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**Dzigar Kongtrul Rinpoche:** The most important thing is not that everything can be accomplished right now, today. It is in time, in many days, in many months, in many, many years that you could get to where you want to get. It's not like everything can be accomplished in one effort or in one day. So, taking breaks, the restoration of the fatigue of the physical body and the mind as well, and then, if you do that, then next time, since you had a good time last time, you would be more attracted to do that and continue.

**James Shaheen:** Hello, and welcome to *Tricycle Talks*. I'm James Shaheen, and you just heard Dzigar Kongtrul Rinpoche. Kongtrul Rinpoche is a Tibetan Buddhist teacher and author based in southern Colorado. In his new book, *Diligence: The Joyful Endeavor of the Buddhist Path*, he draws from the teachings of the 8th-century Buddhist philosopher Shantideva to explore how we can meet the world with joy and openheartedness. In my conversation with Rinpoche, we talk about the power of aspiration, how joy and steadfastness can protect us against laziness and low self-esteem, the importance of taking breaks, and how we can learn to find true joy in everything we do. So here's my conversation with Dzigar Kongtrul Rinpoche.

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**James Shaheen:** OK, so I'm here with Dzigar Kongtrul Rinpoche. Hi, Rinpoche. It's great to be with you.

**Dzigar Kongtrul Rinpoche:** Thank you very much, James, for having me here.

**James Shaheen:** So, Rinpoche, we're here to talk about your new book, *Diligence: The Joyful Endeavor of the Buddhist Path*. So, to start, could you tell us a bit about the book and what inspired you to write it?



**Dzigar Kongtrul Rinpoche:** What inspired me to write on diligence is mainly because many of our students in the dharma struggle with practice being consistent and also sometimes feeling discouraged. I thought to address that and also to help to motivate them was how it's not like there are people with tremendous natural-born diligence and people without. It's more how one works with the insight of one's own mind and as well as also in one's own way of organizing one's life, and that's how many from outside seems like very consistent and very diligent, but in reality it's a lot to do with how you organize your mind and your life. So I thought since this chapter of the *Bodhisattvacharayavatara*, Shantideva has offered some real insights as to how we can work with the mind.

I also thought that maybe this would be helpful for non-Buddhist practitioners, because we all have aspirations, and we all have to strive to fulfill our aspirations in life, and the way you organize your mind and the way you organize your life is going to be something similar. It's going to be a different focus and a different subject that you are focused on. But the way you organize your life and how consistently you engage yourself in the practice of what you want to accomplish and keeping yourself motivated with aspiration and thinking of the outcomes, all of those are going to be very similar, so I thought it could be good for people who are in different fields, like sports, also in different career tracks, and as well as also different other fields, where they know that they have the aspirations, but it's a long way to fulfill their aspiration from where they stand, and the only way that they can actually fulfill their aspirations is through striving and through organizing their life and schedule to have a good routine and mindset for that and also keep themselves feeling quite motivated. So in that way, I thought it could be universal in that way, and that also kind of inspired me as well.

**James Shaheen:** Right, you know, Rinpoche, you make that point very clearly in the book, that the same qualities, like diligence, that make us successful in our spiritual practice, are the same qualities that make us successful in other areas of our life, say, as an example, one's career. So you mentioned Shantideva and his famous text, *The Way of the Bodhisattva*. So for our readers



who may not be familiar with Shantideva, could you give us a brief introduction to *The Way of the Bodhisattva* and who Shantideva was?

**Dzigar Kongtrul Rinpoche:** Shantideva is a prince from a northern part of India in, I think, the 6th century, and before he was enthroned, he ran away and then became a monk at Nalanda University, and there he studied and practiced, and then toward the end of his stay there, then he gave these wonderful teachings, *The Bodhisattva's Way of Life*, and so this then became the fundamental mind training texts for the Buddhists, especially for the Mahayana Buddhists. So that's the text.

**James Shaheen:** OK, so you focus on his verses on diligence, and as you said a moment ago, diligence is something we can cultivate, and certainly Shantideva's verses are very instructive in that regard. But can you start by telling us how you define diligence?

**Dzigar Kongtrul Rinpoche:** Well, diligence is basically being very consistent in what you want to accomplish, having discipline and also overcoming challenges that come from outside, seemingly, but it also mostly resonates more in oneself, like despondence and also feeling pressured and therefore sort of bouncing off of the pressure, and then also self-doubt, as well as also a sense of feeling lethargic and and not being able to come out of that kind of heavy feeling of lethargy. So these are all internal experiences, and when you overcome all of those things, you're not unfamiliar with them but rather you know what to do with them when they come, either triggered from outside or just from as a challenge from inside of your own mind and in your own engagement in the practice of dharma or in the practice of whatever you aspire to accomplish. So, when you, in those ways, are able to follow up on your aspiration with a good pace of consistency and engagement, then I think you get the kind of accomplishment of diligence, and so therefore, I think that diligence would be defined as a sort of a joyful endeavor in that way.



**James Shaheen:** So, it's interesting because often when we think of diligence and discipline, we think of keeping one's nose to the grindstone, or we think of plodding along laboriously, and yet you just describe diligence as learning to find joy in whatever we are engaged with. So can you say more about this definition? How can joy sustain us and help us accomplish our goals when ordinarily we associate challenges with a lot of hard and joyless work?

**Dzigar Kongtrul Rinpoche:** Well, I think the reason why that happens is not that there wasn't joy. If there was no joy, I don't think one would aspire to do that, whatever you are wanting to be diligent and apply your diligence. So, there are some positive things that you see that can be reaped as a fruit for yourself, for your well-being, and for the growth of your spiritual realization. So there is that attraction. That attraction is by nature joyful. There is a sort of something that from within attracts you to have those qualities or those outcomes or those accomplishments that supports one's life and one's growth. You are inspired to have them in you.

So I think in most cases, there is joy already. But then what happens is, in the work, in the path to accomplish what you need to do, you forget that you initially been inspired, what you initially came to find this being attractive for yourself and all the sort of pros and benefits of what you can accomplish, how that can be so much beneficial in the spiritual path for this life as well as also for the future lives, how this could set you on a right path for liberation and for enlightenment.

So you forget because in our mindstreams, our mindstream can be occupied one at a time, so when you are occupied with something else sort of disturbs that or something else comes in that disrupts your initial sort of joy or inspiration, then that almost becomes in the moment your passion, but this is just a sidetrack. So when you are in sidetracks, basically, you have to reorient yourself, thinking initially what you have been attracted to, what you have been inspired to, what the outcomes that you have wanted for yourself. Reminding yourself is the way to kind of reignite that old forgotten or temporarily forgotten joy and the inspiration that was born inside of you. So in that way, then, it can come back because they are much more reason-based and



thought through and not just something in the spirit of the moment that came up. It's something that you decided, and then you could make yourself again reorient to what you have decided and not let yourself get carried by the wind. So in that way, I think joy is always needed there to reengage.

**James Shaheen:** You know, I understand that with the initial aspiration, there's a joy and an excitement and an excitement about what you'd like to accomplish, and it's important to remember that and come back to that when your enthusiasm or energy flags. According to Shantideva, one of the biggest internal obstacles we face, then, is laziness, and that afflicts us all. So can you say more about how Shantideva is defining laziness? How does laziness hold us back? Because you think of all that energy and joy at the beginning, and then we hit a wall. Something holds us back, and for Shantideva, one of the biggest obstacles there is laziness. Could you say something about that?

**Dzigar Kongtrul Rinpoche:** This is not a new phenomenon. Laziness, I think, is a phenomenon that has existed in the 6th century. So is self-disparaging. It's not also a new thing. It has existed a long time, even in the time of the Buddha. What I find in the modern world a more troublesome form of laziness is for example, nowadays, scrolling is a form of laziness. We have a lot of small, momentary joys of being engaged with, let's say, on social media or something that gratifies you, and I think we have to be able to very intelligently know that in a day there are only so many hours, and you don't want so many of your hours to be eaten by them and so you can never get to what you want to get to. So that's one thing. Another form of laziness is when things get a little bit tough to be consistent and you lag behind and fall off the wagon, so to speak, in doing things consistently, then this unresolved feeling of “Maybe I'm not as good as others,” comparing yourself with others, and also thinking “I'm not meant to do this,” or “I don't have it in me,” or, “Maybe this is something good for others, and others can do this, obviously, but I don't seem to have this in me and I seem to not be able to do this.” This kind of self-disparaging is involuntary. It's not like people engage in those kinds of things voluntarily, but involuntarily because there's a



lot of long-term habit that is built up from childhood onwards, and then also maybe not being so in tune with one's own mind and the feelings that arise inside so then they become a form of laziness.

Shantideva talks about how to overcome those two by saying first of all, this kind of thing is very natural. They come up. They do disrupt you in being diligent and focused and also being able to strive consistently. But yet at the same time, when they do come, you can work with them to not be overwhelmed with those things. You have to have self-confidence and some pride, a can-do mentality in the self, and so in that way then slowly that artificial boosting your own pride in the self and in one's ability with this sort of consistency and facing the challenge, then once you do overcome the challenge, it can become a natural confidence, as Shantideva says. And I think this comes from the sutras itself, from the *Vajradhvaja Sutra*, the Buddha has spoken of that pride in one's ability and the self. So I think those two can be very, very helpful to embrace and embody. As many people have said, you fake it till you make it, and then it becomes real. In terms of the outcome, sometimes to be a perfectionist from the beginning is a little bit impractical.

**James Shaheen:** So, Rinpoche, of course, we want to cut through the laziness, and you talked some about that, and Shantideva suggests that we can counter laziness and cultivate diligence through what he calls the four allies and the two strengths. The four allies are aspiration, steadfastness, joy, and rest. So can we start with aspiration? You say that developing aspiration is the starting point of the bodhisattva path, and you mentioned that earlier, the joy that comes with that. So how can we tap into the power of aspiration as an ally?

**Dzigar Kongtrul Rinpoche:** Well, when you are faced with a challenge and you are disrupted by a challenge, to remember your initial attraction, your initial reasoning, your initial desire and aspiration to accomplish what you set to accomplish, reminding yourself of those things, taking some time deliberately to remind yourself of those things is very, very important, and I think that's why I think it is the first ally, instead of feeling the pressure and trying the act of being diligent and not really remembering why you are being diligent in the first place and what



inspired you in the first place and not taking the time to reignite your inspiration inside. That's what normally we end up doing. So he's suggesting to take a little time deliberately to remember your aspirations until that aspiration or the joy or the attraction or the desire that is enticing for you in your mind and heart comes back.

The second is self-confidence, trying to have some self-confidence and a can-do mentality, not seeing yourself as lesser or inadequate. The Buddha himself said, even if animals apply diligently, they can get enlightened. You are a human being, so you certainly can. Having that pride in the self and pride in one's ability in time, in training, in process, not as everything from the beginning perfect or seeking some perfection without the kind of a process. So this steadfastness is in relation to that. And then always having that sense that when you do engage, there's a concentration, right? There's a concentration, and then if you organize yourself in how you are doing with concentration, that concentration can be a way of calming yourself and calming your nerves, calming your energy, and then having something very meaningful thing that you want to do every day, that's like a drop of water in the container that accumulates into a pot or container of water that will increase in that way. Having that kind of joy in concentration, not overexerting so that you're burnt out but rather measuring your effort in relation to your stamina, and that over time can be increased and over time increased with a sense of peacefulness and joy and concentration like *shamatha* in this sense.

Sometimes, you get too into it. You get too involved, and you feel too blissed out sometimes in the case of meditation, so you could overextend yourself, overdo it. In those times, remind yourself that you need to take a break. The most important thing is not that everything can be accomplished right now, today. It is in time, in many days, in many months, in many, many years that you could get to where you want to get. It's not like everything can be accomplished in one effort or in one day. So, taking breaks, the restoration of the fatigue of the physical body and the mind as well, and then, if you do that, then next time, since you had a good time last time, you would be more also attracted to do that and continue. If you've done it too much without so much



enjoyment and pleasure or with the hardship, then the next time, the memory sets you off, not wanting to reengage in that. So taking breaks, many breaks, or certainly taking a break before your physical and mental fatigue sets in. So those are the four *pung*, or the allies, or the force that you could sort of employ from your own self to be consistent and be in your effort not erratic but consistent and smooth.

**James Shaheen:** So, I think of those of us who have a job, and we aren't on retreat all the time, only intermittently, and we have a practice where, say, I get up every morning and I sit, and every evening I sit. And I can't always do it with joy, because it doesn't come to me, even when I try to remember my aspiration, and there's laziness there, but I'm going to sit anyway. So what do you have to say about just doing it anyway? Sometimes you just have to do it and wait for the rest to happen, wait for the joy to return, or wait for results to motivate you. How about that? Or just the pure grit of getting through it sometimes. Does that have a role, or is that a misunderstanding?

**Dzigar Kongtrul Rinpoche:** I think that has a role. I think sometimes, that's very reasonable, and that's a good thing to do. But I generally suggest when you are in that kind of a state, you're either mentally or physically fatigued, so a little nap to restore the physical fatigue or a little shamatha practice first before engaging in whatever other practice you do to calm your nerves or calm your energy down and be more centered. I think it's very helpful to then engage in other practices, or just do or whatever the work that is ahead of you to do.

**James Shaheen:** Yeah, I was thinking of your saying, “Fake it until you make it.” So sometimes it comes down to that, but this is very helpful. So in addition to the four allies, Shantideva also discusses the two strengths: make an effort and be the master of yourself. Could you briefly walk us through these strengths? How can they support us in developing and sustaining diligence?

**Dzigar Kongtrul Rinpoche:** Well, I think if you look at the sports stars, the two sisters, the tennis players, the Williams sisters. One of the Williams sisters, I heard in an interview, she said





something like, “Discipline is a way to freedom,” and everybody was a little bit puzzled, and she said, well, if you're disciplined and if you apply yourself consistently, then you get good at it, and once you get good at it, then in her case, she won all the prizes that there is, and there's economic benefit, and there's also social benefits, and there's all the benefits that there is to win the championship.

In that way, discipline is first of all familiarizing yourself to the art of discipline with all of the internal workings and overcoming internal workings of the obstacles, and then keeping the aspiration or the steadfastness and the joy, and then taking breaks. When you are doing this for some time, whatever in the art of the discipline that you are applying yourself in the spiritual path or in other fields, it naturally—I mean, think about driving for ourselves and when we first learned to drive, how challenging that was, and it's not only just a challenge, there's a lot of dangers involved there. You could actually hurt yourself, and you could hurt others, and there's so much at stake. But then as you become familiar and you do it continuously and you learn the work of how to drive, now you drive as your second nature. So it all comes with time, it all comes with familiarization, it all comes under your power, rather than you applying yourself in this art, which seems daunting.

So the familiarization and getting good at improving yourself in the art of whatever you are applying, and then when the art becomes under your control, under your belt of how you want to execute and the way you want to execute and you know exactly how to do so, this, too, is the power, the process, and the outcome of the process becoming at the best, at the top.

**James Shaheen:** You know, another thing I'm hearing here, Rinpoche, is something that Shantideva has plenty to say about it, and that's patience.

**Dzigar Kongtrul Rinpoche:** I think in the modern world, we live in a competitive world, and whether we like it or not, we are always kind of comparing ourselves with others. In discipline, you only look towards others with an inspiration who are better than you, not with some kind of



envy or that you want to be there and you want to be them without the process, without the due process. So in that way, Shantideva says, for example, even the Buddha had to apply himself to really accomplish what he has accomplished, and all the masters have to apply what they have to accomplish. We, of course, have to apply this mindset. Without applying yourself, and without the due process in time to get there, this tendency to wishful thinking that you are there in the first place, or just there from the beginning, I think that really causes a lot of aches and challenges for us.

**James Shaheen:** Yeah, I think we want to be in first place without doing the work. That's a kind of laziness.

**Dzigar Kongtrul Rinpoche:** That is a way out of applying yourself.

**James Shaheen:** Right. You also link diligence to the four immeasurables, otherwise known as the four *brahmaviharas*, which you describe as the nitty gritty of bodhisattva practice. Can you tell us a bit about how the four immeasurables can help us get out of the mindset of comparison and self-absorption?

**Dzigar Kongtrul Rinpoche:** I think we all come with a self, and this self has to be managed, and without managing this self, this self is always going to be challenging and causing us so much pain from within and lots of obstacles in our lives from within. You know, even the life is from outside being as good as it could get, still from inside there's going to be so much, even maybe much more suffering and much more pain and much more unhappiness, because the challenge outside sometimes keeps you preoccupied, and when you don't have the challenge outside, and you have all the resources or all the needs being met, then it's just inside with yourself, and yourself doesn't have anything to aspire, then it can be in such a funk, and it's not to get rid of the self. I want to make that clear. But it's a way to reduce self-importance. It's a way to reduce the overwhelming habitual way of paying too much attention to yourself. You know, that needs to be managed because otherwise there's a lot of consequential suffering to experience and



furthermore to experience as everyone gets older and everyone gets sick and everyone dies, so there's a lot in there stored up for you. So a way to do that is that attention to the self, being of course valued for the health and well-being of one's mind and life, but also you have to share that with others, with humanity, and with others in the world, find a cause or find a thing that you can actually help humanity and help others in the world. And when you do that, your self becomes much healthier, and that is loving-kindness practice.

**James Shaheen:** You know, I was thinking about what you were saying, and the four immeasurables have been invaluable in helping me, and I'm sure many others, in breaking my own self-absorption, and you talked about, rather than comparing oneself negatively to others, something like *mudita*, or sympathetic joy, allows us to rejoice in the success of others and be inspired in thinking we, too, can do that. So it's not just about me and my success. And as you've mentioned, the four immeasurables can help us cultivate universal love toward all beings. So can you say more about what you referred to as embracing what you refer to as the universal self?

**Dzigar Kongtrul Rinpoche:** Well, universal meaning not single-pointedly all your focus being on yourself, sharing that and expanding yourself, including humanity, including others in your life, really paying attention, listening to them and respecting them as not an extension of yourself and your ego but rather as an individual who actually has aspirations of their own and feelings of joy and happiness of their own and desires of their own in life and then trying to accommodate them. That's what I mean by that responsibility or activism.

**James Shaheen:** So, to close, Rinpoche, would you be willing to read a passage from the book? It's the final paragraph on page 194.

**Dzigar Kongtrul Rinpoche:** I think I'm going to have Jennifer, since she's the editor, read this.

**James Shaheen:** Okay.



**Jennifer Shippee:** Hi, James.

**James Shaheen:** Hi, Jennifer. Good to hear your voice.

**Jennifer Shippee:** Yes, likewise. So this is the last paragraph of the book.

At some point, all that we have been working on and aspiring to becomes second nature. There is only joy. Diligence, or joyful exertion, is learning to train our mind, body, and speech to go in the direction we wish them to go. It is diligence that brings all aspirations to fruition, in both the conventional world and on the spiritual path. Diligence is what made all the great masters into who they became. Diligence is what made their practice effortless and natural, and most especially, joyful in applying themselves for the benefit of others. Diligence is not only about how to accomplish something; it is the art of finding true joy in everything we do.

**James Shaheen:** Thank you so much, Jennifer. Very nicely read. So, Rinpoche, I have a question then. How can we find true joy in everything we do? It's something I mentioned earlier, and I believe it's a possibility. I'm not a cynic, but why don't you tell us how that's possible?

**Dzigar Kongtrul Rinpoche:** Well, I think you have to create a life for yourself with relaxation. In Tibetan, we have this a term that means you have a home, you have an environment, you have a small or larger community, and wherever you are, you have to find your sense of belonging and sense of ease and relaxation without having to constantly be anxious. And the opposite of the kind of relaxation and ease that one needs to create within one's life that I'm talking about, is this feeling of like any moment the other shoe will drop, not living in that anxious mindset or state of a being. You have to work on that, and it's possible to work on that with meditation. However the world is, every meditator needs to work on having that in their life. And then from there, just simple things that you do in the home outside of meditation and also in meditation, like in the Zen. For example, whatever you do, you do it with a kind of mindfulness, and then that brings



further joy. It inflames and brings out that sense of the joy of being alive. So I would actually really recommend that.

I know that many people, because the world as it is and the current political climate as it is, many people are very anxious and very concerned, and there are lots of reasons to be concerned, but at the same time I think if we don't accomplish this in our own personal life, in our own home, for example, you need to be relaxed enough to fall in sleep, right? I mean, without sleep, you cannot function like that. Without that in one's life, without an hour or two when you come back to your own home, then you cannot be productive, and you cannot expand your positive energy outward. Just as sleep is a necessity, ease and relaxation in the home is very, very important, and then from there, you can do what you need to do to engage with mindfulness, and it can inflame that joy.

**James Shaheen:** Rinpoche, you mentioned waiting for the other shoe to drop, and, you know, sometimes the other shoe does drop, and we have to expect that in life, but it's the anticipation that's the hard part, and that's what I find meditation really helps with, because when the shoe drops, it's never as bad as the anticipation itself.

**Dzigar Kongtrul Rinpoche:** Absolutely. You know, this shall also pass, as they say, and it will.

**James Shaheen:** Well, thank you so much, Rinpoche. Anything else before we close?

**Dzigar Kongtrul Rinpoche:** Well, I would like to thank *Tricycle*, James, you personally, and the ladies here who have assisted. I hope this reaches out and comforts and encourages people in the spiritual path to be more consistent and productive and then in other fields as well. That's my longing and my aspiration and my prayer, and to accommodate this reach, I really am grateful to *Tricycle* and *Shambhala* for organizing this.

**James Shaheen:** OK, Kongtrul Rinpoche, thanks so much for joining. It's been a pleasure. For our listeners, be sure to pick up a copy of *Diligence*, available now. Thanks, Rinpoche.

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“Finding Joy in Everything We Do”

Episode #116 with Dzigar Kongtrul Rinpoche

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