



Advice from Our Spiritual Director

Lama Zopa Rinpoche's profound wisdom has guided the FPMT organization since its inception and his ongoing topical teachings provide the relevant advice we all need to practice Dharma in this modern world. Rinpoche's message in this year's annual review focuses on the importance of practicing patience, the method for keeping enemies away and obtaining peace for oneself and others.

We Must Practice Patience

My most dear, most kind, most precious, wish-fulfilling ones,

Practice patience in order to protect our merits

First I want to say that patience is the most important practice to protect one's merits. Most sentient beings do not know Dharma; they are very far away from Dharma. Then, among the sentient beings who have met Dharma, even if they try to practice it, anger often arises.

Even if they collect merits, because their minds easily come under the control of anger, sooner or later the merits will be destroyed, blown up, by anger. So you must really make effort to protect and not burn all your merits by giving rise to anger.

Without protecting your merits, there is no happiness and you don't succeed in fulfilling your wishes. You remain continuously in samsara and in the lower realms. Unless you enjoy that, unless what you want is suffering and what you don't want is happiness, there is only total loss.

Practice patience right now!

I also want to say that it is better to practice patience right now, while you still have an outer enemy who is angry with you or harming you, because that person can die anytime and you can die anytime. Since this is an unbelievably precious opportunity, it is best to practice patience with this person right away, not only so that you yourself can experience all temporary and ultimate happinesses, but also in order to ripen and enlighten all sentient beings.

I want to emphasize this: since just this one time you and the other person have been born human beings, this is an extremely rare opportunity to practice patience.

Therefore, do it right now. Do it right now!

In the morning, make a plan: I am going to practice patience

Every morning when you generate bodhicitta, thinking, “May my life become Dharma and may everything I do become a cause of enlightenment,” at the same time you must make sure to also think, “In this life and today, I’m going to practice patience.” You must motivate like this, otherwise, because your mind is so powerfully habituated with anger, you will miss the precious opportunity to practice patience.

You have to make a plan, a strong decision, so think, “I am going to practice patience.” You have to prepare yourself, just like soldiers in an army prepare themselves before fighting because the important thing for them is to shoot their enemy. You have to be ready, you have to prepare, you have to plan everything well beforehand.

When we understand karma, there is no way we will harm sentient beings

When an action has all four parts complete—the base, motivation, action, and goal—you create karma that has four suffering results.

The first, the ripened-aspect result, is rebirth in the lower realms. Then, when due to a good karma you get reborn as a human being once again, you experience the other three suffering results: the possessed result, experiencing the result similar to the cause, and creating the result similar to the cause.

The second, the possessed result is to have much suffering and danger in your life.

The third, experiencing the result similar to the cause is that others cause you the same suffering that you caused them in a previous life. Therefore, if someone harms you, it is the result of your negative karma of having harmed others in the past.

On the other hand, if in this life somebody helps you, it is the result of having benefitted and helped others in the past. This is experiencing the result similar to the cause. Whether you get helped or harmed by others, it always comes from your own mind.

Therefore, it is most important to always practice awareness of karma in your life. That will help you not get angry, and it will also help you practice patience with others, because you won't see any reason to get angry with them.

And fourth, the other result you experience in the human realm is creating the result similar to the cause. Because of your habituation from the past with the negative karma of harming others, it happens again and again. In other words, you do the same thing again—you harm others as you did in the past.

Due to this habituation with past negative karma, you continue to create the same negative karma on and on. You do this as long as you don't purify and change your mind from creating heavy negative karma into creating good karma, that is, into helping and benefiting others, instead of causing them harm.

There are five paths: the path of merit, the path of preparation, the right-seeing path, the path of meditation, and the path of no more learning. When you achieve the patience level of the path of preparation, it is definite that you won't be reborn again in the lower realms, which is the result of past negative karma. But until

you achieve that, creating the result similar to the cause goes on and on, making your samsara endless.

That is the most terrifying thing about karma—it makes your samsara without end. If you practice awareness of this, there is no way for you to harm sentient beings back, because you have been doing this from beginningless samsara and due to it have experienced oceans of suffering.

The person who harms you is your holy guru

Now I will explain how to practice patience. The *Eight Verses of Thought Transformation* says:

Even if someone whom I have benefited
 And in whom I have great expectations
 Gives me extremely unreasonable harm,
 I will practice looking at them as my holy guru.

When you benefit someone, you have great expectations that they will not harm you and will only help you. But even if that person harms you extremely badly by doing something that you are not worthy of or by doing something unreasonable, you should practice looking at them as your holy guru, not just “as your guru.”

By practicing patience with someone who gets angry with you, who harms you with their body, speech, and mind, who blames you for something that you didn’t do, who beats you, or who even kills you, you are able to complete the paramita of patience.

By training your mind in patience, gradually you have no more anger. Once you have no anger within you, you have no outer enemies in the world. This is because once your real enemy, the anger inside you, is destroyed, it is as if you destroyed the numberless enemies outside.

On the other hand, without destroying your inner enemy, no matter how much you try to destroy your outer enemies through harming them, they only increase.

As Shantideva says in the Bodhicharyavatara (v. 5.13):

Although there is not enough leather
 To cover the whole earth.
 If you have a small piece of leather underneath your shoes,
 It is like all the earth is covered with leather.

The person who harms you is unbelievably kind

We can think of the unbelievable, most unbelievable, most unbelievable, most unbelievable kindness of the enemy in rising anger towards you and harming you, as that gives you the opportunity to practice patience. That person is incredibly positive, incredibly healing; they are enlightening you. It is unbelievable.

By thinking of them as positive, that they are unbelievably kind, you put the label “positive” and “so good” on them, and then you only see them as most positive and good. By doing that, you don’t see them as bad or as harming you, so anger doesn’t arise. If you don’t label them as “bad,” “harmful,” or “enemy,” you don’t see them in that way, as His Holiness often says when going through the benefits of bodhicitta.

On the other hand, if out of self-cherishing, you label the person as “harming me,” as “bad,” then you see bad, and then you get angry. In dependence upon the label “bad” or “harming me,” you get angry, and then you create negative karma by harming them back.

The person who harms you is unbelievably precious

The next thing is that when other sentient beings call you their enemy, get angry with you, and harm you, if, from your side, you practice patience, anger doesn’t arise. Then you don’t see them as your enemy, and instead you see them as most precious and kind.

By practicing the paramita of patience with them, you overcome your delusions, both gross and subtle, and achieve enlightenment, buddhahood. So that person is giving you enlightenment.

If you practice patience, that person gives you enlightenment, the total cessation of obscurations and the completion of realizations.

Then when you achieve enlightenment, you can liberate the numberless sentient beings from the lower realms, the hell, hungry ghost, and animal realms.

Not only that, you can liberate the numberless sentient beings from samsara, which is only in the nature of suffering.

Not only that, you can liberate the numberless sentient beings from the lower nirvana, which is liberation from samsara.

Not only that, you can bring the numberless sentient beings to the peerless happiness of full enlightenment, the total cessation of obscurations and the completion of realizations.

So you can see now how that person is—wow, wow, wow!—most unbelievably precious, most unbelievably precious, most unbelievably precious, most unbelievably precious, most unbelievably precious: five times! They are most unbelievably precious and kind, wow, wow, wow, five times!

Skies filled with diamonds, and even skies filled with wish-granting jewels, can't compare to how precious they are.

The person who harms you is more valuable than skies of wish-granting jewels

It is said in a text that the Buddha's relics make their way to the ocean and after a long time become wish-granting jewels. When those who have unbelievable merits, such as bodhisattvas and wheel-turning kings, find one, they clean it and put it on top of a banner on the fifteenth day of the month. Then, they make prayers and whatever material things they want or need in this life get materialized, such as however many jet airplanes or ships they want.

But even if these things are numberless and fill the whole sky, it is nothing. From them you don't get even the benefit that you can save sentient beings from the lower realms. Just by having those

material things, and even by having numberless wish-granting jewels, you don't get the benefit of you yourself becoming free from the lower realms—you don't get even that very first benefit. And don't get all those other benefits from just having the material things that come from wish-granting jewels filling the whole sky.

Therefore, it is nothing.

Even if you have skies of wish-granting jewels, it is nothing compared to the value the person you call “enemy” has when you see them as being most precious and most kind. Even the words “most precious” and “most kind” cannot describe the kindness you receive from that so-called enemy.

When you practice patience you have no outer enemies

If you try to cover the whole earth with leather, you won't be able to find enough leather to do that. But if you have a small bit of leather on the soles of your shoes, wherever you go, thorns won't go through them, so it is like the whole earth is covered with leather. Like “An apple a day keeps the doctor away,” practicing patience keeps enemies away. In other words, if you practice patience, because anger is no longer there, there are no outer enemies harming you at all. This is very clear.

Nowadays His Holiness often mentions this verse from *Bodhicharyavatara* (v. 3.34) when talking about the benefits of bodhicitta:

Today in the presence of all the refuges, [the Buddha,
Dharma, and Sangha],
I invite all the transmigratory beings to be my guests
In happiness up to the gone-to-bliss state.
Devas, non-devas, and so forth, be happy!

“Transmigratory beings” are the beings who are running on the path of samsara, even though they wish to enjoy happiness

and, especially, to abide in the supreme happiness that is buddhahood—the total cessation of all the obscurations, both gross and subtle, and the completion of all realizations. To make them happy, you invite all sentient beings to be your guests and to be satisfied in happiness by your bringing them to enlightenment.

Nowadays His Holiness often recites this verse wishing everyone to be happy. His Holiness says he doesn't see any sentient being harming him. This is the attitude of a bodhisattva, one who has bodhicitta.

By destroying your anger you give others peace

You give others unbelievable peace by destroying your enemy, anger. You cause unbelievable peace and happiness to the world and to the numberless sentient beings. Then, from life to life, you bring peace and happiness to the numberless sentient beings in the six realms. In addition, you bring them to enlightenment.

Dedicate your merits immediately

Many sentient beings, even though they try to practice Dharma, don't have a complete understanding of the importance of dedication. In other words, they don't know everything there is to know about how to practice Dharma.

Without dedicating your merits to achieve enlightenment in order to enlighten all sentient beings, no matter how much merit you collect—for however many days, however many weeks, however many months, however many years—they will get destroyed when you don't control your anger, when you don't practice patience.

The best thing is, whenever you do a practice and collect merits, immediately dedicate the merits. Whatever merits you collected, whether you made charity to a beggar or offerings to the Guru, Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, immediately dedicate the merits.

Otherwise, if you wait until nighttime to dedicate all your

merits, it can happen that in the daytime anger arises uncontrollably and destroys all the merits you collected when you made the effort to make your actions become holy Dharma.

My way of dedicating merits

Now I will explain my way of dedicating merits. Of course, “my way” doesn’t mean that it only comes from me. It comes from my gurus’ blessings; not the gurus in the world, but my own gurus, those with whom I have a Dharma connection.

I dedicate like this: “Due to all the past, present, and future merits collected by me, all the three-time merits collected by the numberless sentient beings, and all the three-time merits collected by the numberless buddhas...”

Thinking in that way makes your merits unbelievably powerful. If, for example, you collect one dollar from one million people, even though what each person gives is not big, it’s a small thing, just one dollar, but with one million dollars you can accomplish a big project.

Like that, here you don’t dedicate only the merits you collected by doing a particular practice, but you include all the merits you have collected from beginningless rebirths, those you are collecting in the present, and those you will collect in the future, and then you add the three-time merits collected by the numberless sentient beings and the three-time merits collected by numberless buddhas.

Then think, “May I achieve buddhahood and then lead all sentient beings to that buddhahood by myself alone.”

By dedicating merits in this way—all your merits, past, present, and future, then all sentient beings’ three-time merits, and then all the buddhas’ three-time merits—your dedication becomes unbelievably powerful because there are numberless sentient beings and numberless buddhas. Wow, wow, wow! That is my way of dedicating.

Seal the merits with emptiness

Without sealing the merits with emptiness, if anger or heresy arise later on, the merits become weaker. As Kyabje Phabongkha Rinpoche explained, when many rocks are taken away from a mountain by trucks, the mountain is still there but it is weaker. Like that, without sealing the merits with emptiness, they are still there but they are weaker than before you gave rise to anger or heresy.

To seal your merits with emptiness, think: “Due to all the past, present, and future merits collected by me, all the three-time merits collected by numberless sentient beings, and all the three-time merits collected by numberless buddhas, which exist in mere name...”

Here you put all those merits, which exist in mere name, together. When you think precisely about “exist in mere name,” it means nothing exists from its own side, or nothing is there on its base. It is there, but nothing is there on the base, on its base.

Then, “May the I, who exists in mere name, achieve buddhahood, which exists in mere name, and lead all the sentient beings, who exist in mere name, to that buddhahood, which exists in mere name, by myself alone, who exists in mere name.”

While dedicating like that, it is very important to meditate precisely on emptiness according to the words of the dedication.

If you can't bear suffering, you must get rid of your anger

In *Bodhicharyavatara*, the great bodhisattva Shantideva taught the most unbelievable technique for getting rid of anger. So please concentrate on this. *Bodhicharyavatara* (v. 6.73) says:

If I can't bear even
 Just this present suffering,
 Why don't I avert anger,
 The cause of hell suffering?

This is incredible logic. It is unbelievable. It means that if you can't bear, if you can't stand, this present suffering—for example, just some bad words—and get angry, this becomes the cause of your hell suffering.

Therefore, why not put all your effort into getting rid of anger, the cause of your hell suffering?

That's all. Thank you very much. Goodbye. I want all of you to become the most famous people in the world for practicing patience. I want you to be the directors of patience in the world and also the directors of patience in the six realms.

This letter was originally given as advice to a center director in 2022 and Lama Zopa Rinpoche wanted it shared with everyone. It was transcribed by Ven. Joan Nicell, and edited by Ven. Robina Courtin for inclusion in this year's Annual Review.