

Matias F. Travieso-Diaz  
4110 Faith Ct.  
Alexandria, VA 22311  
(703) 472-6463  
[mtravies@gmail.com](mailto:mtravies@gmail.com)

998 words

## **On the Path to Nirvana**

by Matias Travieso-Diaz

At the monastery at the foot of the Himalayas, a disciple voiced his misgivings to his guru: “Master, I keep failing.”

“How so, Chodak?” asked the Lama.

“Time and again, I read the ‘Lamp for the Path’ and meditate on the actions it recommends, trying to carry out the Eightfold Path to nirvana. Understanding, however, eludes me. I get mired in distractions and confusion.”

“What meditation method do you use?”

“I sit alone, cross-legged, in a quiet place, having dimmed all lights, and try to set my mind at rest by deeply inhaling and exhaling; as restless thoughts float in my mind, I observe each one and let it go.”

“That’s a common way to meditate. It works for most people, but perhaps you need a more dynamic way to focus your thoughts and feelings. I suggest you conduct a *kora*, a circular voyage around the mountain surrounding the monastery. As you go up and down the mountain trails, you’ll be able to let go of distractions and focus on the teachings of the Path.”

“Won’t encountering other people also doing the *kora* impair my concentration?”

“It’s past midwinter. It will be cold and snowy on the *kora*. I doubt you will meet others along your path.”

“I still fear I’ll be unable to clear my mind of distractions.”

The Lama did not reply, but removed from his wrist an ancient *dzi* bracelet sporting seven black agate beads that showed etched ivory lines, diamonds, dots, and other patterns. He handed it to his disciple: “Here. Put it on your wrist and wear it during your kora.”

“What does it do?”

“I have infused my essence into this bracelet. As you climb the mountain, I’ll speak to you through the bracelet and help you clear your mind.”

“Is this magic?”

“Of a sort. The bracelet allows me to convey my thoughts to anyone wearing it. If you have it on your wrist, you’ll perceive any messages that I send to your mind.”

“Will I be able to respond?”

“Yes, by focusing your thoughts on me. And of course you may choose to disregard my suggestions. Do you want to give it a try?”

Chodak nodded in assent.

\*\*\*

It was late in the afternoon when Chodak began the kora. The sky was leaden and the air felt humid, presaging snow. The youth was not accustomed to strenuous exertions and the steep climb soon took a toll on his limited stamina. He stopped to catch his breath and his mind issued a lament: °°I’m tired. I may not be able to go much further!°°

A response from the Lama was transmitted by the bracelet: °°You need to lighten the load you carry. Renounce all animosities, all resentments, all the anger in your heart, for those negative feelings weigh you down.°°

Chodak had not lived long enough to have enemies or develop grudges against anyone, but strained all the same to cleanse his soul of negative feelings. This took a while, but at the end he felt at peace with the universe. He lowered the hiking stick to the ground and resumed his progress.

For a while, Chodak's step was elastic and he went up the mountain trail effortlessly, his mind occupied with the Eightfold Plan. Then, weariness set in again. He stopped and leaned against the trunk of an ancient cypress. °°I'm exhausted. I can't go on!°°

His lamentation elicited no response, and Chodak was starting his descent towards the monastery when the bracelet pulsed and a message formed in his mind. °°You must resolve to unburden yourself of all the things you possess, become the owner of nothing but the clothes you wear. That decision will further lighten the weight you carry, so you can resume your progress along the kora.°°

Chodak came from a very poor family and owned very little. Yet, renouncing all current and future wealth lent renewed vigor to his limbs and he continued marching towards the mountain summit and pursuing his meditation.

By now, night had fallen and Chodak stopped to light a torch. By its light, he could see the summit of the mountain, a fair distance away. It was also starting to snow. He quickened his pace.

He had to stop again to catch his breath. He knew there was a shelter at the summit where he could rest, but he was at least half an hour away and almost out of energy. °°I'm not going to make it! I'm so tired that am about to faint!°°

The Lama responded immediately: °°You still have loves and affections, ties to others in the world. Vow to give those up and you'll make it the top.°°

Chodak protested, in the throes of despair. °°If I give up all that I care in the world, what do I have left to live for?°°

°°You'll be further on the way to implementing the Plan. Accomplish this task and you will come close to your goal.°°

Chodak realized he would soon be left without suffering, love, or desires; however, the objective of the Plan would be achieved. With a supreme effort he willed himself free of all ties to others and resumed his trek, dragging himself upwards against the heavily falling snow.

He was only steps from the summit when he collapsed to the ground, unable to move any further. °°This is the end! I've failed! °°

New words of the Lama resonated in his head: °°Not yet! You have one more thing to give up!°°

°°What?°°

°°Remove your garments and lie on the ground. In a few minutes your body will freeze and your life will be over. You will have carried out the Plan to completion. You will be released from the effects of karma and the cycle of death and rebirth. You will have reached nirvana!°°

Chodak shuddered as snow covered his body and a gelid wind buffeted his face. It was time to sleep, but his kora had been a success.

END