back your anger by seeing the fact
That, as the way before,
It all comes from causes.**

Here is the first point, which covers the reasons why it is wrong to feel anger at those who are doing harm to holy images and the like. Someone may make the following argument: "I can admit that it is wrong to feel anger for someone who has hurt me personally. But there is nothing wrong with getting angry at those who have harmed the Three Jewels." Suppose though that someone expresses themselves, *speaking against sacred images* of the Buddhas, the *shrines* of great bodhisattvas and the like, *or else the holy Dharma*. Or suppose that they even act bodily to *try to destroy* these things. *It's completely wrong for me to feel anger even at these kinds of people, since the Buddhas and such, the Three Jewels, cannot be hurt*. In fact, the one who attempts to harm them is someone who deserves our pity, and so it is more appropriate to feel love for them. The point here is that the Three Jewels are incapable of sustaining any kind of injury brought about by mental discomfort due to feeling upset.

Here is the second point, which is why it is appropriate to practice, in the same way, patience for those who do harm to those who are close to us. *Even too* when you see someone hurting another, *when persons do harm to the Lamas* that are teaching you the Dharma; *or else to the relatives or the like* with whom you share a family relationship [reading *rus* for *dus* in the commentary]; *and to those who are your friends*, it is wrong to feel anger. This is because of the fact *that*, in the *way* that was explained *before*, what is happening to them has

all come about through certain causes: that is, through their own past karma—the injuries are dictated by the karma come from the wrongs that these relatives and so on committed themselves before. And you should turn back your own anger by seeing this fact.

Contemplation Six

*People do so much harm to themselves
that it is no surprise if they hurt us*

**There are those who, having lost
Their senses, hurt themselves
By themselves with thorns and such.
To get a woman or the like,
They become obsessed, and then do things
Like refusing to eat food.**

**Some go and hang themselves,
Leap from cliffs, and swallow poison
Or other harmful things.
Others go and hurt themselves
By living in a way
Against the virtuous life.**

**If people driven to it because
Of their mental afflictions even kill
Their own dear selves, then what
Surprise could it ever be to see
That they also act in ways that harm
The bodies of other people?**

**Thus do people live,
Committing acts like suicide,
Driven by their own bad thoughts.
If by some chance you cannot
Feel some pity for them,
At the least withhold your anger.**

Here is the first point, which is how some people, out of their own ignorance, even do harm to themselves. Let's consider the kinds of people who hurt other people. *There are those who, having lost their senses, having lost control due to their mental afflictions, hurt even themselves by themselves.* Some, thinking it will lead them to some kind of nirvana, do all kinds of harm to themselves: they roll around in beds of *thorns*, jump from cliffs, *and* do other *such* things. Others, *to get a woman or money or the like*, start *becoming obsessed*, and out of anger *then do things like refusing to eat food*. Some others, oppressed by their mental afflictions, *go and hang themselves, or leap*

from cliffs, or swallow poison or other harmful things. Others go and hurt themselves, in both this and their future births, by living in a way against the virtuous life, in a way that they commit many bad deeds which will lead them to the lower realms. Therefore it is impossible to justify your anger by saying that it is because you have been harmed by someone else.

Here is the second point, which describes how it is no great surprise that people do harm to others, since these ignorant ones even kill themselves. *If people driven to it because of their mental afflictions even kill their own selves, so dear and precious to them, then what surprise could it ever be to see that they also act in ways that harm the bodies of other people? We should realize that this fits their way of life well, and thus understand how wrong it is to be angry with them.*

Here is the third point, which demonstrates why it is, therefore, quite appropriate that we should feel compassion for such people. *Thus do people live, as described above, doing harm to others and committing acts like suicide because they are overpowered by their mental afflictions.*

They are truly worthy of our pity, and *if by some chance you cannot feel some of this pity for them, then at the least withhold your anger: realize how totally wrong it is to be angry with them.*

**The Asian Classics Institute
Extension Course—
The Six Perfections of a Spiritual Warrior**

Reading Four: The Perfection of Joyful Effort

The following reading is an excerpt from a book written by Geshe Michael Roach entitled The Garden—a story of a young man's conversations with the great spiritual masters of Buddhism in a special desert garden.

We sat some more, and then my little adventure and the long night and, most of all, the strain of learning new things and of examining my heart with honesty all began to drain me—and I fell into a brief sleep. In the sleep I dreamt, and saw myself as a child, and thought of the Mayday holiday, something I hadn't recalled in many years. I was sitting at a small wooden desk in the school, and looking out the window in the morning sun at a group of my fellow students, boys and girls dressed in bright spring dress. They were dancing around the maypole, each one holding the end of a colored ribbon that was attached to the top of the pole, singing and skipping in a circle that ran to the left. I was alone in the classroom, and felt attracted to the holiday, but somehow unable to stand and run to play.

Then a kindly monk came in, with dark eyes and a soft smile, and led me to a huge vaulted place, with great high windows pouring in sunlight, and a great smooth wooden floor, shining with polish. And he pushed me gently towards the center of the sunlight and air, and said "Dance, dance whatever you like, make up your own dance." And I ran into the sun, in the midst of the great empty cathedral filled with radiance, and threw myself into spins, just spins, the dance of a child, thinking nothing, arms thrown out, and head thrown back, laughing. Shanti Deva softly touched my arm; he was standing over me, his great strong body framed in the moonlight, regal in his robes.

"Come now," he said gently.

"I am little tired," I replied, "couldn't I sit a bit longer?"

"You could," he replied softly, "you could, but there is no time."

"We have all night."

"You cannot be sure."

"Just a few minutes."

"No need."

"I need."

"You do not."

"Really, just a bit."

"We are going, now."

"Where? Why?"

"Your mother."

I sat up sharply. "My mother?"

"Your mother. Come."

"Is she here?"

"I didn't say that."

"Then what do you mean?" I said, rising despite myself.

"She is waiting, she needs you, she wants you to come. Will you rest, or will you come?"

"Come, of course, come," I felt new strength, the tiredness was gone completely, and hope had made me light and joyful.

"I knew you would come," and he stepped strong and quickly ahead; I had no trouble to follow. "You are blessed with the strength of goodness; you feel the joy of knowing that you do goodness, you sense the great goodness of rising to serve your mother."

And in truth I felt refreshed in a way I could hardly remember, and in but a few moments we were at the dear wooden bench, at the foot of the carob tree, Her

school. Here Shanti Deva wheeled around, the bottom of his robes describing a great arc, and grasped me by the hands.

"This is where it shall be, and soon," he said happily.

I looked into his face with hope, and smiled again despite myself, seeing his own smile shine. "What? What will be?"

"It is on this holy ground," he said, nodding towards the small patch of grass where She and I had often lain, "soon to be made holier, that you will be instructed in the last two of the six perfections, and perfectly so, by someone greater than myself."

I paused momentarily, for despite the long night in the Garden, I knew he had taught me only three of the perfections, and three remained. He had shown me how to give, and how to follow a life of goodness, and how to crush anger —only these three.

"But what of the fourth perfection? Who will teach me the fourth?" I cried, almost afraid that I would lose it.

"The fourth is joy, joy in being good, joy in doing good, the good feeling of being good, and the good feeling that gets you to stand up when you are tired, to go on to do more good: a goodness that once you have tasted it you cannot doubt its sweetness. Simply remember your mother, for your mother waits, and every moment that passes without you, every moment she spends in pain and confusion, wherever she is, is a moment in which you must be on your feet, and striving for the highest things of the spirit, so that you can reach her, and bring her these highest gifts.

"It is a path of joy to a city of joy, and a joyful task you have to bring her with you. You have no reason ever to be discouraged, no reason ever to doubt, no reason ever to hesitate, no reason ever to turn back. Behind you is only death, behind and gone forever is a way of life that held only pain in the present, and pain in the future, a life of accumulating things and people that can only be lost again. You are on the right way, you have found the right way —take joy, run forward, find her, dance—dance whatever dance your heart desires." And he laughed again that great full deep laugh, and tears filled both our eyes.

The following contemplations are based on the Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life (Bodhisattvacharyavatara; Byang-chub-sems-dpa'i spyod-pa la 'jug-pa) of the Buddhist master Shantideva (circa 700 AD), and the commentary upon it by Gyaltsab Je Darma Rinchen (1364-1432) entitled Entry Point for Children of the Victorious Buddhas (rGyal-sras 'jug-ngogs).

*Contemplation One
What moves the flame?*

**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.**

Once you have practiced patience as described above—that is, once you have learned to maintain your patience with various spiritual hardships, and with the harms that others do to you—then you must, if you hope to achieve enlightenment quickly, begin your practice of effort. This is because enlightenment lies in making these kinds of effort in the different perfections. Butter lamps and other such flames never flicker without a breeze, and just so—in the absence of effort—it can never occur that one manages to complete the collections of merit and wisdom. As such, the matchless state of enlightenment itself is something that all depends upon effort, and so we must make great efforts in practicing it. Entering the Middle Way makes this same point when it states,

All good qualities are things that follow
In the wake of the perfection of effort.
It is the one cause that brings about both
The collections of merit and knowledge.

Contemplation Two
Effort is joy

**What is effort?
It is joy
In doing good.**

"If laziness is defined as joy in mental affliction, then *what is effort?*" one may ask. Effort *is* a feeling of *joy* focused upon *doing* something *good*.

Effort can be divided into four different types: effort which is like armor; applied effort; effort where you never feel discouraged or upset; and effort where you are never satisfied.

Contemplation Three
The armies of the King

**Never feel discouraged, assemble the forces,
Engage yourself gladly, come to find
Complete command of yourself,

See yourself and other people
As equal, and finally exchange
Yourself and others as well.**

Here is the first point, which is advice to make efforts in applying the antidotes for feeling discouraged. A king defeats his enemies by making use of the four traditional armed forces, and warrior bodhisattva do the same. They open their practice by inspiring themselves—for this they utilize "armor effort," which enables them *never* to have thoughts where they *feel discouraged* in their practice of the path.

Then they make use of "working effort," where they work or apply themselves to the task of *assembling the two great armed forces*, the two collections. Then when the actual fight begins, they use engaged effort, where as they actually undertake their virtues they *engage themselves gladly* with constant recollection and awareness. Lastly they bring to bear their *self-command*, a

state of *complete* control where you *find* yourself able to make your body and mind do anything that you ask them to do.

When you have done all this then you must *as well* undertake the practices of *seeing yourself and other people as equal*, and *finally exchanging yourself and others*, in the manner that we will describe these two below [in the chapter on meditation].

Contemplation Four

**Never allow yourself the feeling
Of being discouraged, of having the thought
"How could I ever become enlightened?"
About this Those Who have Gone Thus,
The Ones who speak the truth, have spoken
The following words of truth:**

**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.**

**Someone like me, someone born
As a member of human kind,
Can tell what helps or hurts.
Assuming then that I never give up
The bodhisattva's way of life,
Why shouldn't I reach enlightenment?**

Here is the second point, which presents an explanation from scripture on how to put these antidotes into practice. Now you might *have the* following *thought*:

The state of Buddhahood is something that people of very great powers of intellect achieve only after applying incredible effort—over a period of many "countless" eons—in the pursuit of extremely difficult practices, and thereby amassing a virtually limitless amount of meritorious karma. I am nothing like these people; so *how could I ever become enlightened?*

Never though *allow yourself the feeling of being discouraged* in this way, of despairing that you could ever accomplish these things. *About this Those Who have Gone Thus, the Ones who can only speak the truth, have spoken the following words*, which are *truth* and which are something we can believe

in, since They have absolutely no reason ever to say something which is wrong.

And what are the words which they spoke? They come from the *Sutra Requested by Subahu*—

Bodhisattvas must, moreover, master the following way of thinking: "Even those beings who are lions, or tigers, or dogs, or wolves, or vultures, or cranes, or crows, or owls, or worms, or flies, or bees, or gnats can bring about the matchless state of enlightenment. And here am I, someone who is living the life of a human—now, no matter what, even if it costs me my life, I will put forth whatever effort is needed to reach enlightenment.

This same point is made in the sutra known as *The Cloud of the Jewels* as well.

The third section, describes how, if we make effort, we will be able to stop our laziness, and then achieve enlightenment. Here there are four parts: contemplating the fact that, if we are able to raise the force of effort, we will find ourselves able to achieve enlightenment; why it is right to bear gladly those hardships required to reach enlightenment, given the fact that they involve not even the tiniest fraction of the pain of the lower realms; why it is right to bear gladly with any pain required, given the fact that the King of Physicians cures the great illness with a technique which is very gentle; and why it is right for us to feel glad over the treatment of our great illness, since it involves no pain at all, but rather causes our happiness to flourish. Here is the first.

As we just noted, it has been spoken that even *those beings who are flies and gnats, or bees, and even those who live as worms as well can reach unmatched enlightenment, which is so difficult to reach, if they "develop the force of effort";* which is to say, if they amass the necessary good karma. We can thus think to ourselves,

And then there is *someone like me, someone born as a member of a kind of being which is truly extraordinary: I have been born human. And I possess as well an extraordinary mental ability; that is, I can tell what will help or what will hurt me in my pursuit of the state of enlightenment. Assuming then that I never give up the bodhisattva's way of life—which is to say, assuming that I can continue to practice the activities which bodhisattvas do continually—why shouldn't I reach enlightenment?* Of course I can.

Contemplation Five

The bowl and the sword

**Poison makes its way throughout
The entire body, riding upon
The coursing of the blood.
Just so, should they find an opening,
Then negativities make their way
Throughout the entire mind.**

**Suppose a person handed you
A bowl completely full of oil,
Then stood before you with a sword,
Threatening to take your life
Should a drop spill. You ascetics
Must concentrate like this.**

Here is the third point, which is how recollection and awareness leave no opening for problems to arise. Imagine now that someone has shot you with a poison arrow, and that the *poison* is *making its way throughout your entire body, riding upon the blood* as it *courses* through your veins. *Just so* do the various mental afflictions, such as losing your recollection, act *should they find any opening* to do so. And when they do find an opening, *then* the different *negativities* of anger and the rest *make their way throughout the entire mind*. For this reason you must try to stop even the slightest mental affliction whenever it should arise.

"How can I learn to concentrate on this?" you may ask. *Suppose a person handed you a bowl completely full of oil*, and made you walk down a slippery path. Suppose *then* that they *stood before you* holding a sword, *threatening to take your life should you spill even a single drop*. Out of complete fear, you would try your utmost to concentrate. Those of *you* who are *ascetics* in the sense of attempting to follow the life of a bodhisattva must be *like this*; you must *concentrate* by keeping tight hold on your recollection, aimed at the various antidotes such as the wish for enlightenment, and the like.

Contemplation Six

Alone, by myself, if need be

**The confidence of accomplishment
Is when you say, "I am willing to do
This thing all by myself."**

**The entire world lives at the mercy
Of their mental afflictions; they're incapable
Of helping themselves at all.
Beings can't do what I can do;
And thus I'll be the one
To do what must be done.**

Here is the first point, which is identifying the confidence of accomplishment. Suppose you see someone else undertaking some worthy activity. *The confidence of accomplishment is when you raise the mental power to say to yourself, "I am willing to do this thing all by myself."*

Next is the second point, which is the reason why we should feel this confidence. You must undertake deeds for the benefit of living beings without depending on others to help you. This is because the inhabitants of *the entire world live at the mercy of their mental afflictions, and are therefore incapable of helping even themselves at all.* Given this fact, *beings can't do what I can do*, in making efforts at good deeds for the sake of others. Even if I did try to rely on them for help then it would be useless, *and thus* you must think to yourself, *"I'll be the one to do what must be done for the sake of others."*

**The Asian Classics Institute
Extension Course—
The Six Perfections of a Spiritual Warrior**

Reading Five: The Perfection of Meditation

The following reading is an excerpt from a book written by Geshe Michael Roach entitled The Garden—a story of a young man's conversations with the great spiritual masters of Buddhism in a special desert garden.

The words of the master, Tsong Khapa, and I think now the death of my mother, affected me greatly. It was not that I was despondent, or thrown into despair; outwardly I was living a normal life, I continued with studies and writing, making a modest but comfortable living. The walk and the death though became constant companions in my mind; each one gave reason for the other.

It was true that my mother had lived a good and fruitful life; raised her children, contributed to her world, provided always and without hesitation for the needs even of strangers that we brought home. But what was the meaning, if regardless of how she lived she grew old, and died so horribly of the cancers, and if all that she lived for—her sons, her home, her work—were already crumbling themselves into dust, all to be forgotten, so soon after she herself was forgotten? She was proof of the truth of the words spoken to me by Tsong Khapa in the Garden, that even things which seemed beautiful and good were not so, if death and pain were how they always ended. And in my mind Tsong Khapa existed because of her: he had come to the Garden knowing my needs, and bringing some answer to my questions.

The death and the walk worked on my thoughts over the months, and so finally I was compelled to seek out a small hermitage some distance from our desert town. There I found a kindly, holy, and learned abbot, who gladly took me in, gave me a small, quiet room in which to stay, and secured me work as the assistant to the keeper of a rich collection of books in the manor of a nearby nobleman. I spent much time in the study of sacred texts, and in the thoughts that grew from the walk and the death, and came to feel that there was some path I could learn to solve my questions, yearned for this path deeply. And so I was drawn back to the Garden, and entered just after dusk, one year, as the desert was entering its subtle springtime, a slight sweetening of the air, and greening of the spare but lovely grass and rosebushes, within the stone walls of that beloved place. I waited for Her there, again.

This time it was no long wait, but as disappointing as it was quick, for I sensed approaching, in the darkness from the gate, a wholly different step from Hers; this one was measured rather than skipping, sprightly but almost businesslike, and above all heavy. I turned and saw the Great Meditator—Kamala Shila.

He was nothing like I would have expected, for I had in mind a severe and austere presence, a face and body that had seen the rigors of deep meditation, hour after hour, on the side of a stone Himalayan cliff, eleven centuries before. But here was the real thing, and nothing of the sort. He was of medium height, and chubby, with his robes hitched up too high, nearly to his knees, giving him a sort of playful appearance—like a young boy. His face matched the rest: round happy cheeks, a full nose, dark Indian complexion, little patches of ill-shaven white hair around the top of his head, and above all laughing sparkling little eyes, in a constant state of giggling, as was he.

"Want to know the Path!" said he.

"Yes of course," I replied, for it is a very serious thing to know the true suffering of the world, and to await anxiously for the way of escape.

"*Why not!*" he laughed, "and—*why not!*"

"I want to know why my mother died," I replied somberly, "and I want to know if there was anything I could have done, or if there is anything still I can do for her—and I want to know if it must always be this way."

"Yes! Yes!" he boomed back. "Can do! *Why not?* Got to learn to meditate!" and he plopped down on that patch of grass beside the carob tree, blessed to me because of the tender nights passed there with Her.

He motioned for me to sit beside him; I had done a little meditation with friends at the Academy, and had read some about it, and so I sat up straight, closed my eyes, and tried not to think about anything.

He giggled and slapped me on the back. "*What are you doing?*" he demanded merrily.

"Meditating!" I said.

"Would you run a footrace without warming up first?" he asked happily.

"Well, no."

"Got to do the *warmup!*" he laughed, and jumped up again.

"What's the *warmup?*" I said, getting to my feet grumpily, with thoughts of leg stretches and other unpleasant exercise.

For the first time, Kamala Shila looked at me a little sternly. "Everybody wants

to meditate! Nobody knows how! *Got to do the warmup right!*" he said.

"So what's the warmup?"

"First *clean up!*" he yelled, and began running around the little patch of grass, stooping over his little belly, picking up stray leaves and twigs, until the surface of the grass was smooth and clean in the moonlight, inviting to the eyes, a pleasant place to meditate. "Do this in your room, right?"

"Right," I replied, and started to sit down.

"Don't forget the *gifts!*" he squealed.

"What gifts?" I said.

"*Important people coming!*" he giggled, "Need some nice gifts for when they get here!"

I glanced dubiously at the gate of the Garden, apprehensive at the thought of a crowd of merry meditators like himself. "Who's coming?" I asked.

"Nobody *you* could see!" he replied, and went over to the wooden bench, and from under the top vest of his robes pulled a bag of tiny little clay cups, which he began arranging in a row. Three he filled with a little water from the fountain, and then went and plucked a small red bloom from atop a thorn bush (after it seemed a short prayer, as though he were asking the bush for permission).

From a sage bush and juniper lining the spring that lead from the fountain he took a few sprigs, placed them in a fifth cup, and collected a bit of dry grass into the sixth. From the tangerine tree on the near side of the gate he took a fruit, peeled it, placed a few pieces in the seventh cup, and with relish ate the rest, talking as he moved and chewed, pushing a little slice into my hand as well.

"Suppose," he said between bites, "that some very important person were to show up in this Garden tonight, during our meditation. Maybe even a great Queen, with golden hair and a golden crown..." and he winked at me slyly, as if he knew why my heart kept me coming to this place. "You'd want to greet them properly, as you desert folk always do for your guests."

"But who are you expecting, really?" I asked.

"*Must* invite the Enlightened Ones!" he giggled, "How can you meditate, if they are not with you? How can you meditate too, unless you bring here, if only in your mind, your Heart Teacher?"

These last words, Heart Teacher, struck me deeply, with some pang in my breast, because the only thing I could imagine—when I imagined "Heart

Teacher"—was my golden Lady.

"Here," he continued, leaning heavily over the little cups, "put them in order, like this. One cup of the water, it's a crystal cup of some wonderful beverage, nice to greet a guest that way."

"Next is another cup of water," he shuffled the little cups around, as if playing a shell game. "That's a warm little bowl of water from one of those mineral springs, nice to wash the guest's feet, tired from their journey."

"Third is the flower. *Everybody* likes flowers!" he took a deep sniff of the fragrance of the bloom. "Next is incense!" and he lit the fragrant leaves in the next cup with a spark from a flint, pulled from the bottomless folds of his vestments.

"Do you always carry these things around?" I asked dryly.

He turned slowly and looked in my face, dead serious. "Want the Path? Got to meditate. Want to meditate? Got to. . .*warm---up!* Of course, I carry them everywhere, and I meditate. . .everywhere!"

He lit the dry grass in the next cup from the glowing fragrant embers. "Nice to light a lamp when a visitor comes. Here now, move that little cup of water next in the row; that's a fragrant ointment, that you spread upon the guest—use your imagination now, enjoy it, I'm sure there's some guest you can imagine, to whom you would like to offer this scented cream," and he glanced at me from the side, in a strange way, reminding me of someone.

"Now last in row, put here the slice of fruit, nice to feed an honored guest." I was wondering when, or even if, we would ever get to the meditation; he sensed, or knew, my thought, and said with a twinge of exasperation, "Must take the time. Must put these gifts out right."

"What, do they actually use them?" I asked curtly.

"Of course not," he said. "You think They, you think Enlightened Ones, need food to eat, or water to drink?"

"Well if not," I responded, "why put these things out? I thought we were going to meditate."

"Want to run? Got to *warm up!* Can't meditate without Them here, can't meditate without your Heart Teacher, here, with you, helping, blessing, giving strength. Putting out gifts, it proves—you want Them here, please...come here, be with me a while, as I meditate." And then, all of a sudden, Kamala Shila broke into a sweet little song, a prayer song, his face cherubic, uplifted, eyes closed but seeing, as if there were someone there, in the star-filled sky above us, to whom he was making an offering.

He stopped and lowered his face, and looked at me merrily. "That's the last gift, my favorite one to give—always give Them some little music, before you sit to meditate."

"And so we can finally sit?" I asked, but tenderly, for no one could deny the beauty, and the feeling, of the place of meditation that Kamala Shila had just created; surely, the Garden, and my own heart, had indeed been *warmed up*, and it felt good, and right, to begin our meditation this way.

"Yes, *why not?* Time to sit!" he exclaimed. I stooped and began to sit, and felt his arm pulling me back up.

"What now!"

"You forgot to bow!" he said, as if surprised that I didn't know better. He put his palms flat against each other at his breast, and bowed with great grace and respect, as if some great being stood before him, and then slowly took his seat upon the grass.

I followed suit and then settled myself upon the grass, but like a little rubber ball he bounced back up again. I was really getting irritated, wondering how late it was getting, and sat grumpily staring ahead. He was flitting all around me, like a bee on a flower.

"Where's your seat? No meditation seat? Must get the back up higher than the front!" and he grabbed my shoulder, pushed me forward, and shoved a wad of cloth (that had appeared mysteriously from beneath his vest) under my tailbone.

Next his hand was on the ankle of my left foot; "Get that up on your right thigh! Sit up straight!" slapping my back straight, "Get that right shoulder down even with the other!" pushing them down level, "Fix the head! Didn't they teach you anything?" I felt ready to strangle the great jolly master.

"Don't point it down, don't point it up, just straight ahead, and stop leaning it to the left!" his two hands were on the temples of my head, like a vise. "How's the tongue?"

"In my mouth, as usual," I retorted. He didn't seem to hear.

"Touch it there slightly, behind the front teeth, keep the mouth loose, everything just natural, like usual," he enthused. "Can't meditate if we're slobbering or swallowing all night, can we? *Stop breathing through your mouth!* You'll dry out!" And he had me completely straightened out, and I had to admit it felt quite good.

"Shouldn't I cross both my legs up on my thighs, like they do in the pictures?" I asked.

"A full lotus? Sure, if you can, but you can't, till you practice more. The main thing is to be completely comfortable, so you can concentrate the mind, without worrying how much your knees hurt. If you want, you can even sit on the bench over there," he explained, and slid down next to me immediately in full lotus.

I closed my eyes, and went into a state of peace, here in the peaceful Garden, the Garden of my Golden One—and he was in my face once more.

"What, you going to bed?" he demanded.

I opened my eyes, and fixed them straight ahead, on a design carved into the side of the wall opposite us.

"You people around here meditate with your mind, or with your eyes?" he demanded again.

I looked at him angrily. "Well if I'm not supposed to close my eyes, or open them either, then what do you want?"

"Watch," he said, and he sat with his head erect and straight, but the eyes half open, gazing slightly downwards, and without focusing on anything in particular, as if he were in some deep reverie, which I realized was the whole point. "If it gets too distracting, you can close them, but your mind is too used to going to sleep when you do, so it might be hard. Make sure though not to open them too wide, or you will start to look around; and see to it as well that the background in front of you is plain, like a cloth or wall of a single color, with nothing moving to catch your eye and distract the mind."

I did as he said, and felt my mind immediately go into a clear state of focus. I prepared to empty my mind...

He was up again, running to and fro, and I despaired of ever actually meditating with this, the greatest master of meditation. "What now?"

"Do you hear something?" he asked anxiously.

I let my eyes back down, and concentrated. All I could hear was the familiar tinkle of the fountain.

"Just the fountain, over there against the wall," I replied.

"Got to *go!*" he exclaimed, and headed over to the bench, and made to collect the little cups together.

"What?" I jumped up, "All this work, and now you must go? Can't you stay for

just a few minutes, and let me meditate near you?"

"Impossible," he announced. "Noisy, noisy. No good for meditation. Should have noticed it before. Impossible to meditate with noise around," and he pointed to the offending fountain.

"It's not so loud," I said, "come, try."

Kamala Shila looked at me gravely. "You asked me to show you the Path. I told you there is no Path, without meditation. You have to make choices. Your pretty fountain, or your meditation. Your life as it is—and as your mother's life was—or Freedom. Freedom or your fountain. Your life now will always be such choices. I'm going."

Desperately I looked around, and my eyes caught on the bricks stacked in a circle around the trunk of the carob. I caught one up and placed it on the opening of the fountain, and the water stopped. "Please now, can we meditate together?" I asked quietly.

"*Why not!*" he giggled, and we sat together on the grass, at peace, and ready to find peace.

The jolly little man transformed then before my eyes. The left hand went down upon his lap, palm up, and then the right one upon the left one, also palm up. The two thumbs touched slightly, a little off the palms. His sparkling face changed instantly, into the very visage of serenity, totally relaxed, totally quiet, a quiet that was so strong that it seemed to suck the entire Garden into it, a realm of total silence. It was a quiet that I hungered for, a quiet that my life had never allowed me, and I sat down eagerly beside him.

For the first time, thankfully, Kamala Shila was quiet, for a few moments at least.

And then he whispered, "Did we talk about the *warmup* yet?"

"Yes yes," I whispered back urgently, hoping he would settle down, "remember, we did all that already."

"Not *that* warmup," he whispered back, "the *other* warmup."

"What are you talking about?" I said apprehensively, waiting for him to bound back to his feet. But he stayed serene, and led me with his words.

"If you will come with me, into real meditation, you must prepare your thoughts. Otherwise you will be left behind."

"Teach me, please."

"Now first watch your breath, the breathing in and out. See if you can count

ten breaths without your mind wandering away. Start with the out-breath, and then the in-breath: this is one breath. See if you can count ten of these; at first, if you are honest, you will not be able to get to ten, before your mind wanders off to something else."

I tried, and saw he was right. I never got past four before my thoughts went off to, to the Garden itself, and to Her.

"It's enough," he whispered after some minutes. "The point of watching the breath is only to bring your mind to neutral, to pull it slowly away from the whirl of your worldly thoughts, and begin to focus it within. It's not as if watching the breath is itself a goal which would free us."

"Now think for a moment why you are here: you seek the Path, you seek I know to find the answers about the death of a good woman, and about the wisdom you have found from another. Decide now, here, that these questions cannot be answered elsewhere, and in fact are not even asked elsewhere. Children ask why good people must suffer and die, and adults teach their children not to ask any more, and these children become the adults who tell their children, 'These questions have no answers.' Decide here why you will meditate with me. Decide here, and now, that you will meditate for a real goal, for an ultimate goal, and that you seek these answers in the Path. Do not waste your life, do not waste even the few moments we will spend here together, on any lesser goal."

I reflected on his words, and felt their truth, and felt a joy and rightness in meditating for this one reason.

"Next, before we start to meditate, ask the Enlightened Ones to come; ask your Heart Teacher to come, bring them here, to guide and help us. You cannot see them now, but you will; if they exist at all, if they are who They are supposed to be, they will hear your mind, and They *will* come. Ask them, sincerely, with deep reverence, now, to come, and they *will* come."

I did as he said, and thought I felt Her presence, close to me. My heart leapt, with joy, and devotion.

"We have bowed to Them before we sat; bow again to them now, in your mind's eye, for I tell you, on the day that you *do* see them yourself, you will in one natural motion throw yourself upon the floor, at their feet, in happiness and awe."

Again I did as he said, and it felt good and right.

"Good, good, continue as I say. Sincere people around the world seek to meditate, but find they are unable to reach the depths and heights of meditation, because they have not found how to enter the door of the meditation, which I teach you now. Imagine next then the entire sky."

I did, in my mind imagined the entire expanse of the azure sky of my desert home.

"And fill it entirely with sweet crimson and ivory roses, and offer it to your Heart Teacher, and the Enlightened Ones, and ask them sweetly for their help."

I did, and again, it felt good and right, and my mind felt even closer to deep meditation, even before we meditated.

"Still we have a few steps to go. Clean now your conscience, for no person can meditate unless their conscience is clear. This again is why so many find it difficult to meditate, why so few never see the miracles of the depths of meditation. Your heart must be clean, your life must be clean. Think now of anything you have done, or anything you have said, or anything you have even thought that might have harmed another; admit it to yourself, be totally honest with yourself, decide that you did it, decide that it was not a goodness, and decide that you will try not to do it again. This one cleaning, of your conscience and your heart, will open to your mind doors of meditation that you never dreamed were possible."

I sat quietly, and reflected, not finding any great evils, but many small and daily harms to others, and cleaned them from my heart.

"Good, good. This is *real fun!*" he whispered happily. "Few more steps; now do the opposite, think of all the good things you do, all the good things you've said to others, all the good and pure thoughts you've had and have—oh, and by the way, think of all the goodness of anyone else at all, from your Heart Teacher on down, and just...*be glad, be happy, take joy*, in everything that is good."

I did, and it felt a good and proper balance to cleaning my conscience. My mind felt fairly bursting with good energy, and thirsting for meditation, like a warmed horse, about to race.

"Now ask Them for guidance—your Heart Teacher, and the Enlightened Ones. And ask that they continue to appear to you, in all the many ways that an Enlightened Being can appear (and you can hardly guess all the ways, and all the places, that they appear to you). Ask them to come to you as your teachers, both teachers who seem like teachers, and in the world and the people around you, teaching you, always teaching you, and guiding you along the Path."

With a deep sense of reverence, which drew me already into meditation, I followed.

"And now finally beseech Them, from your heart, always to stay near you, seen or unseen, keeping you, and bringing you to Them."

This I did, and from the goodness of these thoughts fell into a deep state of

meditation, a total quiet. Which, of course, the great Kamala Shila could never seem to tolerate.

"Isn't the peace so nice?" he whispered.

"Oh...yes..." I could hardly make words.

"And what are you meditating upon?" he whispered back.

"I have emptied my mind, and I am trying not to think, and the thoughts I do have I am simply watching, as they pass by."

Somehow his heavy little body travelled the space between us in a flash, and he was in my face again, this time really angry. "Fools! The fools still live! Fools that I thought I finished off in the great debates, over a thousand years ago! I'm leaving!" and again he headed towards the bench and his little holy cups.

"Wait!" I started up. "What have I done wrong? Teach me what I have done wrong."

He sat down before me, legs crossed on the grass, breathing heavy and intense, and leaning close, his face before my own. Then his look softened, and he asked gently, "Do you want to help your mother?"

"Of course," I said, "you know my quest."

"Then think—what possible good would it be, simply to sit and empty your mind for an hour? Do not animals, like the rabbit, do the same? Are not the drunkards, who pass out after tankards of their mead, just the same? Are their minds not emptied and quieted, for a time? Come, think about it, tell me, why do you think we meditate?"

"Because we seek the truth; and the truth is in the silence of meditation."

"Only half true. Meditation is but a tool, not a goal itself. It is an axe, a sharp axe, with which we cut a tree. Cutting the tree is wisdom, ultimate wisdom, and this is the heart of the Path. Meditating for the sake of meditation would be like burning an axe for firewood, rather than using it to cut firewood. What is the goal of the Path?"

"I hope to find some answer to the question, why did my good mother die so painfully, why did she die at all, why must we all—good or bad—suffer and die; why does all life, and all the work of life and all the fruits of the work of life, turn to destruction, and pain? This is the goal of the Path, for me."

"Good, and so it should be. So now, if you could sit for hours or days or months and empty your mind, would you find the answers—would you be freed from sickness, and the loss of the things and people you hold dear; would you be freed from aging itself, would the energy of your body and mind stop leaking away from day to day—would you not, in a word, die?"

"I suppose I would; I suppose that, even if I could sit here and empty my mind, and be quiet and peaceful and serene even for very long periods of time, and sit even through hot and cold, and rain or the heat of the sun, I suppose you are right, nonetheless one day I would fall sick, and eventually get older and become unable to sit here, and then die."

"So then please," he whispered to me urgently, "*please*. . . follow me now, and learn true meditation, and learn to use it for our real goals." He settled back nearby me, and this time settled with a finality that I sensed meant he would not rise again.

"There are three ways of meditation," he began, not moving from his own meditation posture. "For the first, I ask you to put before your mind a picture of your Heart Teacher."

This I did easily, and waited easily, for seeing Her, if only in my mind's eye, had always been for me a comfort, and consolation.

"The first enemy of meditation," he whispered again, "is a kind of laziness; it is simply not to feel like meditating. And so it is good as we have done to remember the urgent and sacred necessity of our meditation. It is good as well," he giggled, "to choose an object of meditation which is both important, and which we enjoy. I don't think you will have laziness tonight."

"Now I will snap my fingers," he continued, "from time to time. I want you to mark your mind carefully, and tell me where your mind is at the very moment I snap my fingers. This way I can show you the other enemies of meditation, and how to battle with them."

I returned in my mind to my sweet image, and it brought me to thoughts of this Garden, which brought me to thoughts of the hour, which must be late, and I wonder if I will be in any condition in the morning to do my work at the library . . . *snap*.

"Where was your mind?" Kamala Shila asked.

"I lost the picture, I began thinking about my work," I said sheepishly.

"This is the second enemy," he said, "losing the picture. You fix this by becoming so familiar with the picture, by keeping it in mind so often, and on a steady basis from meditation to meditation, in meditations done steadily, during brief but frequent sessions through the day, that you always remember the object, that it is always close to mind. Now go back to the picture." I did,

and was able to hold Her lovely form somewhat better. My body was still, and the Garden still. The meditation felt good. I was beginning to feel comfortable, and more confident. My breath was slow, my body still, and She was always there, a kind of fuzzy golden light... *snap*.

"How is the picture?" he whispered.

"Good, good," I replied. "I am still, my body is comfortable."

"No no," he said sternly, "the *picture*."

"Oh," I said, "it was fine, steady, a little fuzzy..."

"Typical," he said, a bit harshly. "Your meditation had slipped into dullness, a great enemy because he is an almost invisible enemy. In the extreme form he is more obvious: you feel drowsy, the head starts to nod. In his subtle form he is pure poison; he lies to you, and tells you your meditation is good, when really you are only in a kind of stupor—many meditators have wasted away a good part of their lives this way."

"So what shall I do?" I asked.

"Reserve a little corner of your mind; we call it watchfulness. Set it aside. Teach him what this enemy looks like; let him know the signs of his coming, and above all instruct him to raise the alarm, to alert you when mental dullness has come to drug your meditation. Now go back to Her."

I was a bit started to realize he knew the object of my meditation, but settled quickly back. I held Her picture in my mind, and began to reflect on Her beauty, and the many spiritual lessons She had taught me here in this place. I remembered especially the night She had so innocently walked to the water leading away from the fountain, and stepped in without hesitation, clothed in Her golden hair, not crude or unclean, but with a total lack of desire and malice both; simply at oneness with... *snap*.

"Where was your mind?" Kamala Shila demanded.

"In good thoughts, holy thoughts," I replied tentatively.

"Good thoughts perhaps, but bad if they disturb your meditation. You wandered from the picture, to some other thought, and some other time or place, something that you like to think about, correct?"

I admitted it was so.

"This is the enemy of mental agitation; this is the one who comes most often, and he is mighty. I need not tell you more. Use your watchfulness, detect his arrival. And I warn you now of his companion, and the companion of dullness. This is inaction: failing to raise your sword, when either of these enemies has

crossed the threshold of your meditation.

"For dullness, inspire yourself back to fixation upon the picture, and clarity, working first on the outline of the picture, and then the details of the face, the hand, and so on. If dullness continues, put your mind upon a deep blue sky, a very bright and blue sky, let your mind become this sun-washed sky; it will refresh you, and then return. In an extreme case rise, splash your face with cold water, or lay and take some rest, if you must.

"For agitation, gather your thoughts back to your heart, gently, softly. Seek a deeper silence, stay still in mind and body. Slow your breath, count your breaths again if you must, and bring yourself back. Meditation is like the flight of great birds through the sky; as they hover through the wind at a distance, it seems to those of us standing upon the ground that they glide effortlessly. But in fact they are in a state of constant correction, tilting one way as the wind changes, tilting another as the wind changes again.

"Your meditation is similar, and you must continually watch and adjust, keeping it tuned like the string of a lute: not too tight, not too loose. Then finally there comes a time when, with much practice, the meditation is flowing smoothly. This is a time when you must watch for the final enemy, which is adjusting when no adjustment is necessary. Now follow what I have said, and watch the picture again."

I did, and brought Her image back, the true image. I held it clearly and silently, if only for a few minutes, and heard Kamala Shila say, "It is good. Now the second type of meditation, which we call problem-solving. I will give you a problem, and you focus your mind single-pointedly on this problem, and try to solve it. This is an important kind of meditation, and one which will serve you well later."

"I will do as you say."

"Focus now on some small event in your life, something perhaps accidental, but which changed your life, for the better."

I tried, and immediately thought of the pot, the pot that had been left behind at my mother's house on the feast day of Thanksgiving, the pot that had led me to Her door.

"Now consider, whether it was really an accident or not; do we know it was an accident; can we be sure it was an accident; could it have been arranged by someone; what would make someone arrange it; what are the possible motives, common or sacred. Think, consider, analyze, and conclude if you can."

I thought deeply. Considering its eventual effect upon my life, the accident of the pot was certainly very important to me. I had always assumed it was an accident. Even if it were not an accident, it would seem more likely that

someone had simply wanted me to meet the girl, and less likely that someone could have known that this meeting would become the door to my entering the path of the spirit; and yet, if Enlightened Ones did exist, and if they truly did see the future, as clearly as we see now the present, then I suppose...

Kamala Shila interrupted me here. "It is late; you can consider that matter further on your own, and you must. Learn now the third type of meditation. I want you to review, one by one, the steps I have taught you tonight, beginning from the moment I began to clean the grass of leaves. Go mentally through the whole warmup, of preparing the place and your own heart, for meditation; and then go through the kinds of meditation, and review the enemies I warned you of, and the ways of defeating them.

"Think lastly of the proper way to end a meditation: imagine a stone, thrown in the center of a pond, and see the ripples, going slowly out. The night we have spent together here, and each one of your meditations, is the same. It is an event, a sacred event, that has repercussions beyond what you can imagine; try to be aware of these ripples, think of them, and pray that they swiftly become waves of help and happiness that touch every living thing around you."

And I began the review, as he had instructed. He sat silently next to me, deep in some meditation of his own. And afterwards the final question came to my mind, "But what is it, Master Kamala Shila, that I should meditate upon? What picture or problem or review in my mind can answer the questions we have spoken of?"

"Begin where we must always begin," he answered, "picture your Heart Teacher, before you, and let the picture become perfect to the point of real. Ask Her then for Her help, have faith, and perhaps," he said, with a twinkle in his eye, "She will come to guide you."

The following contemplations are based on the Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life (Bodhisattvacharyavatara; Byang-chub-sems-dpa'i spyod-pa la 'jug-pa) of the Buddhist master Shantideva (circa 700 AD), and the commentary upon it by Gyalsab Je Darma Rinchen (1364-1432) entitled Entry Point for Children of the Victorious Buddhas (rGyal-sras 'jug-ngogs).

*Contemplation One
Where to devote yourself to meditation*

**We spend our days in gentle walks and thoughts
Of helping others, here in the silent
Peace of the forest, flowing in soft breezes;
We live doing as we please in our mansion
Of a wide flat rock, cool with the touch
Of moonlight and sandalwood scent of the holy,
Living deep within the woods
Of peacefulness, completely emptied
Of conflict and the afflictions.**

**We live where we please, as long
As we like, in abandoned houses
Or caves, or else at the foot of a tree.
We have given up the suffering
Of owning and protecting things,
Carefree we live, relying on nothing.**

Here is the first point, which describes one of the feature of living in isolation: that the place and so on are so perfectly excellent. "If I go into isolation," you may ask, "where should it be?" Think of a wheel-empowered emperor, who has no one at all to compete with him, and who revels in the objects of the senses at his own complete leisure. Just like this emperor do *we live, deep within the woods of peacefulness*, at rest from all the various distractions, in a place *completely emptied* of both any outer *conflict* and any kind of mental *affliction*—completely free of any of the objects that could trigger within us emotions such as liking or disliking another person.

We live doing as we please under some very *wide, flat rock* as a roof, which is just like a *mansion for us*. The place is cool, made *cool by the touch of sweet sandalwood scent* smeared all over—the soft *moonlight* of the presence of the *holy beings* who have stayed there in the past.

Here the forest is silent, with no kinds of sound to clash with our thoughts, and *peaceful* with the *soft velvet breezes* that *flow* past to grace the ground of our meditation. *We spend our days* here *in gentle walks, and thoughts of things*

we can do that will *help others*—in the practice of the wish for enlightenment. And so it is, that when great practitioners go into isolation, the pleasure they feel is infinitely greater than anything felt by those who follow the worldly way of life.

Here is the second point, that another benefit I will achieve from living in isolation is my independence. In isolation *we live where we please, and as long as we like*, in places where there are no other people: *in abandoned houses, or in caves, or else at the foot of a tree*. *We have given up both the suffering of owning many different material things, and the suffering of trying to protect these things from being lost*. In short, *we live carefree, relying on nothing*: no hopes, and no plans.

Contemplation Two

What to meditate upon: the service of others

**Think of these considerations
And others as well, contemplate
The benefits of isolation.
Put an end to useless
Thoughts, and meditate upon
The wish for enlightenment.**

**From the very beginning exert yourself
In the practice of treating others
And yourself the same.
When the happiness and the sufferings
Are the same, then you will care for all
Just as you do yourself.**

Think of these considerations—the ones presented up to this point—*and others as well*, in order to *contemplate the benefits of* living in some faraway place, *isolated* from the hustle and bustle of life and other such distractions. *Put a complete end to all useless thoughts* like striving after the objects of the senses, *and spend your time meditating upon the wish for enlightenment*.

"What is the method," you may ask, "which I should use to meditate upon this wish?" You should, *from the very beginning, exert yourself in the practice of treating others and yourself the same*. "And how do I do that?" you may ask. We spend our time working to achieve happiness for ourselves, and working to stop any suffering for ourselves. We must learn to act just the same way towards the happiness and the sufferings of others; we should make our attempts to achieve *happiness and to stop suffering the same*, for both

ourselves and others. *When we do so, then we will come to care for and cherish all living beings just as we do ourselves.*

Contemplation Three

The democracy of love

**Given the fact that both myself
And others are exactly the same
In not wanting pain,
What difference could there ever be
Between us, what reason that I protect
Myself and not all others?**

It is right that I should act exactly the same towards the happiness and sufferings of others as I do towards those of my own, for the following reasons. *Given the fact that both myself and others are exactly the same in how we want happiness, what difference then could there ever be between us—between myself and others? There is no difference at all. And for what reason then do I work only for happiness for myself—what is my justification? Why do I not work the same for the happiness of others? What I'm doing now is not right.*

Given the fact that both myself and others are exactly the same in how we do not want any pain, what difference could there ever be between us, between myself and others? There is no difference at all. And for what reason then do I fail to protect the happiness of all others, and concentrate instead on reaching my own happiness, and protecting it from ever being lost? The two happiness are exactly the same, and it is right for me to work to achieve them both.

Contemplation Four
If I use it myself, what will I have to give others?

**Thinking of yourself and saying,
"If I give, what will I have
For me?" is nothing but demonic.
To think of others and to say,
"If I use this for myself,
What will I give?" is Angel Dharma.**

Suppose that, under the influence of an attachment to our possessions, we begin to *think only of ourselves, saying, "If I give all my money and the rest of my things to other people, then what will I have to use for myself?"* This way of thinking though *is nothing but demonic*, because like a demon it can only in the end create terror for us. Suppose on the other hand that we begin to *think only of others, and to say, "If I use this for myself, then what will I have to give to them?"* This *is the Dharma of the Angel*, in that every good and perfect thing comes from it.

Contemplation Five
Not many words are needed

**The total amount of happiness
That exists in the world has come from
Wanting to make others happy.
The total amount of suffering
That exists in the world has come from
Wanting to make yourself happy.**

**What need is there for many words?
The children of the world
Work for their own sake;
The able Buddhas do their labor
For the sake of others—
Come and see the difference.**

Here is the fifth point, which is part of the expanded explanation in a listing of the respective problems and benefits of cherishing ourselves and cherishing others, from a point of view of help and happiness. To put it quite briefly, *the total amount of happiness that exists in the world has come from wanting to make others happy*, and from working for the benefit of others. And *the total*

amount of suffering that exists in the world has, on the other hand, come from cherishing ourselves, from wanting to make ourselves happy. We must therefore make great efforts to stop in ourselves this tendency of cherishing ourselves.

Here is the second point from above, which is a brief summary. So *what need is there for many words, for any long explanation? The children of the world work for their own sake, for their own dear selves; and this makes every single thing that they ever hoped would not happen to happen to them. The able Buddhas, on the other hand, do their labor for the sake of others, and in so doing bring to its final perfection every good and excellent thing. Come and see the difference between these two, and come to believe in it.*

**The Asian Classics Institute
Extension Course—
The Six Perfections of a Spiritual Warrior**

Reading Six: The Perfection of Wisdom

The following reading is an excerpt from a book written by Geshe Michael Roach entitled The Garden—a story of a young man's conversations with the great spiritual masters of Buddhism in a special desert garden.

And so I, the quiet bookworm, began leading the life of a Warrior, secretly. It was a truly new experience, a new way of experiencing the world in which I had always lived, for the battlefield of this particular Warrior was the same old library, and my little room at the hermitage, and the alley down which I travelled to go to market for my vegetables in the evening. I really did feel like a different person, for I had a totally different purpose than I had had in the past. Going through life before had seemed like walking down a boulevard lined with shops; I was a shopper, a consumer, looking into the windows to see if there was something I wanted, and then doing whatever was necessary to get what I wanted.

Life as the Warrior was entirely different. I really was a knight in shining armor, and walking on my two little feet was like riding some great powerful horse, and looking around myself at the library or on the road was like viewing some great vista from a seat of royalty: I looked at all my subjects, all my children, around me, and dreamt up ways of serving them, of keeping them happy, and assuring their future and ultimate happiness. I gave them all I could, kind words, kindly looks, a pat on the back, what little money I had, and a few words of encouragement, with as much of the spiritual as I thought they could hear happily; while in the back of my mind I was also offering them great piles of jewels, deep spiritual realizations, all the things in the world that no man claimed his own—the blue of the sky, the sound of the sea, the flowers that grew on every mountain on the planet, and I did so sincerely, although no one ever knew, and I did so with the wish that all I offered they could one day possess, especially enlightenment itself, and above all I found a deep and contented joy growing within myself daily, hour by hour.

As the joy increased my thirst increased, for I knew that my lessons were not complete, and like a horse near water I knew I was near, nearer and nearer, and I felt nearly an obsession now to reach the goals I knew now were reachable: I wanted to find perfection, I knew I could reach my mother, I knew she was near now, and instinct told me that I was close enough now to see the

Golden One again as well, and that the end of my searching, and the finding of what I sought, and my mother, and the masters of the Garden, and the Golden One would all before long join one with the other. And so I went again to the Garden, thinking that perhaps the night for this had come.

I remember distinctly the date it happened, nothing could make me forget, it was the 28th of July, and summer at its height. I entered the Garden late at night, well after the earth had cooled from the heat of the day, and sat on the foot of the bench beneath the carob, drinking in the sweet smell of the desert breezes, sweet respite from the still and burning feel of the daytime, a feel that struck the face and dried the nose and eyes, like the wind from an oven.

I sat and prepared to enter meditation, going through the preparatory steps slowly, with relish, as though I were putting on a soft old glove, or beginning a conversation with some dear old friend. I was nearly finished when I sensed a motion at the gate of the Garden, and then a small form moving quietly down the row of crimson desert roses along the northern wall. The form stooped at one bush, as though saying a silent prayer, and then moved off again.

I caught sight of the head of a monk, well-formed and cropped short, with velvet-like black hair, and then the robes and body followed. I had not seen much more than these brief clues before I found myself involuntarily on my feet, with my palms joined at my breast, bowed in deep respect. I glanced up almost in fear, in awe, for before me was Gautama, the Buddha himself, and although he was nothing like what I might have expected, there was absolutely no denying, and no questioning, who He was.

He was not tall, but only medium in height, and his frame was somewhat slight, and slightly bent, in a kind of modesty that nearly seemed like shyness. His every gesture was simple and graceful, as was his entire appearance, and his robes: clean, graceful, simply hung on his simple form, soft and natural with a lifetime of wear. His age no one could have guessed, I suppose I would say about 27 or 28, but his face gave no certain clue. It was simple itself, and the first impression, beside the modesty, was one of simple honesty: the eyes were gentle and open, rarely blinking, often down in modesty, and there was a quiet happiness in the way his face was held—in the slight but graceful smile, and the smooth, intelligent face. His skin and the rest were the same as yours or mine, it was not as though he were blazing in light or anything of the like, but there was a different kind of radiance about him, one with no color or shape, a kind of clear warmth that bathed his eyes and face, and his gentle hands, all the way down to his humble, bare feet; and this warmth radiated forth and filled the Garden, and bathed my being, and bade me to bow, before One who seemed to neither need nor wish any bow. And I bowed.

"Sit," he spoke quietly, "sit, please sit." And I sat instinctively there, on the grass before the bench, and bowed again sitting, praying that he himself would sit there, on the bench. This he did quite naturally, although with a bit of hesitation, as though he did not consider himself worthy of such a throne. And he sat quietly, looking down at the grass, almost abashed, like a young girl

alone before a stranger. We sat quietly.

After some time he reached his hand out towards me, and I saw that he had plucked one of the red roses from the bushes on his way in. He didn't speak, he only held it out towards me, as if asking me to look at it, which I did. No words passed between us, I simply looked at the rose, and have no idea what he himself may have been looking at, for I felt still too much in awe of him to gaze into his face.

He withdrew then the rose suddenly, and put three of his fingers under my chin, and raised my face slowly up to meet his eyes. And then he said "Rose," and reached the same fingers of both hands to my eyelids, and closed them, and kept his fingers there. In my mind I pictured a rose, a perfect red rose.

Then his fingers opened my eyes again, and he reached out towards me again, holding the rose, and said, "Do not think 'rose'." And I tried not to think 'rose,' I tried not to see the picture I had just seen of the rose, and I looked into his hand again. For just an instant, for just a brief flash, I saw a tiny corner of red, outlined against the dark of the night air, and then my eye jumped and saw something roundish and red, further down, and finally something green, and thin, and straight. And then in the next moment I was again looking at a rose.

"Again," he said simply.

He let me look at the rose, and then he pulled back his hand, and then he gently closed my eyelids, and then he said again, "Rose." I thought of 'rose,' there was the outline and color of a rose in my thoughts, and then he gently pushed my eyes open again, and again said "Do not think 'rose'." And then he opened his hand before me, and again, for a moment, my eyes danced across some colors and shapes, before an instant later I saw a rose in my mind, and before my eyes.

Then he stooped and touched his finger to the ground, and brought up on the tip of it a tiny black ant. He touched his finger to the side of the rose, and let the ant climb onto the rose; the ant began to race across the petals, leaning out over thin air and then reversing itself, racing across to the opposite side, leaning out in the air, nearly falling off the rose, and then racing further on again, in an obvious panic. Gautama touched the rose to the ground, and the black ant raced off into the blades of the grass.

And then he cupped the rose in his hand, and all I could see was the back of his hand. He held the hand to his face, and opened his deep brown eyes wide, and with his head slightly cocked to the side looked at the rose himself, gazed upon the rose. All I could see was his eyes, but in his eyes I saw some kind of extraordinary contentment, some kind of extraordinary happiness with the rose, and I knew in that moment that he was seeing something that I could never in my present condition ever see: he was experiencing some profound state of bliss triggered by the same thing that I had looked at, and I knew at

that moment that it could not be the same thing I had looked at. Gautama closed his hand gently around the rose, and turned those shining eyes to mine.

"For a moment," he said quietly, "you saw the rose before you thought 'rose,' and it was only a few simple shapes and pieces of color. Then your mind thought of these as 'rose.' The poor ant also perceived these same shapes and colors, but thought only 'threat,' and then 'death,' and ran for his life. When I looked at these same colors and pieces of shape, I saw all of eternity, and all the minds of every being in existence, and loved them."

Gautama paused, and closed his eyes, as if waiting for my mind to grasp his words, and then think on them clearly, before he continued. And then he reached out his hand again, and opened it, and asked me, "Who saw this thing right? What is this thing? Is it a rose? Is it the Lord of Death? Is it all humanity, and perfect love?"

In his presence I felt as though my mind were someone else's, as though it belonged to some great and enlightened saint, and I had no hesitation to answer, and no need to answer in words. The thing he had in his hand was each of these things, and all of these things, and none of these things. It was to each of the three beings who looked upon it truly what they saw; it was in sum all the things it appeared to be to all three; and it could never have been three completely different things at once. It was what each saw it to be.

He closed his hand again, and paused again. He leaned and whispered to me, fiercely, "See it now as eternity; see it now as all humanity, and know the perfect love for them that I do." And then he opened his hand again, and in almost a trance of joy I looked eagerly into the palm and saw—a simple, red, rose.

I closed my eyes in disappointment, and said only, "I cannot."

"I know," he said.

"Why?"

"You know very well; you see only what your mind forces you to see; you see only what the imprints in your mind allow you to see, even though you are looking upon exactly the same thing that I am looking upon, when I see all of eternity, and all of life, and feel all love for it."

I closed my eyes and thought "Rose." I opened my eyes and saw "Rose." He raised his legs up to the bench and crossed them, under his robes, and went into meditation. I crossed my legs, and I went into meditation. The silence grew. I lost the sounds of the Garden, and then I lost the smells and feel of the Garden, and then I lost the feeling of sitting in the Garden, and then finally I lost the feeling even of thinking, and even of myself. It was perfectly and totally still.

I saw emptiness. And it was only that, and I saw it. There was nothing else.

When it was over things began to come back. I was aware of coming down, and then I was aware of myself again. I was aware then, in that moment, for the first time, that I had seen emptiness.

I knew then that I had seen an Enlightened One, and so I knew then that Enlightened Ones really existed.

I knew then, perfectly, that I would myself become an Enlightened One, in the space of seven lifetimes, and so I knew then that my future lives really existed.

I knew then that the Path was perfectly true.

I knew they would not call me by my name when I became an Enlightened One.

I knew the seven lives would be good, no more real suffering, and surrounded by loving parents, and good and learned teachers, and spiritual friends and teachings, exactly as I needed, without fail.

I knew that what I had seen was true. I could never doubt these things again. I knew I was not mistaken, I knew I was not somehow deluded or crazy. I knew that no one, ever, could say anything that would ever make me doubt what I had seen.

I knew that I knew what every holy book in the world said; I knew that I knew the great ocean of knowledge entirely, as though it were reduced to a teardrop in a child's eye. And I knew the truth of these holy books, and I knew I must give my life to keep them in this world, for others to come after me.

I loved every living thing. A light came out of my chest, a powerful pillar of light, with no color, and it went out, and it touched every living thing, and I knew then that I would always live for each of them, and only for them, and that there was nothing else for me ever to do.

I knew that pictures of the Enlightened Ones were true. I knew we had to care for them. I knew that I must bow down to them, and when it was time to rise, I threw myself on the ground before Them.

I knew I had seen a different reality, a true reality, a truly higher and pure reality. I knew there was no thing like this reality in the reality I had known. I knew that the reality I had known was not a pure reality. I knew there was nothing in this reality that could ever be pure. But I knew that, of all the things in this reality, the diamond was one thing that was in some small way close to being pure, purely hard, purely clear, and pure throughout, nearly.

I knew I would die. I knew my mind was not yet pure. I knew my mind was seeing things wrong, and always had, until the moment I saw emptiness. I knew that even now, once I had come down, I was again seeing things wrong, and would continue to do so until I was nearly enlightened. I knew I could read minds. I knew that, if I developed myself carefully, I could perform miracles.

I knew I was now someone different because, of all the people in the world, I had seen emptiness, and I had seen all these other things, and I no longer had to suffer like before. It was over with; I was on my way out, with certainty, with a sweet certainty that I would carry with me forever after.

I looked up to Gautama, in gratitude. He gazed down at me, in total silence, and complete joy. He knew everything.
