

What is this?

A secular dharma study course using talks given by Stephen Batchelor

• PART 3 OF 8 •

ENTHUSIASM – REFLECTIONS ON ‘RIGHT EFFORT’

Recorded at the July 2016 Secular Buddhist Retreat in Gaia House, Devon

Conditionality & dharma

1. In the Pali canon, one description of conditionality reads: *When this is, that arises. When this is not, that does not arise.* How is it that when contemplating these verses one would recognise that the dharma is not about imposing a belief or provoking a mystical experience?

Complete effort or enthusiasm

2. How is it that when contemplating the above verses one would recognise a basis for cultivating enthusiasm or right effort?

Four conditions for *virya*

3. Define the four key conditions that the 8th century Indian poet Shantideva [see pages 4–6 after these questions] identifies for cultivating *virya* (enthusiasm, right effort, or ‘finding joy in what is skilful’) and give an example of each from your own life.

Self-confidence & false modesty

4. With respect to the second of these four key conditions, how is it that faux modesty hinders both oneself and others? Give an example to illustrate your point.

Self-confidence

5. Summarising one point of the verses on self-confidence, Batchelor remarks that, ‘If you have a negative image of yourself then you will be that much more prone to these emotions which will then really bring you down ... The way that we imagine ourselves, the way we picture ourselves, has a considerable consequence on how we come to terms with powerful feelings and emotions and the criticisms of others.’ What counsel does Shantideva offer for reversing such imagery and negative self-talk?

Cultivating enthusiasm, or *virya*

6. Consider Batchelor’s remark that one cannot simply decide to be joyful but ‘if we bring into mind our motive, our goals ... a confidence in our abilities, that hopefully would be strengthened by the more practice that we engage with, we actually start experiencing the results of the practice.’ What does Batchelor advise one do to cultivate the joy of *virya*?

Conditionality & the four tasks

7. Batchelor cites Nagarjuna as follows: *The one who sees conditionality sees dukkha, the arising, the ceasing and the path.* Summarise in a few words the causes and results of accomplishing each of these four tasks.

The four great efforts

8. Summarise in two or three words, each of the four great efforts.

Conditioned arising

9. Provide a dictionary definition of *pratītyasamutpāda*.

***Virya*, or complete effort, or enthusiasm**

10. Cite a dictionary definition of *virya*.

Conditioned arising & nirvana

11. Batchelor cites the following from a sutta – *One who sees conditionality [conditioned arising] sees the dhamma; and one who sees the dhamma sees conditionality* – and remarks that these verses parallel others in which the dharma equals nirvana. What may the equivalency be between seeing conditioned arising (*pratītyasamutpāda*) and realising nirvana?

The four great efforts & four tasks

12. In the analogy between the four great efforts and the four tasks how does Batchelor frame, 'to create the conditions for dukkha not to arise,' and 'embracing dukkha'?

The four great efforts & four tasks

13. In the analogy between the four great efforts and the four tasks how does Batchelor frame, 'to create the conditions for the letting go of reactivity' and 'letting reactivity go' i.e. fall away?

The four great efforts & four tasks

14. In the analogy between the four great efforts and the four tasks how does Batchelor frame, 'to create the conditions for the arising of skilful qualities' and 'seeing the stopping of reactivity'?

The four great efforts & four tasks

15. In the analogy between the four great efforts and the four tasks how does Batchelor frame, 'to create the conditions for the maintaining of skilful states' and 'cultivating the path itself'?

The four tasks

16. Batchelor concludes by stating that, 'enthusiasm therefore, may simply be what arises when we commit ourselves to embrace life fully, to let go of reactivity, to see the stopping of it, and from that stopping, the cultivation and the emergence of a path. So when we think of the four truths as four tasks, then the engaging in the tasks is precisely what are the conditions that lead to a greater commitment to, a greater enthusiasm for, a greater joy in this practice.' Returning to the earlier discussion on the distinction between truth claims and tasks, are you persuaded of the value in going with Batchelor's interpretation of the four truths as four tasks? If so, why? If not, why not?

Our heartfelt thanks go to Christine Johnson of Upaya Sangha of Tucson for her work developing these questions

Bodhisattvacaryāvatāra by Shantideva

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Thus in order to increase my enthusiasm
I should strive to abandon its opposing forces,
To (amass the supports of) aspiration, self-confidence, joy and rest,
To practice in earnest and to become strong in self-control.

Aspiration

40

The Mighty One himself has said
That aspiration is the root of every facet of virtue;
Its root is constant acquaintance
With the ripening-effects (of actions).

41

(Physical) pain, mental unhappiness,
All the various kinds of fear,
As well as separation from what is desired
All arise from an unwholesome way of life.

42

(However) by committing wholesome actions
Which are (motivated by aspiration) in, the mind,
Wherever I go I shall be presented with
Tokens of the fruit of that merit.

Self-confidence

49

Self-confidence should be applied to (wholesome) actions,
The (overcoming) of disturbing conceptions and my ability (to do this).
Thinking, 'I alone shall do it,'
Is the self-confidence of action.

52

When crows encounter a dying snake,

They will act as though they were eagles.
(Likewise) if (my self-confidence) is weak
I shall be injured by the slightest downfall.

56

Whoever has self-importance is destroyed by it:
He is disturbed and has no self-confidence.
For those with self-confidence do not succumb to the power of the enemy,
Whereas the former are under the sway of the enemy of self-importance.

57

Inflated by the disturbing conception of my self-importance,
I shall be led by it to the lower realms.
it destroys the joyous festival of being human.
I shall become a slave, eating the food of others,

58

Stupid, ugly, feeble and everywhere disrespected.
Tough people bloated by conceit
Are also counted among the self-important;
Tell me, what is more pathetic than this?

59

Whoever seizes self-confidence in order to conquer the enemy of self-
importance,
He is the self-confident one, the victorious hero,
And in addition, whoever definitely conquers the spread of this enemy, self-
importance,
Completely (wins) the fruit of a Conqueror, fulfilling the wishes of the world.

60

If I find myself amidst a crowd of disturbing conceptions
I shall endure them in a thousand ways;
Like a lion among foxes
I will not be affected by this disturbing host.

61

just as men will guard their eyes

When great danger and turmoil occur,

Likewise I shall never be swayed by the disturbances within my mind,

Even at times of great strife.

Joy

63

Just like those who yearn for the Fruits of Play,

(A Bodhisattva) is attracted

To whatever task he may do:

He never has enough) it only brings him joy.

64

Although people work in order to be happy,

It is uncertain whether or not they will find it;

But how can those whose work itself is joy

Find happiness unless they do it?

65

If I feel that I never have enough sensual objects,

Which are like honey smeared upon a razor's edge,

Then why should I ever feel

that I have enough merit which ripens in happiness and peace?

66

Thus in order to complete this task,

I shall venture into it just as an elephant

tormented by the midday sun

Plunges into a (cool, refreshing) lake.

Rest

67

When my strength declines, I should leave whatever I am doing

In order to be able to continue with it later.

Having done something well, I should put it aside

With the wish (to accomplish) what will follow.