



# 37 PRACTICES *of* A BODHI- SATTVA

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commented by  
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2016 Edition

# THE THIRTY-SEVEN PRACTICES OF A BODHISATTVA

Composed by Ngulchu Thogme Zangpo

Commented by Khenpo Sodargye

2016 Edition

Dedicated to

Khenpo Sodargye Rinpoche in deep gratitude and love

*May your compassion and wisdom illuminate everywhere  
and enlighten every sentient being.*



**KHENPO SODARGYE**

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# **The Thirty-Seven Practices of a Bodhisattva**

**(Root Text)**

**by Ngulchu Thogme Zangpo**



# Root Text

## A1. Opening Verses

## B1. Homage

## C1. Homage in General

*Namo Lokeshvaraya.*<sup>1</sup>

*[Namo Lokeshvaraya.<sup>2</sup>]*

## C2. Homage in Particular

Though he sees that in all phenomena there is no coming  
and going,

He strives solely for the sake of beings:

To the sublime teacher inseparable from Avalokiteshvara,  
the Protector of Beings,

I pay constant homage with respectful body, speech, and mind.

*[Seeing that all phenomena neither come nor go*

*Yet seeking only to benefit living beings,*

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<sup>1</sup> The first version of verses and textual outline are from The Heart of Compassion by Kyabje Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche.

<sup>2</sup> The second version of verses are from Traveling the Path of Compassion by His Holiness the 17th Gyalwang Karmapa.

The supreme master and the Protector Chenrezik  
I honor continually with body, speech, and mind.]

## **B2. Promise to Compose**

The perfect buddhas—source of happiness and  
ultimate peace—  
Exist through having accomplished the sacred Dharma,  
And that, in turn, depends on knowing how to practice it;  
This practice of the bodhisattvas I shall therefore now explain.

[Perfect buddhas, source of all benefit and happiness,  
Arise through accomplishing the genuine Dharma;  
Since this in turn depends on knowing how to practice,  
The practices of a bodhisattva will be explained.]

## **A2. Main Text**

### **B1. The Preparation**

#### **C1. The Need to Give Meaning to This Human Existence of Yours, So Rare and Difficult to Obtain**

##### **Practice 1**

Now that I have this great ship, a precious human life,  
so hard to obtain,  
I must carry myself and others across the ocean of samsara.

To that end, to listen, reflect, and meditate  
Day and night, without distraction, is the practice of  
a bodhisattva.

[Now that we have a vessel of leisure and resources,  
so difficult to find,  
So that we may bring ourselves and others across the ocean  
of samsara,  
Without a break during day or night  
To listen, reflect, and meditate is the practice of a bodhisattva.]

## **C2. Abandoning Your Native Land, the Source of the Three Poisons**

### **Practice 2**

In my native land waves of attachment to friends and kin surge,  
Hatred for enemies rages like fire,  
The darkness of stupidity, not caring what to adopt or avoid,  
thickens—  
To abandon my native land is the practice of a bodhisattva.

[Attachment to friends churns like water;  
Aversion to enemies burns like fire.  
Dark with ignorance—not knowing what to adopt  
or reject—  
To give up this homeland is the practice of a bodhisattva.]

### C3. Living in Solitary Places, the Source of All Good Qualities

#### Practice 3

When unfavorable places are abandoned, disturbing emotions  
gradually fade;

When there are no distractions, positive activities  
naturally increase;

As awareness becomes clearer, confidence in the Dharma  
grows—

To rely on solitude is the practice of a bodhisattva.

[By leaving harmful places, afflictions gradually decline.

With no distractions, virtuous activity naturally grows.

With a clear mind, certainty in the Dharma arises.

To rely on solitude is the practice of a bodhisattva.]

### C4. Giving up the Concerns of This Life by Reflecting on Impermanence

#### Practice 4

Close friends who have long been together will separate,

Wealth and possessions gained with much effort will  
be left behind,

Consciousness, a guest, will leave the hotel of the body—  
To give up the concerns of this life is the practice of  
a bodhisattva.

[Everyone will part from relatives and old friends;  
The wealth of long labor will be left behind;  
The guest, consciousness, leaves its lodging, the body, behind:  
To give up concern for this life is the practice of  
a bodhisattva.]

## **C5. Avoiding Unsuitable Friends, Whose Company Creates Conditions Unfavorable to Your Progress**

### **Practice 5**

In bad company, the three poisons grow stronger,  
Listening, reflection, and meditation decline,  
And loving-kindness and compassion vanish—  
To avoid unsuitable friends is the practice of a bodhisattva.

[Make friends with these and the three poisons grow;  
The activities of listening, reflecting, and meditating decline  
While love and compassion are destroyed.  
To cast off bad friends is the practice of a bodhisattva.]

## **C6. Relying on a Spiritual Teacher, Whose Presence Creates Conditions Favorable to Your Progress**

### **Practice 6**

Through reliance on a true spiritual friend one's faults  
will fade

And good qualities will grow like a waxing moon—  
To consider him even more precious  
Than one's own body is the practice of a bodhisattva.

[Rely on this one and defects disappear;  
Qualities increase like the waxing moon.  
To cherish a genuine spiritual friend  
More than our own body is the practice of a bodhisattva.]

## **C7. Going for Refuge, the Entrance to the Buddhist Teachings**

### **Practice 7**

Whom can worldly gods protect  
Themselves imprisoned in samsara?  
To take refuge in the Three Jewels  
Who never fail those they protect is the practice of a bodhisattva.

[Captive themselves in the prison of samsara,  
Whom could the worldly gods protect?

Therefore, when seeking protection, to go for refuge  
To the unfailing Three Jewels is the practice of a bodhisattva.]

## **B2. The Main Teachings, Illuminating the Path**

### **C1. The Path for Beings of Lesser Capacity**

#### **Practice 8**

The Buddha taught that the unendurable suffering of  
the lower realms  
Is the fruit of unvirtuous actions.  
Therefore, to never act unvirtuously,  
Even at the cost of one's life, is the practice of a bodhisattva.

[The sufferings of the lower realms so difficult to bear  
Come from misdeeds, thus the Buddha taught.  
Therefore, even at the risk of our life,  
Never to commit these actions is the practice of a bodhisattva.]

### **C2. The Path for Beings of Medium Capacity**

#### **Practice 9**

Like dew on grass, the delights of the three worlds  
By their very nature evaporate in an instant.  
To strive for the supreme level of liberation,  
Which never changes, is the practice of a bodhisattva.

[Happiness in the three realms is like dew on a blade  
of grass—

Its nature is to evaporate in an instant.

To strive for the supreme state of liberation

That never changes is the practice of a bodhisattva.]

### **C3. The Path for Beings of Superior Capacity**

#### **D1. The Bodhichitta of Intention**

##### **Practice 10**

If all the mothers who have loved me since beginningless time  
are suffering,

What is the use of my own happiness?

So, with the aim of liberating limitless sentient beings,

To set my mind on enlightenment is the practice of  
a bodhisattva.

[From time beyond time, our mothers have cared for us;

If they suffer, what good is our own happiness?

Thus, to liberate living beings beyond number,

To engender bodhichitta is the practice of a bodhisattva.]

#### **D2. The Bodhichitta of Application**

##### **E1. Relative Bodhichitta**



## **F1. The Meditation Practice of Exchanging Oneself and Others**

### **Practice 11**

All suffering without exception arises from desiring happiness  
for oneself,

While perfect buddhahood is born from the thought of  
benefiting others.

Therefore, to really exchange

My own happiness for the suffering of others is the practice  
of a bodhisattva.

[All suffering comes from wanting happiness for ourselves;  
Perfect buddhas arise from the intention to benefit others.  
Therefore, to truly exchange our happiness  
For the suffering of others is the practice of a bodhisattva.]

## **F2. The Post Meditation Practice of Using Unfavorable Circumstances on the Path**

### **G1. Using on the Path the Four Things That You Do Not Want to Happen**

#### **H1. How to Use Loss on the Path**

### **Practice 12**

If someone driven by great desire

Seizes all my wealth, or induces others to do so,

To dedicate to him my body, possessions,  
And past, present, and future merit is the practice of  
a bodhisattva.

[If out of great desire someone steals all our wealth  
Or makes another do so,  
To dedicate our body, possessions, and all merit of  
the three times  
To this person is the practice of a bodhisattva.]

## H2. How to Use Suffering on the Path

### Practice 13

If, in return for not the slightest wrong of mine,  
Someone were to cut off even my very head,  
Through the power of compassion to take all  
his negative actions  
Upon myself is the practice of a bodhisattva.

[Even if another were to cut off our head  
Though we had not the slightest fault,  
To take on their negativity  
With compassion is the practice of a bodhisattva.]

### H3. How to Use Disgrace on the Path

#### Practice 14

Even if someone says all sorts of derogatory things about me  
And proclaims them throughout the universe,  
In return, out of loving-kindness,  
To extol that person's qualities is the practice of a bodhisattva.

[Although someone broadcasts throughout a billion worlds  
A legion of unpleasant things about us,  
In return, with a mind full of love,  
To tell of their qualities is the practice of a bodhisattva.]

### H4. How to Use Disparagement on the Path

#### Practice 15

Even if in the midst of a large gathering  
Someone exposes my hidden faults with insulting language,  
To bow to him respectfully,  
Regarding him as a spiritual friend, is the practice of  
a bodhisattva.

[Before a large crowd, if someone were to speak harsh words  
And expose our hidden faults,  
To see this person as a spiritual friend  
And bow with respect is the practice of a bodhisattva.]

## **G2. Using on the Path the Two Things That Are Difficult to Bear**

### **H1. How to Use on the Path Being Wronged in Return**

#### **for Kindness**

#### **Practice 16**

Even if one I've lovingly cared for like my own child  
Regards me as an enemy,  
To love him even more,  
As a mother loves a sick child, is the practice of a bodhisattva.

[If another whom we cherished as our child  
Came to see us as an enemy,  
Like a mother whose child is gravely ill,  
To love this person even more is the practice of a bodhisattva.]

### **H2. How to Use Humiliation on the Path**

#### **Practice 17**

Even if my peers or my inferiors  
Out of pride do all they can to debase me,  
To respectfully consider them like my teachers  
On the crown of my head is the practice of a bodhisattva.

[If people who are our equal or less  
Through pride would put us down,

With respect as for a teacher

To place them above us is the practice of a bodhisattva.]

### **G3. Using Deprivation and Prosperity on the Path**

#### **H1. How to Use Deprivation on the Path**

##### **Practice 18**

Even when utterly destitute and constantly maligned by others,  
Afflicted by terrible illness and prey to evil forces.

To still draw upon myself the suffering and wrongdoing of  
all beings

And not lose heart is the practice of a bodhisattva.

[Though stricken with poverty and always scorned,  
Plagued by grave illness and bad spirits too,  
Not to lose heart but take on the misdeeds  
And misery of all beings is the practice of a bodhisattva.]

#### **H2. How to Use Prosperity on the Path**

##### **Practice 19**

Though I may be famous, and revered by many,  
And as rich as the God of Wealth himself,  
To see that the wealth and glory of the world are  
without essence,

And to be free of arrogance, is the practice of a bodhisattva.

[Although famous with crowds bowing down  
And affluent as a god of wealth,  
To see samsara's riches as devoid of essence  
And remain free of arrogance is the practice of a bodhisattva.]

## **G4. Using Hatred and Desire on the Path**

### **H1. How to Use Objects of Hatred on the Path**

#### **Practice 20**

If one does not conquer one's own hatred,  
The more one fights outer enemies, the more they will increase.  
Therefore, with the armies of loving-kindness and compassion,  
To tame one's own mind is the practice of a bodhisattva.

[Not conquering the foe of our anger  
Yet fighting with enemies outside, we'll just make more.  
Therefore, with an army of love and compassion  
To tame our mind is the practice of a bodhisattva.]

### **H2. How to Use Objects of Desire on the Path**

#### **Practice 21**

Sense pleasures and desirable things are like saltwater—  
The more one tastes them, the more one's thirst increases.  
To abandon promptly

All objects which arouse attachment is the practice of  
a bodhisattva.

[Desired objects are like water mixed with salt:  
To the extent we enjoy them craving increases.  
To give up instantly everything  
That arouses attachment is the practice of a bodhisattva.]

## **E2. Absolute Bodhichitta**

### **F1. The Meditation Practice of Remaining in a State Free of Conceptual Elaborations without Any Clinging**

#### **Practice 22**

All that appears is the work of one's own mind;  
The nature of mind is primordially free from  
conceptual limitations.  
To recognize this nature  
And not to entertain concepts of subject and object  
is the practice of a bodhisattva.

[Things as they appear are our own mind;  
The mind itself is forever free of fabrications.  
Knowing this, not to engage the attributes  
Of a subject or object is the practice of a bodhisattva.]

## **F2. The Post Meditation Practice of Abandoning Any Belief in the Objects of Desire and Aversion as Truly Existing**

### **G1. Abandoning Any Belief in the Objects of Desire as Truly Existing**

#### **Practice 23**

When encountering objects which please us,  
To view them like rainbows in summer,  
Not ultimately real, however beautiful they appear,  
And to relinquish craving and attachment, is the practice of  
a bodhisattva.

[When encountering a pleasing object,  
See it as a rainbow in summer—  
A beautiful appearance, but not real—  
To give up attachment is the practice of a bodhisattva.]

### **G2. Abandoning Any Belief in the Objects of Aversion as Truly Existing**

#### **Practice 24**

The various forms of suffering are like the death of one's child  
in a dream:  
By clinging to deluded perceptions as real we exhaust ourselves.



Therefore, when encountering unfavorable circumstances,  
To view them as illusions is the practice of a bodhisattva.

[All suffering is like our child dying in a dream;  
To take these delusive appearances as real, how exhausting!  
Therefore, when dealing with difficult situations,  
To see them as delusions is the practice of a bodhisattva.]

### **D3. The Precepts for Training in Those Practices**

#### **E1. Training in the Six Transcendent Perfections**

##### **F1. Transcendent Generosity**

###### **Practice 25**

If those who wish for enlightenment must give away  
even their own bodies,  
How much more should it be true of material objects?  
Therefore, without expectation of result or reward,  
To give with generosity is the practice of a bodhisattva.

[If those aspiring to enlightenment give even their body away,  
What need is there to mention outer objects?  
Therefore, without hope of return or a good result,  
To be generous is the practice of a bodhisattva.]

## F2. Transcendent Discipline

### Practice 26

If, lacking discipline, one cannot accomplish one's own good,  
It is laughable to think of accomplishing the good of others.  
Therefore, to observe discipline

Without samsaric motives is the practice of a bodhisattva.

[If lacking discipline, we can't even help ourselves,  
Wishing to benefit others is just a joke.  
Therefore, to maintain a discipline  
Free of desire for samsara is the practice of a bodhisattva.]

## F3. Transcendent Patience

### Practice 27

For a bodhisattva who desires the joys of virtue,  
All who harm him are like a precious treasure.  
Therefore, to cultivate patience toward all,  
Without resentment, is the practice of a bodhisattva.

[For bodhisattvas aspiring to a wealth of virtue,  
Anything that harms is a treasury of jewels.  
Therefore, never turning aggressive or angry,  
To be patient is the practice of a bodhisattva.]

## F4. Transcendent Diligence

### Practice 28

Merely for their own sake, even shravakas  
and pratyekabuddhas  
Make efforts like someone whose hair is on fire  
trying to put it out:  
Seeing this, for the sake of all beings,  
To practice diligence, the source of excellent qualities,  
is the practice of a bodhisattva.

[If Hearers and Solitary Realizers for their benefit alone  
Practice diligence as if their heads were on fire,  
To develop diligence, the wellspring of all qualities  
That benefit every being, is the practice of a bodhisattva.]

## F5. Transcendent Concentration

### Practice 29

Knowing that through profound insight thoroughly  
grounded in sustained calm  
The disturbing emotions are completely conquered,  
To practice the concentration which utterly transcends  
The four formless states is the practice of a bodhisattva.

[Knowing that deep insight fully endowed with calm abiding  
Completely conquers all afflictions,

To cultivate a concentration that transcends  
The four formless states is the practice of a bodhisattva.]

## **F6. Transcendent Wisdom**

### **Practice 30**

In the absence of wisdom, perfect enlightenment  
cannot be attained  
Through the other five perfections alone.  
Therefore, to cultivate wisdom combined with skillful means  
And free from the three concepts is the practice  
of a bodhisattva.

[Without wisdom the five perfections  
Cannot bring forth full awakening.  
To cultivate wisdom endowed with skillful means  
And free of concepts in the three domains is the practice  
of a bodhisattva.]

## **E2. Training in the Four Instructions Taught in the Sutra**

### **F1. To Examine Oneself for One's Own Defects and to Give Them Up**

### **Practice 31**

If I do not examine my own defects,

Though outwardly a Dharma practitioner, I may act contrary  
to the Dharma.

Therefore, continuously to examine my own faults  
And give them up is the practice of a bodhisattva.

[Not examining our confusion, we could masquerade  
As a practitioner while not in harmony with the Dharma.  
Therefore, to continually examine our confusion  
And discard it is the practice of a bodhisattva.]

## **F2. To Give Up Speaking of a Bodhisattvas Faults**

### **Practice 32**

If, impelled by negative emotions, I relate the faults  
Of other bodhisattvas, I will myself degenerate.  
Therefore, to not talk about the faults of anyone  
Who has entered the Mahayana is the practice of a bodhisattva.

[If afflictions compel us to fault other bodhisattvas,  
We ourselves will be diminished.  
Therefore, not to mention the faults of those  
Who have entered the Mahayana path is the practice  
of a bodhisattva.]

### F3. To Give Up Attachment to a Sponsor's Property

#### Practice 33

Offerings and respect may bring discord  
And cause listening, reflection, and meditation to decline.  
Therefore, to avoid attachment  
To the homes of friends and benefactors is the practice  
of a bodhisattva.

[Disputes arise from wanting honor and gain;  
The activities of listening, reflecting, and meditating decline.  
Therefore, to give up attachment to the homes  
Of friends, relatives, and donors is the practice of a bodhisattva.]

### F4. To Give Up Harsh Speech

#### Practice 34

Harsh words disturb the minds of others  
And spoil our own bodhisattva practice.  
Therefore, to give up rough speech,  
Which others find unpleasant, is the practice of a bodhisattva.

[Harsh words trouble the minds of others  
And diminish a bodhisattva's conduct.  
Therefore, to give up rough words  
Not pleasing to others is the practice of a bodhisattva.]

### E3. Training in How to Be Rid of the Negative Emotions

#### Practice 35

When emotions become habitual, they are hard to  
get rid of with antidotes.

Therefore, with mindfulness and vigilance, to seize the weapon  
of the antidote

And crush attachment and other negative emotions

The moment they arise is the practice of a bodhisattva.

[Once they've become a habit, afflictions resist their remedies.

Alert attention, the noble being, seizes the weapon of  
an antidote

And slays in a flash its enemy, every affliction—

Excessive desire and all the others; such is the practice  
of a bodhisattva.]

### E4. Training in Accomplishing Others' Good with Mindfulness and Vigilance

#### Practice 36

In short, wherever I am, whatever I do,

To be continually mindful and alert,

Asking, "What is the state of my mind?"

And accomplishing the good of others is the practice  
of a bodhisattva.

[In brief, wherever we are and whatever we do,  
While staying continually mindful and alert  
To the state of our mind,  
To benefit others is the practice of a bodhisattva.]

## **E5. Dedicating the Merit to Perfect Enlightenment**

### **Practice 37**

Dedicating to enlightenment  
Through wisdom purified of the three concepts  
All merit achieved by such endeavor,  
To remove the suffering of numberless beings, is the practice  
of a bodhisattva.

[To dispel the suffering of limitless beings  
With a wisdom not tainted by concepts of the three domains,  
To dedicate for full awakening all merit  
Gained by this effort is the practice of a bodhisattva.]

## **A3. Concluding Verses**

### **B1. How and for Whom This Text Was Composed**



Following the teachings of the holy beings,  
I have arranged the points taught in the sutras, tantras,  
and shastras  
As The Thirty-seven Verses on the Practice of a Bodhisattva  
For the benefit of those who wish to train on  
the bodhisattva path.

[Following the meaning of the sutras and treatises  
And the teachings of genuine masters too,  
I have given these thirty-seven verses of a bodhisattva's practice  
For the benefit of those who would train on this path.]

## **B2. The Unerring Nature of These Practices**

Since my understanding is poor, and I have little education,  
This is no composition to delight the learned;  
But as it is based on the sutras and teachings of holy beings  
I think it is genuinely the practice of the bodhisattvas.

[Since my intelligence is limited and little trained,  
The artistry of this text will not please the learned.  
Yet relying on the sutras and teachings of genuine masters,  
These practices, I trust, are free of confusion.]

### **B3. A Humble Prayer for Forgiveness**

However, it is hard for someone unintelligent like me  
To fathom the great waves of the bodhisattvas' activities,  
So I beg the forgiveness of the holy ones  
For my contradictions, irrelevances, and other mistakes.

[For an inferior intellect like mine it is difficult  
To measure the vast activity of a bodhisattva,  
So I pray that genuine masters will tolerate  
All the defects here, the contradictions, non sequiturs,  
and so forth.]

### **B4. Dedicating the Merit of Having Composed This Text**

Through the merit arising from this  
And through the power of the sublime bodhichitta,  
relative and absolute,  
May all beings become like the Lord Avalokiteshvara,  
Who is beyond the extremes of samsara and nirvana.

[By the virtue arising from these verses,  
Through ultimate and relative bodhichitta,  
May all beings become equal to the Protector Chenrezik,  
Who dwells in neither extreme of existence or peace.]

## **B5. The Colophon**

*For his own benefit and that of others, Thogme, a teacher of scripture and logic, composed this text at Rinchen Phug, in Ngulchu.*

*[For the benefit of self and other, the monk Thogme, a proponent of scriptures and reasoning, composed these verses at Ngulchu Rinchen Cave.]*

**Commentary on *The Thirty-Seven*  
*Practices of a Bodhisattva***

by Khenpo Sodargye



# Opening

Commentary on  
*The Thirty-Seven Practices of a Bodhisattva*



## THE GENERAL BACKGROUND

This great treatise, *The Thirty-Seven Practices of a Bodhisattva*, is the heart essence of the Mahayana teaching. It summarizes the entire bodhisattva path and provides the excellent pith instructions for Mahayana practice. Bodhichitta will naturally increase and become stronger in our mind after we completely understand this treatise. Even if one doesn't understand its real meaning, just by hearing the verses word by word, one's compassion and loving-kindness will naturally increase.

His Holiness Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche gave great importance to this teaching and he himself had received this teaching from different masters over 150 times. I received this teaching, including oral transmission, more than 100 times from His Holiness Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche. His Holiness frequently taught this text at Larung Gar and also when he visited monasteries or Dharma centers in different places. He would give teachings, sometimes very briefly or just reading the transmission and sometimes in great detail, depending on how much time he had. Most of the time I accompanied His Holiness as his attendant and translator so

that's why I was able to receive the teaching more than 100 times from His Holiness Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche.

It is said that when Thogme Zangpo was writing this text, he did not have enough food to eat or good clothes to wear; he was, in fact, very poor. Various people proposed that he learn how to give initiations and perform rituals in order to earn money easily. Rather than doing this, he composed *The Thirty-Seven Practices of a Bodhisattva* which sums up the whole bodhisattva path. He first presented these teachings to some of his closest students and from that time onward it is said that material resources came to him spontaneously.

Once when Thogme Zangpo was heavily sick, one of his disciples asked him to give a final teaching as his testament. He said, "I don't have anything to say, and my teachings such as *The Thirty-Seven Practices of a Bodhisattva* could be my last words."

## THE TITLE

### The Thirty-Seven Practices of a Bodhisattva

#### Bodhisattva

This term *bodhisattva* in the Tibetan version literally means “children of the Victorious Ones”. Buddhas are those who have totally conquered the enemies of ignorance and the other emotions. As a result they are often referred to as “Victorious Ones”.

Buddha Shakyamuni had three types of son: the son of the Buddha’s body—Rahula; the son of the Buddha’s speech—all hearers such as Arhats; and the son of the Buddha’s mind—all bodhisattvas. Just as a great king with a thousand children would choose the one with the most perfect qualities to be his heir, a buddha regards bodhisattvas as his authentic heirs. So strictly speaking, only bodhisattvas are the sons of a buddha.

Narrowly speaking, those who have attained enlightenment from the first bhumi to tenth bhumi are called bodhisattvas. Broadly speaking, as long as one generates bodhichitta in one’s mind, this



person can be called a bodhisattva from that very moment. From then onwards they are the merit field, worthy of being offered and respected by gods and humankind. Like it is said in *The Way of the Bodhisattva*,

*Should bodhichitta come to birth*

*In those who suffer, chained in prisons of samsara*

*In that instant they are called the children of the Blissful One,*

*Revered by all the world, by gods and humankind.*

## Practice

*Practice* refers to a bodhisattva's behavior. It indicates the main text will address the questions such as: Being a bodhisattva, how should one behave? What is correct conduct according to the Mahayana teaching? How should one discipline himself or herself when travelling the Mahayana path toward buddhahood?

## HOMAGE

### *A1. Opening Verses*

#### *B1. Homage*

#### *C1. Homage in General*

*Namo Lokeshvaraya.*

*Namo* means I pay homage, or make a prostration, to our own special refuge; *loka* signifies the world or universe; *ishvara* means the all-powerful master, or lord. Thus the first line means, “I pay homage to you, the Lord of the Universe.” The Lord of the Universe referred to here is Avalokiteshvara.

#### *C2. Homage in Particular*

Though he sees that in all phenomena there is no  
coming and going,

He strives solely for the sake of beings:

To the sublime teacher inseparable from Avalokiteshvara,  
the Protector of Beings,

**I pay constant homage with respectful body, speech,  
and mind.**

## **The Wisdom of Emptiness**

This is a specific homage to the author's masters. The first line describes the supreme wisdom that his masters achieved, which is seeing that *in all phenomena there is no coming and going*. This is the ultimate nature of all phenomena, and those who realized such nature have achieved the profound wisdom of emptiness.

Ultimately speaking, the true nature of all phenomena is that there is no coming and no going, no birth and no death, and that it is beyond all conceptual thoughts and free from all fabrications. This is exactly what Buddha Shakyamuni realized when he achieved buddhahood. And here, his masters also realize the true nature of all phenomena, which is beyond eight fabrications such as coming and going, eternalism and nihilism, existence and nonexistence, oneness and diversity.

The ability to realize such truth belongs to the true nature of the mind. In other words, they realized the true nature of the mind and achieved the omniscient wisdom of knowing everything. This is something that we all have because our nature of the mind is never apart from us. However, at this moment, there are certain conditions obscuring this knowledge. The good news is

that these obscurations are not part of mind's true nature; they are obscurations to the mind but not a quality of the mind. So the obscurations have the quality of being able to be purified, or removed. This is exactly what the enlightened beings, or the great masters try to help us deluded beings understand. Although they achieved full enlightenment, they won't abide in peace or nirvana. Enlightened beings become so filled with compassion that their sole desire is to help others. They have no other purpose or activity except to work for the benefit of those caught in samsara, like us, who still do not understand phenomena as they truly are.

## The Compassion of Benefiting All Living Beings

The second line describes his extraordinary compassion: "He strives solely for the sake of beings". Such compassion is not limited or preferential—it is not bound by like and dislike, or by partiality for one over another. Their compassion is all-encompassing, like the vast sky.

The union of wisdom and compassion is a unique feature of those enlightened beings. In *The Ornament of Clear Realization*, it is said, for a fully enlightened being, because of his supreme wisdom, he won't be confined in the three worlds of samsara; and because of his strong compassion, he won't abide in nirvana like arhats.

## His Supreme Masters and Avalokiteshvara

The third and fourth lines say the author pay homage to his sublime teacher, who is inseparable from Avalokiteshvara with respectful body, speech and mind. Thogme Zangpo has many great masters in his life, and two of them were his root gurus. Thanks to these two gurus, who were inseparable from Avalokiteshvara, Thogme Zangpo generated the genuine Bodhichitta in his mind.

In line 4, *constant*, or in some version translated as *continually*, means that from now until the author has reached full enlightenment, with the three doors of his body, speech, and mind he will always respectfully bow down to his masters.

Avalokiteshvara is known as the embodiment of the infinite compassion of all buddhas. He manifests in infinite ways for the sake of beings, and appears in a variety of forms. For example, the *Chapter of Universal Door* in the *Lotus Sutra* says, he manifests thirty-two appearances in the world and rescues sentient beings in whichever way is needed.

As human beings, if we develop devotion and faith in Avalokiteshvara, we can receive his blessings and realize all his enlightened qualities. The Mani mantra, *Om Mani Padme Hum*, is a manifestation of Avalokiteshvara himself. The six syllables of the mantra are

created from his blessings and have the power to liberate. Whenever anyone, even an ignorant wild animal, sees these six syllables or hears the sound of the mantra, the seed of liberation is sown in his mind and he is protected from rebirth in the lower realms of existence. The six syllables of the Mani mantra, even when written by an ordinary human hand, are not ordinary syllables but have been consecrated by Avalokiteshvara's wisdom.

## PROMISE TO COMPOSE

### *B2. Promise to Compose*

The perfect buddhas—source of happiness  
and ultimate peace—  
Exist through having accomplished the sacred Dharma,  
And that, in turn, depends on knowing  
how to practice it;  
This practice of the bodhisattvas I shall  
therefore now explain.

### What Is Buddha?

There are many perspectives to describe a buddha's incredible features and merits. This verse is saying that a buddha is the source of happiness and ultimate peace. The other version uses the words *benefits and happiness*, which is more close to Chinese expression. That is, all happiness and benefit in the world comes from the perfect buddhas.

Here *benefit* refers to the temporary happiness in realms of human and heaven, such as good health, long life and wealth; and *happiness* refers to ultimate peace, ultimate bliss, or full enlightenment, which is the complete liberation from samsara.

The word *source* is not saying that all our benefits and enlightenment can be guaranteed by buddhas. Some may think buddhas have all kinds of magical powers and their happiness can be bestowed by buddhas, while they themselves needn't make any effort. This is not true. Even the perfect buddhas do not have the power to bestow happiness on us. However, they themselves are free from all sufferings and so, when one is fully enlightened and becomes a buddha, one would eradicate all sufferings and attain all happiness.

## **How to Achieve Buddhahood?**

It is only through practicing the sacred and genuine Dharma that one can achieve buddhahood. It is not by invading, cheating or robbing others, neither by trading nor using some relationships. Instead, one must practice the Dharma to attain enlightenment, which is also the best way to benefit others and oneself.

Temporarily speaking, practicing the genuine Dharma prevents us from being reborn in the lower realms, including the hell, hungry ghost, and animal realms. We can gain a precious human rebirth



in which we can again practice the Dharma. Ultimately speaking, by practicing the Dharma, we can attain full enlightenment and the liberation from samsara.

So we should learn and know how to practice the Dharma. To help us accomplish this aim, Thogme Zangpo intends to describe the practices of bodhisattvas, and teaches us supreme pith instructions in the following text.

In summary, the source of all temporary and ultimate happiness is the perfect Buddha, and the cause of attaining buddhahood is learning and practicing the sacred Dharma. In order to let everyone understand the Dharma, driven by his great compassion, Thogme Zangpo composed these thirty-seven verses, all of which describe *the practice of a Bodhisattva*.



# Thirty-Seven Practices

Commentary on  
*The Thirty-Seven Practices of a Bodhisattva*



# PRACTICE 1

## GIVING MEANING TO THIS HUMAN EXISTENCE

*A2. Main Text*

*B1. The Preparation*

*C1. The Need to Give Meaning to This Human Existence of  
Yours, So Rare and Difficult to Obtain*

Now that I have this great ship, a precious human life,  
so hard to obtain,

I must carry myself and others across the ocean  
of samsara.

To that end, to listen, reflect, and meditate  
Day and night, without distraction, is the practice  
of a bodhisattva.

## What's a Precious Human Life?

The original Tibetan version for precious human body is “the freedoms and the endowments”, a reference to the eight freedoms and the ten endowments that compose it. Sometimes it is also translated as *leisure and resources*.

### 1 Freedoms

In order to practice the Dharma, we need to know what to cultivate and what to eliminate from all the things we usually do. Without the capacity to do certain things and to abstain from others we are not free to practice. This is the meaning of freedom. Human beings have this capacity of adopting something and rejecting something else, and that is why a human life is the most suitable one for Dharma practice.

The eight states in which there is no freedom to practice the Dharma are: (1) to be born in a hell realm; (2) to be born as a tortured spirit, or hungry ghost; (3) to be born as an animal; (4) to be born as a long-lived god; (5) to be born in a dark kalpa in which no buddha has appeared; (6) to be born among barbarians (in border countries); (7) to hold wrong views, and (8) to be born with impaired sense faculties.

Beings reborn in hell have no opportunity to practice the Dharma because they are constantly tormented by intense heat or cold.

The hungry ghosts, or pretas, have no opportunity to practice the Dharma because of the suffering they experience from hunger and thirst.

Animals have no opportunity to practice the Dharma because they undergo slavery and suffer from the attacks of other animals.

The long-lived gods have no opportunity to practice the Dharma because they spend their time in a state of mental blankness.

Those born during a dark kalpa have no opportunity to practice the Dharma because they never even hear of the Three Jewels.

Those born in barbarians have no opportunity to practice the Dharma because the doctrine of the Buddha is unknown in such places.

Those born with wrong views have no opportunity to practice the Dharma because their minds are so influenced by those mistaken beliefs.

Those born with impaired sense faculties have no opportunity to practice the Dharma because their faculties are incomplete.

## 2 Endowments

Of the ten endowments, or advantages, conducive to Dharma practice, five pertain to the individual, and five depend on circumstances, so they are called five individual advantages and five circumstantial advantages.

The five individual advantages are: (1) to be born as a human being; (2) to be born in a central place where the Dharma flourishes; (3) to be born with all one's faculties intact; (4) not to have a lifestyle that is in conflict with the Dharma, and (5) to have faith in the teachings.

The five circumstantial advantages depend upon circumstances outside oneself. They are: (6) a buddha has appeared in this world; (7) he has taught the Dharma; (8) the Dharma has remained and still exists in your time; (9) you have entered the Dharma because there are sangha who practice it, and (10) you have been accepted by a spiritual teacher.

Not all human lives are precious because not all people study the Dharma. A precious human life indicates an individual with great faith in the Dharma; the wisdom with which to analyze and comprehend its teachings; and the diligence and joyful effort with which to practice it.

### 3 So Hard to Obtain

You have not obtained this precious human existence just by chance. It is the result of having heard a buddha's name in a past life, having taken refuge in him, accumulated virtuous actions, and developed some wisdom. There is no certainty that you will obtain this vessel again. If you fail to practice the Dharma in this life, it is certain that you will not obtain a human existence in the next life.

The Buddha said that it is more difficult for a being to obtain human existence than it would be for a turtle coming up from the depths of the ocean to put its head through the opening of a wooden yoke tossed around by huge waves on the surface. Also, in the *Nirvana Sutra*, the Buddha said that the difficulty of obtaining human existence is compared to that of getting dried peas thrown at a smooth wall to stick to it, or to that of balancing a pile of peas on the tip of an upright needle.

Therefore, such an opportunity should not be wasted. To neglect such an opportunity would therefore be very foolish. When some great teachers of the past reflected on the rarity of human existence, they did not even feel like sleeping; they could not bear to waste a single moment. They put all their energy into spiritual practice.

## Why Do We Need to Cross the Ocean of Samsara?

Samsara is a Sanskrit word which literally means “wandering through”—in reference to the passage through many states of existence that is involved in the cycle of death and rebirth. Simply it means the repeating cycle of birth and death. Mostly it is described as a wheel. People inside it are driven by karma going round and round, without a moment’s rest. It can be classified into the three realms of existence, or the three worlds, which are the desire realm; the form realm; and the formless realm. No matter where we are, the only thing we have to experience is suffering and, because each of us wants to be free from suffering, we need to liberate ourselves and others from the ocean of samsara.

In Buddhism, there are three types of suffering: the suffering upon suffering; the suffering of change; and the all-pervasive suffering of the composite.

The lower realms are mainly afflicted by suffering upon suffering—a ceaseless round of sufferings, one on top of another: the heat and cold of the hells; the thirst and hunger of tortured spirits; and the fear of being killed of the animal realm.

The higher realms are particularly subject to the suffering of change. Among human beings there are four root sufferings: birth, old age,



sickness, and death. These four powerful currents of existence are strong enough to carry us helplessly away—there is no way we can reverse their flow. Additionally, we suffer when we do not get what we want, whether food, clothing, wealth, or influence; when we get what we do not want, such as criticism, physical illness, or unpleasant circumstances; when we cannot be with the people we love; and when we have to be with people we dislike.

The demigods, or asuras, suffer from constant fighting and jealousy. The higher gods suffer from the change they endure upon death. When their long celestial life of bliss and enjoyment ends, they will likely fall again into the lower realms.

The formless realms are characterized by the latent, all-pervasive suffering of the composite. Beings remain in states of deep, blissful contemplation, but once the good karma that has caused and therefore underlies this peaceful condition is exhausted, they will again have to experience the anguish of samsara.

Contemplating the sufferings of samsara, we will naturally develop a strong wish to be liberated from it. It is important for us to become more and more clearly convinced that the only thing worth achieving is enlightenment. Rather than meaninglessly wasting our energy, we should concentrate on practicing the Dharma.

## How to Follow the Procedure of Listening, Reflecting and Meditating?

Simply speaking, we need to first listen. Then we use our intelligence to analyze what we have heard, which is reflecting. Finally, we meditate on what we have reflected. This is how a bodhisattva practices.

### 1 Listening, Reflecting and Meditating

#### 1.1 Why Do We Need This Procedure?

All of the Dharma teachings describe the direct experiences of the enlightened beings, which are pretty straightforward, very logical and evident, and easy to understand. However, sometimes the Dharma seems so hard for us. This is mainly due to our old habits, our old pattern of thinking. We ordinary people have adapted to this mundane world manifested by samsara. Our interest and intelligence are limited to what we see in this manifestation and we never give much thought beyond this world. That's why we don't know how to practice the Dharma and feel it is distant from ourselves. It is not surprising because all of these teachings are beyond our common sense in our daily life. What we learn in the Dharma is to transcend our common sense. In other words, the Dharma teaching aims to guide us to go beyond this world.

Nevertheless, no matter how unfamiliar we feel the Dharma, we can get used to it by following a proper way. This process comprises of three steps: listening, reflecting and meditating, which are the core of Dharma learning and practice.

## **1.2 How to Follow This Procedure?**

Through listening, we realize the true reality of this world. Through contemplating, we digest the teaching we hear, develop confidence on it and thus think and act according to the new principles we have learned. Through meditating, we transcend our mind and replace old habits with Dharma teachings. Eventually our thinking will align with the Buddhist teaching and our ignorance will be eradicated permanently.

Meditating is the key, and listening and contemplating are pre-requisites. So none of them can be skipped. Excellent listening and contemplating require us to fully understand the teaching, reproduce the original meanings from buddha and bodhisattvas by ourselves.

These three steps are not unique to Dharma learning. It's the common process for us to learn anything new. To learn any worldly skill one needs to go through these same steps. For example, if you want to become a pilot then first, you study the mechanism of an airplane and the instructions of how to control it. Then

you memorize the theory. This is listening. Next you review the knowledge and familiarize yourself with everything in a real aircraft. This is contemplation. Finally, you fly with your instructor and, after repeated practice, you'll turn those instructions into your new habits and reinforce them. This is meditating.

## **2 Without Distraction**

How can we one-pointedly focus on Dharma practice without being distracted?

The first point is that we should understand what is meant by distraction, or on the other hand, what is the genuine practice. The only way to get this point is to keep learning the Dharma in a systematic way through listening, reflecting and meditating.

Secondly, if we want to spend all our efforts on listening, reflecting and meditating, there's a pith instruction saying that we should meditate on impermanence. As it is said, death is certain; the time of death is uncertain; the cause of death is unpredictable. Every day, we should remind ourselves that if we do not study and reflect on the Dharma and meditate then at the moment of death we will be helpless. Meditating on death will prevent us from wasting a single moment in pointless distractions and activities, and we will only want to practice the Dharma.

## PRACTICE 2

### ABANDONING YOUR NATIVE LAND

#### *C2. Abandoning Your Native Land, the Source of the Three Poisons*

In my native land waves of attachment to friends and  
kin surge,  
Hatred for enemies rages like fire,  
The darkness of stupidity, not caring what to adopt  
or avoid, thickens—  
To abandon my native land is the practice of  
a bodhisattva.

#### The Meaning of Native Land

Here *native land*, or *homeland*, refers to any environment that may increase our three poisons of mental affliction, attachment, hatred, and ignorance, because these environments can produce unfavorable conditions for our spiritual practice. It is quite normal

that in our real homeland, with many friends and family members around us, these unfavorable conditions are much more obvious. We are preoccupied by wanting to protect those to whom we are attached and we are more concerned about the increasing of their wealth and happiness. If something bad happens to them we are offended and become very angry. That's why we choose the word native land or homeland in this case, by saying that native land is the source of attachment, hatred and ignorance.

## **The Disadvantage of Native Land**

### **1 Waves of Attachment to Friends and Kin Surge**

We experience strong attachment to our parents, family members and friends. This kind of attachment is constantly surging like waves. This phenomenon is probably very common in modern cities where people very easily get attached to this person today and another one tomorrow. They are always bound by afflictive emotions and hardly have a chance for Dharma practice.

### **2 Hatred for Enemies Rages Like Fire**

On the other hand, when someone hurts us or our friends, we easily become offended and develop strong anger toward those people. For example, we are angry with those who steal our property, who slander us, who don't have a good relationship with us. We spend

so much energy fighting for our wealth and fame. This is terrible because anger is just like the raging fire which can immediately destroy our virtuous roots.

### **3 The Darkness of Stupidity, Not Caring What to Adopt or Avoid, Thickens**

Accordingly, due to the intensive attachment and hatred, we may completely lose the wisdom or awareness of what we should do and what we should abstain from, which is replaced by the thick ignorance, just like the bright sun being heavily covered by dark, thick clouds.

### **4 Why Are Three Poisons Described in This Way?**

Just like one wave of water follows quickly upon the other, the more one is drawn towards friends, the more one's attachment increase. When fire burns, it consumes all the fuel that feeds it. In the same way, hatred towards enemies is like a fire that consumes one's mind, and burns one's virtuous roots. In the grasp of attachment and hatred, one forgets what to adopt and what to reject. The absence of awareness is described as the darkness of ignorance.

### **How to Abandon the Native Land?**

Here we should know that the meaning of leaving behind our native land is to leave behind the emotions of attachment, hatred,

and ignorance. There are two ways to give up one's homeland. One is by directly abandoning it, just packing up and departing, physically leaving the homeland.

However, for people living in a big city, it is not realistic for them to abandon their homeland and to leave behind their family. That's why I said that there could be another pith instruction regarding this practice for lay practitioners, which is not necessarily to abandon one's homeland, but rather to set up a good schedule for both Dharma practice and daily work. It is possible to arrange one's time well and stay away from distractions. A couple of years ago, when I gave some advice to lay practitioners, I said that a lay practitioner should have three kinds of responsibility, the responsibility for one's job, the responsibility for one's family, and the responsibility for one's own Dharma practice.



# PRACTICE 3

## LIVING IN SOLITARY PLACES

### *C3. Living in Solitary Places, the Source of All Good Qualities*

**When unfavorable places are abandoned, disturbing  
emotions gradually fade;**

**When there are no distractions, positive activities  
naturally increase;**

**As awareness becomes clearer, confidence in the Dharma  
grows—**

**To rely on solitude is the practice of a bodhisattva.**

### **The Advantage of Solitary Places**

#### **1 When Unfavorable Places Are Abandoned, Disturbing Emotions Gradually Fade**

Here unfavorable places, or negative places, are those where one cannot practice the Dharma at all, or where unfavorable conditions

make one neglect practice. By staying away from unfavorable or negative places, such as noisy cities, chaotic environments, then all kinds of afflictions such as greed, anger, and jealousy will gradually decline and eventually vanish. There will be no distractions or disturbances to encourage our afflictive emotions.

## **2 When There Are No Distractions, Positive Activities Naturally Increase**

In solitary places, where there's no business, no competitions, without the causes of all these distractions, positive thoughts such as compassion and bodhichitta will increase day by day. We won't be distracted from listening, reflecting, and meditating and we will naturally develop compassion towards all living beings, cultivate pure perception in our surroundings, and generate faith and devotion toward our masters and the Three Jewels.

## **3 With a Clear Mind, Certainty in the Dharma Arises**

With a very pure mind, it is easier for us to develop certainties of Buddhadharma, such as the law of causalities, and to dispel all the doubts and wrong views that cause us to conduct non-virtuous actions. Solitude clears the mind and sharpens awareness. From this mental clarity, certainty and deep trust in the Dharma are born.

So in a solitary place, undisturbed by friends and relatives, undistracted by the need to make a living through business, one will be able to concentrate one-pointedly on deep spiritual practice and thus make spiritual progress. Furthermore, one's mind will become self-controlled, serene, clear, and filled with certainty about the teachings. This is why all the sages of the past lived in the wilderness, in solitary, mountainous places conducive to spiritual practice.

## How to Rely on Solitary Places?

### 1 Outer Solitude

Lord Atisha said, "Until you have attained stability, distractions harm your practice. Dwell in forest and mountain solitudes. Free of upsetting activities, you will be able to devote yourself entirely to practicing the Dharma, and you will have no regrets at the time of death." Here stability means the first bhumi of Perfect Joy, the first bodhisattva stage. Before achieving such a state, a bodhisattva should stay in secluded places; otherwise, his or her mind will be distracted and disturbed by outside environments.

When we are in cities we are dazzled by all the colors and when we walk in the streets, we hear so many noises. In such a distracting environment, our faith in Buddhism can hardly grow. We are better

to keep away from noisy, chaotic environments and live in a quiet place.

## **2 Inner Solitude**

Not everybody can renounce worldly life and stay in a remote mountain as a hermit. Actually there are many ways of abiding in solitary places. Superior practitioners will leave all of their relatives, friends, and acquaintances behind, and practice for the rest of their life in mountains. For average practitioners, staying at home as a diligent lay practitioner is also a good choice. We can try all different ways to create solitude around us. Even if we cannot move to secluded place, we should not follow bad friends or be led away by outside distractions.

Real solitude can be divided into inner and outer solitude. This is a key point. Outer solitude is something external, and is actually not as important as inner solitude, since all disturbances come from within. Therefore, it is more important to create inner solitude. We become used to creating our own crowd of thoughts and since they are within us, these distractions are not easily banished. Although it's difficult for us to create inner solitude, we need work hard on it since outer solitude alone is not enough for a Dharma practitioner.

## PRACTICE 4

### GIVING UP THE CONCERNS OF THIS LIFE

#### *C4. Giving up the Concerns of This Life by Reflecting on Impermanence*

Close friends who have long been together will separate,  
Wealth and possessions gained with much effort will be  
left behind,  
Consciousness, a guest, will leave the hotel of the body—  
To give up the concerns of this life is the practice  
of a bodhisattva.

#### What Is Worldly Concern?

If we examine our mind, the concern of this life is mainly about our family and friends, our possessions and wealth, as well as our own body. Usually our ordinary beings have strong attachments to these three type of things. But through meditating on death, we know that all of these will be apart from us sooner or later. They

are impermanent, or ever-changing phenomena that we cannot rely on.

### **1 Close Friends Who Have Long Been Together Will Separate**

Although you and those around you, your parents, relatives, close friends, and so on, have relied and depended on each other for a very long time, there is definitely one day when you will have to part from each other. It is impossible for you to enter the bardo, the intermediate state, together with your close friends. Some may die first, leaving you behind; and you may also die earlier than some others, leaving them behind. It is unavoidable that we will part from all our friends and family members in the end. All our relatives and old friends certainly will leave us.

### **2 Wealth and Possessions Gained with Much Effort Will Be Left Behind**

As for our wealth, it seems that people in the world can hardly give it up. From a young age, many people have been striving day and night to make their living. However, all the wealth that they have accumulated cannot be taken along when they die, just like when you pull a hair out of butter, nothing remains on the hair. Sometimes, even before they pass away, their wealth is lost or consumed for one reason or another, and they are not able to enjoy

the wealth that they have accumulated. So, we'd better not become the slaves of our wealth, which is really meaningless.

### **3 Consciousness, a Guest, Will Leave the Hotel of the Body**

As for our bodies, they are actually like hotels, and our consciousness is like the guests who temporarily stay in this hotel. A traveler may stay in a hotel for a day or two, and then he checks out and goes on with his journey. The traveler will not feel reluctant to leave the hotel. In the same way, we have been born and reborn again and again in the six realms of samsara. By this human form, we stay in the realm of humans for the time being. In the end, we will have to die and leave our body. This body will be disposed of and the consciousness moves on to the next life.

### **Why Do We Need to Give Up Worldly Concern?**

The reason is that they represent our attachments, the various ways we cling to all the things of this world. It does not matter whether these things seem to be nice or unpleasant, good or bad, beneficial or harmful. It is just our clinging to them—blindly and without understanding or thinking—that disturbs our mind and fills us with apprehension.

In our delusion, we see things as being permanent and truly self-existing. But in reality phenomena are impermanent, and devoid

of any substantial existence. We want to believe that our friends, partner, wealth, and influence will all endure, but by nature they are bound to change. It is therefore senseless to be so preoccupied with them.

This attitude does not mean actually giving up everything. It suggests developing an attitude of renunciation. By realizing that this life is impermanent, or just like a dream and an illusion, we can abandon attachment to it.

The awareness of impermanence is actually a very important practice for each of us. If we have certain realization of impermanence, knowing that birth, aging, sickness, and death are all part of impermanent phenomena, and gain and loss, success and failure are also part of our present life, we can easily become good practitioners. Like in a sutra it is said that “this existence of ours is as transient as autumn clouds, the birth and death of beings is like a play being performed on the stage”. So birth and death occurs like a play unfolding, which is ever-changing and has nothing reliable in it. As long as we understand impermanence and the nature of illusion of this world, we will not be worried about situations of birth, aging, sickness, and death.

When Milarepa was ready to return to his hometown, his guru said to him, “If you blend worldly concern with your Dharma



practice, you cannot succeed". That is to say, the genuine Dharma is to renounce this life. If we can renounce this life, we will definitely succeed in our practices. In a key text of the Sakya tradition, *Cutting Free of the Four Attachments*, it is said that "if we are attached to this life, we are not a genuine Dharma practitioner". The true Dharma practitioner is free of clinging to this existence.

## **Be Content with Less Desire**

For ordinary practitioners, it is not practical to renounce their family and all their wealth, and to completely relinquish their attachment. But we should contemplate these teachings and try to apply them in our daily life as much as we can. In other words, we should at least remain content instead of constantly indulging our desires. We should not be controlled by our desire or our clinging to those impermanent and illusory phenomena. Reflecting on these teachings, we should at least be content with whatever we have, have few desires, and be more focused on our Dharma practice.

# PRACTICE 5

## AVOIDING UNSUITABLE FRIENDS

### *C5. Avoiding Unsuitable Friends, Whose Company Creates Conditions Unfavorable to Your Progress*

In bad company, the three poisons grow stronger,  
Listening, reflection, and meditation decline,  
And loving-kindness and compassion vanish—  
To avoid unsuitable friends is the practice of a bodhisattva.

### **What Are Unsuitable Friends?**

When a friend is unsuitable, or negative, it means that when we associate with this person, some of our positive habitual tendencies may be changed or destroyed. So here unsuitable friends refer to those who have the effect on us of increasing our three negative emotions, hatred, attachment, and ignorance, and who encourage us to conduct negative actions. When we are with certain people,

we may find that our defects and emotions only increase. That is why in the root verse, they are called *bad company*.

More specifically, in the context of Buddhism, an unsuitable friend is one who is fond of distractions, totally immersed in ordinary worldly activities, and who does not care about achieving liberation, having no interest or faith in the Three Jewels. Even if you do not initially agree with their ideas and actions, if you spend a lot of time with such negative friends, you will eventually be influenced by their bad habits.

## **The Bad Results of Being with Unsuitable Friends**

### **1 The Three Poisons Grow Stronger**

The previous verse explains the disadvantage of negative places, and here this verse is about negative friends. It doesn't matter whether it is negative places or negative friends, both play an important role in distracting us from Dharma practice or from developing positive qualities.

While ordinary beings must stay away from negative friends and environments, those special beings who are skilled in all kinds of means, such as those great yogis, can carry the unfavorable condition onto the path and even be able to transform their afflictions into wisdom. That is, they can use them as a basis for

practice. But for an ordinary person, associating with negative friends will certainly cause three poisons to increase in their mind. The influence of negative friends or environments is so powerful that it can destroy all positive qualities.

### *The Meaning of Cause and Conditions*

Everything that happens is a result of cause and conditions. For instance, a seed can grow up into a big tree, the root cause of this is the seed itself. The conditions of it are all the factors that constitute a suitable environment, such as the sun, the water, the temperature, the soil and so on. Without any of these conditions, a seed still cannot sprout and grow up into a big tree.

It is the same for Dharma practice. For example, at this moment I am very angry with someone. The root cause of my anger is my own affliction, my own mind. However, there are also conditions that make this happen. For example, I am told that being angry is a good thing, or I'm not fully aware of the bad results of indulging in my anger, or the object of my anger is really something that I am unable to transform into a favorable condition for my practice. The object is so powerful that I lost my control, lost my awareness. It can happen very frequently and such conditions can come from the external environment where we live or the friends with whom we stay.

In *Abhidharmakosa* it is said, “As long as the improper mental activities in our minds are not eradicated, when the outside conditions are present, or the object of our afflictions appears outside, with such cause and conditions being combined, our afflictive emotions will come out immediately.” That’s why for ordinary people, we should stay away from negative friends and environments and rely on good spiritual friends and solitary places.

## **2 Listening, Reflection, and Meditation Decline**

Based on my many years of observation, it is very true that under the influence of negative friends, one’s listening, reflection, and meditation can be completely destroyed. Some Dharma friends used to be good practitioners, but after being in company with some negative friends who are fond of distractions for a certain period of time, they are completely influenced and did not want to continue their Dharma practice any more.

That’s why in the past ten years, since I started to formally give teachings to lay practitioners in big cities, I repeatedly emphasizes the importance of group study and practice. This is the best way of protecting a person from being distracted and abandoning one’s own Dharma practice.

### 3 Loving-Kindness and Compassion Vanish

Even worse is that under the influence of negative friends, our loving-kindness and compassion will vanish. Loving-kindness and compassion are the foundation of Mahayana teaching. Without them, one loses the identity of a Mahayana practitioner. There's a story that once Lord Atisha asked his disciple Drom Tonpa, "Who is the most dangerous enemy in this world?" Drom Tonpa answered: "Negative friends." And "What is the biggest unfavorable condition to a monk's practice?" Drom Tonpa answered, "Women."

So we should from time to time examine our own mind, whether it is influenced by negative friends. His Holiness Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche once said, "Dharma practitioners had better keep away from negative friends and all distractions and spend every effort on listening, reflecting and meditating. Even if you really cannot stay away from distractions, you'd better hang out with good Dharma friends. In this way, after a while, you will gradually go back and focus on your Dharma practice."

### What Should We Do in Our Daily Life?

First of all, we should know that as ordinary beings, the external environment and friends are very important to us. In a sutra called *The Great Jewel Heap Sutra*, the Buddha said, one should rely on

spiritual friends who teach the Dharma and never rely on negative friends at any time.

There is an analogy in the *Nirvana Sutra* saying that, people fear drunk elephants, but in fact, drunk elephants are not that horrifying because in the worst case they crush our bodies; however, negative friends are much worse because they not only contaminate our pure mind, but also destroy our virtuous roots that are being cultivated from life to life. Also in the Kadampa school there is an instruction saying that, one should discard negative friends in the same way as we discard dead bodies, and one should avoid negative friends like avoiding enemies.

Furthermore, negative friend may not necessarily mean any individual person but certain kind of influences. On a deeper level, this verse is actually talking about whether our own mind is focused on positive things or turned toward negative ones. When our mind is involved with the three poisons, all our negative emotions increase and their influence over us strengthens. Therefore, though we need to avoid negative people, ultimately speaking, if our mind is unable to disconnect from our inner negative influences, our practice will not go well.

We need to distinguish the cause and the conditions. On the one hand, we cannot deny the effects of conditions, and that's why we

should keep ourselves away from negative friends and negative environments; on the other hand, we should always keep in mind that the root cause of our negativities is our own mind, and it is our own mind that need to be trained and tamed.



# PRACTICE 6

## RELYING ON A SPIRITUAL TEACHER

### *C6. Relying on a Spiritual Teacher, Whose Presence Creates Conditions Favorable to Your Progress*

Through reliance on a true spiritual friend one's faults  
will fade  
And good qualities will grow like a waxing moon—  
To consider him even more precious  
Than one's own body is the practice of a bodhisattva.

### What Are the Qualifications as a Spiritual Teacher?

We should keep in mind that for anybody, to achieve liberation from samsara and to attain the omniscience of enlightenment would be impossible if without following an authentic, qualified spiritual teacher. Such a teacher shows us what we need to do and what obstacles we will have to avoid in order to make progress

successfully on the Dharma path. An authentic teacher is like the sail that enables a boat to cross quickly over the ocean. If you trust his words, you will easily find your way out of samsara, and that is why the teacher is so precious and important to us. As the Buddha said, all the virtuous teachings and all good qualities come from the spiritual teacher.

What are the qualities that an authentic spiritual teacher should possess? The literature of Buddhism discusses the many different qualities of a spiritual teacher. From the Vinaya to the Vajrayana, a variety of spiritual characteristics are listed. For example, in Patrul Rinpoche's *The Words of my Perfect Teacher*, he listed six qualities that a spiritual teacher should possess, which are 1) based on pure observance of the three vows, i.e., the external vows of individual liberation, the inner vows of the Bodhisattva and the secret vows of the Mantrayana, 2) steeped in learning the tantras, sutras and shastras and 3) suffused with great compassion towards the vast multitude of beings, 4) skilled in the rites of the infinite sutras and tantras, 5) actualized in himself all the extraordinary achievements of riddance and realization, or in other words, rich in the immaculate wisdom that comes through riddance and realization, 6) skilled in the methods of four attractive qualities, which means he is generous, his language is pleasant, he teaches

each individual according to that person's needs and he acts in conformity with what he teaches.

It would be difficult to find such a perfect spiritual teacher in this day and age. However, a spiritual teacher should possess at least one quality, which is the altruistic attitude of benefitting others. Whatever he does is not for himself but is motivated by the attitude of being compassionate to others and the intention of bringing others the temporary benefits and ultimate happiness. This is the most important quality of a spiritual teacher.

## **The Benefits of Relying on a Spiritual Teacher**

Relying on a spiritual teacher, one's faults will fade and one's good qualities will grow like a waxing moon. Here, *faults* refer to our defects, afflictions, negative karma, as well as suffering; and *good qualities* in particular refer to the qualities of the bhumis and of the paths, and in general they also refer to qualities that develop from listening, reflecting, and meditating. *A waxing moon* means that just like the moon becomes more and more fuller from the first day to the fifteenth day of a month, our qualities are growing day by day. Or to put it in the other way, if by relying on a spiritual friend, our faults are decreasing and our good qualities are growing, then this is a good sign to continue our reliance.

We may not notice such changes in just a few days, but, as long as we rely on a qualified spiritual teacher for several years, we will certainly notice this change. For example, in the sandalwood forests of the Malaya Mountains, when an ordinary tree falls, its wood is gradually impregnated with the sweet perfume of the sandal. After some years that ordinary wood comes to smell as sweet as the sandal trees around it. In the same way, if we rely on a perfect teacher full of good qualities, we will be permeated by the perfume of those qualities and in everything we do we will come to resemble him. Therefore, if we find a true spiritual teacher, we should really rely on him with sincere respect and devotion.

## How to Rely on a Spiritual Teacher?

### 1 Observe a Teacher

The first step is to have the ability of examining or observing a teacher. We should not choose a teacher too soon, and should not accept just anyone we meet who is called a teacher. Instead, we should use the qualifications as criteria to check if a teacher is really authentic or not.

One pitfall for our ordinary being is that, we may very easily choose someone as our teacher because of his fame, his wealth, his attitude of being nice or sweet to us. In actual fact, all of these have nothing to do with our liberation. So we should be fully aware of

our initial purpose of seeking liberation and stick to it instead of being distracted by another's opinion, which may or may not be relevant to us.

When we start searching we need to consider whether a person has all, or most of the qualities of a teacher. This is the focus of our investigation, not whether we like the person or not. If we are preoccupied with our likes and dislikes and do not examine someone's qualifications as a spiritual teacher, we will not know whether we are attracted to a good or a bad teacher. We could like someone who does not measure up, and we could be relating to an unqualified person. For that reason, we should not be too hasty in choosing a spiritual teacher.

## **2 Rely on a Teacher**

Once we choose someone as our spiritual teacher, we should rely on him with full trust and respect, with a pure and sincere devotion to him. Because our relationship with the genuine spiritual teacher decreases our afflictions and increases our good qualities, we should consider this teacher as even more precious than our own body. As Thogme Zangpo said in the root text, "To consider him even more precious than one's own body is the practice of a bodhisattva."

This means that once we have decided to relate to someone as our teacher, we should not continue to look around. In other words, once we have accepted someone as our spiritual teacher, we search no more. Having made our decision, we stop evaluating the teacher because there is no benefit in continuing to observe. The only thing we need to do is to follow his teachings, and to apply his teachings into our Dharma practice and daily life.

According to the Vinaya, novice monastics must rely on their masters and stay with them for at least 10 years. This means that we should consistently rely on a spiritual teacher and never give up this connection. What is more important is that we should have devotion to him. Otherwise, we cannot make progress in our spiritual path. So the connection with a teacher has to come from our heart and spring from our deepest aspiration.

There's a story from the secret biography of Do Khyentse Yeshe Dorje. One day, Khyentse Yeshe Dorje stayed with many other people together. Suddenly, he looked into the sky, and then everyone around him saw a monk, Sonam Gyatso, going directly to the Copper-colored Mountain, the pure land of Padmasambhava. Those people were so amazed. Then Khyentse Yeshe Dorje said, "Sonam Gyatso is illiterate, but today he goes to the pure land directly, solely due to his pure and sincere devotion to his master."

There's another story about devotion. Once someone said, "Atisha, give me your teachings!" Atisha replied, "That sounds so nice! But to give you the pith instructions, I need one thing from you, and that is devotion!"

So devotion is the major prerequisite for the path. If you have no faith or devotion, even the Buddha himself cannot help you. If you have faith in the teacher, you will receive the blessing of his enlightened body, speech, and mind. Relying on a spiritual teacher is the most profound and essential practice in Mahayana and Tantrayana. To follow a teacher is the root of all our accomplishments. If we see our teacher as the real buddha, enlightenment is not far away from us. So to cherish the teacher more than yourself, and more than anyone else, is the practice of a bodhisattva.

# PRACTICE 7

## GOING FOR REFUGE

### *C7. Going for Refuge, the Entrance to the Buddhist Teachings*

**Whom can worldly gods protect  
Themselves imprisoned in samsara?  
To take refuge in the Three Jewels  
Who never fail those they protect is the practice  
of a bodhisattva.**

### **The Meaning of Refuge**

Literally speaking, refuge means something or someone that can protect you and ensure your safety. Regardless of whether one has religious belief or not, naturally we all need to search for certain kind of refuge to protect us, because living in this world we feel unsafe, we need a feeling of security, and a feeling of being protected in our lives. So seeking refuge is a very natural thing for us. For example, we take refuge in food to release our hunger, and



we take refuge in a house to keep us warm. To satisfy our needs in a higher level, some people turn to those powerful ones with the hope of achieving wealth, pleasure, and influence. Others seek protection through natural forces, such as the stars or mountains, to be away from sickness or natural disaster and to be healthy and have a long life. Some also seek aid through the power of spirits or ghosts.

But when we see that samsara has the nature of suffering and we develop complete trust in that recognition, we come to fear samsara and seek refuge to protect us from its suffering. Who is able to protect us? Actually, none of the objects of refuge mentioned above are free from ignorance and samsara and therefore cannot provide us ultimate refuge. Also, if they have any compassion, their compassion is partial and limited. In other words, they fail to be our refuge because their lack of wisdom and compassion. Without wisdom, they don't have the ability to protect us; and without compassion, they are not willing to protect us.

So true refuge can only be provided by something that is itself totally free from the bonds of samsara and ignorance, and free from the limited peace of a one-sided nirvana. This quality of true refuge is to be found only in the Three Jewels, the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha.

## The Difference between Worldly Gods and the Three Jewels

All kinds of worldly god do not have the ability of guiding someone towards the liberation, they even don't have the ability of liberating themselves from samsara. Worldly gods are themselves prisoners of samsara, bound by afflictions, karma, and suffering. Thus they have no ability to protect other beings.

However, the Three Jewels can be our true refuge because they possess the rare and supreme qualities. Due to his absolute wisdom, impartial compassion and unimpeded ability, the Buddha himself has the ability of protecting us and guiding us towards liberation. He did so by turning the Dharma Wheel and giving us his teachings.

What the Buddha taught is the Dharma. The quality of the Dharma is that it is a remedy against our affliction and suffering. If we think the Dharma is textbooks, scriptures, something outside ourselves, we are mistaken. The genuine Dharma is the process of actualizing within our minds the wisdom being transmitted by the Buddha's teachings. Such wisdom overcomes all confused appearances and afflictions.

The quality of the Sangha is friendship. Sangha means a community of the Buddha's followers who help us practice the Dharma and

who accompany us on the Dharma path. It is always good to have traveling companions who can assist us in avoiding dangers and pitfalls and ensure that we arrive safely when we are in distant and unfamiliar lands.

Therefore, the Buddha is the guide or the teacher who shows us the path to enlightenment. Without him we would have no choice but to remain in the darkness of ignorance. The Dharma is the path, the unmistakable way that leads directly to enlightenment. The Sangha is composed of the companions who accompany us along this path.

Or the Buddha is like a doctor, the Dharma is like his medicine, and the Sangha is like a nurse. As long as we trust the doctor, and take his medicine as prescribed, and are taken good care of by the nurse, we are able to cure our illness of affliction and ignorance, and then achieve freedom from samsara.

Of the Three Jewels, the Dharma is considered most important. In this world, the Buddha appeared, taught the path to liberation, and then passed away. So the Dharma is the Buddha's representative. If we put into practice the meaning of his teachings, it is the same as if the Buddha were present and teach us.

## The Benefits of Taking Refuge in the Three Jewels

The merit of taking refuge in the Three Jewels is tremendous. For example, the Buddha said in sutras, anyone who takes refuge in the Buddha will not go to lower realms. The Buddha also said in the *Nirvana Sutra*, those who take refuge in the Three Jewels will soon attain buddhahood. Therefore, I suggested that, if we have the opportunity, we should try to encourage other people around us to take refuge in the Three Jewels. We can also help animals to take refuge by reciting the prayers and the name of buddhas beside them.

There's such a story in the Buddha's time. One day, when the Buddha and his disciples went to a village to beg for alms. None of the villagers offered them food. The Buddha went back and observed who had the karmic connection with these villagers and he found that Maudgalyayana had the connection. The Buddha asked him to go to that village and beg for alms. When Maudgalyayana entered the village, every person welcomed him and gladly made offerings to him and he came back to the Buddha's place with a lot of food.

Some disciples wondered why the Buddha, with his perfect merits, did not receive any alms, while Maudgalyayana, an arhat, got so many offerings? The Buddha answered, "I have no connection

with them, but Maudgalyayana has a deep one with them.” Then Buddha explained the connection: Countless eons before, a farmer made his living by selling firewood. One day, the farmer went cutting firewood in hills. There was a wasp hive in a tree and when he cut the tree, all wasps swarmed out. At that moment, the farmer recited the prayer of taking refuge for them. In this way, the wasps all heard the buddha name and were reborn as humans in a future life. The farmer was one of the previous lives of Maudgalyayana; and the wasps were reborn as the people living in that village. Because Maudgalyayana helped them to take refuge long time ago, they were so happy to make offerings to him in this life.

## How to Develop Deep Devotion to the Three Jewels?

Up to now, through the previous six verses, we are aware of the importance and the rarity of the human existence, and we also realize the impermanence of this life and the stark immediacy of death. We have decided to rid ourselves of distracting conditions and misleading influences, and then to try to tame our mind according to the instructions of an authentic teacher. Now, we are ready to take refuge in the Three Jewels, because only the Three Jewels have this capacity of protecting and guiding us on the path of liberation.

In taking refuge, the Three Jewels give us the protection of being a refuge, and we in turn give them our trust. So faith is the prerequisite for refuge, and is also the very essence of going for refuge. Taking refuge does not just mean reciting a refuge prayer, or going through a Buddhist ritual, or being given a certificate of being a Buddhist. Taking refuge needs to have a strong determination from the depth of our heart. If we have complete confidence in the Three Jewels, their blessings will always be present, like the sun and moon being instantly reflected in still water.

As faith develops, three successive levels of faith can be distinguished. When you meet a teacher, hear the teaching, learn about the extraordinary qualities of buddhas and bodhisattvas, or read the life stories of great masters of the past, a vivid feeling of joy arises in our mind as we discover that there are such great beings in this human world. This is the first kind of faith, vivid faith.

When thinking of the great masters, we are so eager to know more about them, to receive teachings from them, and to develop spiritual qualities like them. This is the second kind of faith, eager faith.

As we reflect on the teachings, practice, and assimilate them, we develop complete confidence in their truth and in the Buddha's boundless perfection. We clearly understand the law of cause and

effect, and the need to act in accord with it. At this stage, we are free from doubt. This is the third kind of faith, confident faith.

To take refuge in a genuine way, we should develop these three kinds of faith. Faith and devotion make us a perfect vessel to receive the nectar of blessings from the teacher, so that our good qualities steadily grow like the waxing moon.

Without faith, taking refuge would be pointless. It would be like planting a burnt seed, which will never sprout no matter how long it remains in perfect conditions in the ground. Therefore, without faith, we will never be able to develop any positive qualities. Even if the Buddha were to appear in person right in front of us, without faith we would fail to recognize his qualities, and may even conceive erroneous views about him.

In summary, in order to develop our devotion or faith to a deeper level, we do need systematically study, reflect, and meditate on the Dharma. This is the only way for us to develop the right view and make progress on our spiritual path.

# PRACTICE 8

## THE PATH FOR BEINGS OF LESSER CAPACITY

According to an individual's capacity, there are three levels of motivation for Dharma practice.

The first level is the wish to be reborn in the happy realms, out of fear of the suffering in the three lower realms; the second level is the wish to achieve nirvana, out of fear of the pervasive suffering in the three realms of samsara; and the third level is the wish to attain Buddhahood, the liberation beyond both samsara and nirvana, out of fear of selfish attitudes.

Briefly speaking, the practitioners of the first level are those who practice Dharma to avoid the suffering of rebirth in hell or as a hungry ghost or as an animal. Fear of the lower realms pushes them to strive for a favorable rebirth such as a god or a deity. Their motivation coming from these reasons is considered inferior because their result of a good rebirth is temporary.



The practitioners of the second level are motivated by the desire for nirvana, as they understand that samsara has no essence and can be totally abandoned. As a result they renounce all the delights of three realms and eventually achieve the peace of nirvana, like Shravakas and Pratyekabuddhas. A practitioner seeking such kind of liberation embodies a medium level of motivation.

The practitioners of the third level are those who seek for Buddhahood with the desire to attain complete and perfect enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings. This is the attitude of the Mahayana practitioners, endowed with supreme motivation. As the result of practicing the Mahayana teaching, a bodhisattva cuts the root of existence through the wisdom of emptiness; while due to the great compassion that the wisdom engenders, the Bodhisattva remains in existence or samsara to benefit all sentient beings.

## ***B2. The Main Teachings, Illuminating the Path***

### ***C1. The Path for Beings of Lesser Capacity***

**The Buddha taught that the unendurable suffering  
of the lower realms**

**Is the fruit of unvirtuous actions.**

**Therefore, to never act unvirtuously,**

**Even at the cost of one's life, is the practice  
of a bodhisattva.**

## What Are Virtuous & Unvirtuous Actions?

This teaching is about karma, or cause and effect. Karma simply means actions. According to the Buddha's teaching, if our action is positive, its result will be positive. If our action is harmful, the result will be harmful. All actions produce their corresponding results in a similar way, because karma is action and reaction. Like water flowing down or smoke floating up, it is something natural, and we cannot argue about it or change the way it functions. Therefore, we should find out what kinds of actions are beneficial and what are harmful, and then act according to these principles.

### 1 Virtuous Actions Are the Causes of Happiness

According to Patrul Rinpoche's *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, the ten virtuous actions, or ten positive actions, consist of three positive acts of the body, four positive acts of speech, and three positive acts of the mind.

The three positive acts of the body are: (1) to renounce killing, and instead protect the lives of living beings; (2) to renounce taking what is not given, and instead practice generosity; and (3) to give up sexual misconduct, and instead follow the rules of discipline.

The four positive acts of speech are: (1) to renounce lying, and instead tell the truth; (2) to give up sowing discord, and instead

reconcile disputes; (3) to abandon harsh words, and instead speak pleasantly; and (4) to put an end to useless chatter, and instead recite prayers.

The three positive acts of the mind are: (1) to renounce covetousness, and instead learn to be generous; (2) to give up wishing harm on others, and instead cultivate the desire to help them; and (3) to put an end to wrong views, and instead establish in oneself the true and authentic view.

These actions are the causes of happiness, and will lead one to be reborn in one of the three higher realms.

## **2 Unvirtuous Actions Are the Causes of Suffering**

If we do not follow these ten virtues, then our actions are unvirtuous and will lead us to the three lower realms.

The ten unvirtuous actions are: the three unvirtuous acts of the body, including taking life, taking what is not given, and sexual misconduct; four unvirtuous acts of the speech, including lying, sowing discord, harsh words, and worthless chatter; and three unvirtuous acts of the mind, including covetousness, wishing harm on others, and wrong views.

To determine whether an action is completed or not, there are four elements that we should observe. The act is complete when it

includes all four elements. For example a hunter kills an animal. First of all he sees that animal and identifies it without any doubt: his knowing that it is a living creature is the *basis for the act*. Next, the wish to kill it arises: the idea of killing it is the *intention to carry out the act*. Then he shoots the animal in a vital point with a gun or any other weapon: the physical action of killing is the *execution of the act*. Then the animal's vital functions cease and its body and mind separate: that is the final *completion of the act* of taking a life.

Suppose that I intended to kill an animal, or that I said I would, but did not actually do so. There would already be the basis, the knowledge that there is a sentient being, and the intention, the idea of killing it. Two of the elements of the negative action would therefore have been fulfilled and, although the harm would be less heavy than if I had in fact completed the act of killing, the stain of a negative act, like a reflection appearing in a mirror, would nevertheless remain.

If I ordered someone else to kill that animal, or even if I just felt pleased about the killing, the same karmic result comes to me. As said in the *Abhidharma Kosa*, each person involved in the procedure of killing one animal gets the whole karmic result of killing that animal. It is not as if one act of killing could be divided up among many people.

Similarly, if many people together carry out some virtuous action, for example, building a stupa, then when it is completed, each of those involved gets the whole karmic result of building a stupa. Or for another example, ten people together chant Mani mantra, each of them chanting 10,000 times, so altogether they chant Mani mantra 100,000 times, then each of them actually accumulate the merit of chanting 100,000 times Mani mantra. This is why our masters always encourage us to attend group practice or group study, in this way we can accumulate a great stock of merit which may never be accomplished by oneself in his or her whole life.

### 3 The Suffering upon Suffering

The root text addresses the unendurable suffering of the lower realms. Beings in the hell realms suffer from extreme heat and cold. Hungry ghosts suffer from hunger and thirst. Animals suffer from ignorance. All these kinds of intensive suffering are the suffering upon suffering, which is limitless in the three lower realms. The unendurable suffering of the lower realms are mainly characterized as the suffering upon suffering.

Suffering upon suffering means from the moment it appears, this suffering is undesirable. As said in Ju Mipham Rinpoche's *Gateway to Knowledge*, "What is the suffering upon suffering? It is that which

is painful when arising, painful when remaining, and pleasant when changing.”

Here the root text tells us that suffering is not the creation of gods or devils, nor does it arise without causes or conditions. Suffering is the inevitable consequence of negative actions. Someone who has done many negative actions, even if rich and powerful, will inevitably sink into the lower realms of samsara. Therefore, it is better to die than to commit them. As said in the root text, “To never act unvirtuously, even at the cost of one’s life, is the practice of a bodhisattva.”

## How to Cultivate Certainty in the Karmic Law?

### 1 Study the Sutras Taught by the Buddha

As the root text says, it is the Buddha who told us the consequence of unvirtuous actions. We should know that only the Buddha himself, instead of any great bodhisattva such as Manjushri, can clearly and thoroughly explain the karmic law of cause and effect. So, in order to develop the certainty in the karmic law, we should repeatedly read and learn those sutras taught by the Buddha. For example, in *The Sutra of Cause and Effect*, *The Sutra of One Hundred Karmic Stories*, and *The Sutra of the Wise and the Fool*, the Buddha taught us many stories about cause and effect, and explained how

the endless suffering in three lower realms are the results of the negative karma that one has committed in previous lives.

By learning these sutras, we should be able to recognize that there is no such thing as even a single act that vanishes, leaving nothing behind. The imprint created by a negative action, such as killing, will never disappear until one experiences its inevitable result or counteracts it with a positive antidote.

On the one hand, even offering a single flower to the Three Jewels, or reciting Mani mantra once, brings inconceivable merit; on the other hand, even the most seemingly insignificant negative action has a negative result, and should thus be purified straight away.

The Buddha knows all the relationships of cause and effects by his omniscient wisdom, and he sees the past, present, and future lives of all beings. So instead of believing in our own limited perceptions, we should certainly rely on the Buddha's wisdom, and have confidence in the Buddha's words. Doubt and hesitation are the main obstacles to making progress in our Dharma practice.

## **2 Understand the View of Emptiness**

As Padmasambhava said, "Although my view is higher than the sky, my attention to actions and their effects is finer than flour." When we have a deep understanding of emptiness, we will gain

an even greater conviction about the law of cause and effect, and will see just how important our conduct really is. Relative truth functions inexorably within absolute truth. A thorough realization of the empty nature of all phenomena has never led anyone to think that positive actions do not bring happiness, or that negative actions do not bring suffering. All phenomena appear from within emptiness as a result of the coming together of illusory causes and conditions. The infinite display of phenomena can arise only because everything is empty in nature.

As Nagarjuna said, “Only by things being empty can things be possible at all.” The presence of space makes it possible for the whole universe to be set out within it, and yet this does not alter or condition space in any way. Although rainbows appear in the sky, they do not make any difference to the sky; it is simply that the sky makes the appearance of rainbows possible. A high view of emptiness and a thorough, careful attitude regarding our acts are never contradictory, but rather complementary. The more careful we are in whatever we do, the easier for us to realize emptiness; likewise, when our view becomes more profound, our understanding of the relationship between cause and effect will become deeper and clearer.



## The Necessity of Confession

If we have conducted negative actions, we must confess. This is very crucial. Sometimes we would say the difference between the wise and the fool is that, the wise knows how to confess all their negative actions, while the fool has no idea about it. As the Buddha said in sutras, the fool commits negative karma, and never knows they should confess their negative actions; while the wise always confess their negativities, and their negativities won't live with them.

There's a Tulku in my hometown, called Tulku Tisha. He was a very admirable practitioner, never stopped learning and practicing the Dharma since his childhood. Even during the Cultural Revolution, when all the religious activities were forbidden, he still kept learning and practicing secretly. However, in his late years, whenever he met a great master, he would say, "I keep confessing every day, but I still have great negative karma, would you please bless me and purify my negativities so I won't be reborn in the three lower realms?"

Nowadays seems so many people have no idea of the three lower realms, and when speaking of the intensive sufferings in hells, they have no feeling at all. But such a great Tulku who already achieved enlightenment would manifest in this way of being so scared of

the suffering of the lower realms. So being a good practitioner, we should follow the behaviors of the wise, feel regret about our wrong doing, and resolve never to repeat such bad actions. We should even confess every negative action in a dream. Meanwhile, we should not be confused about how to act in everyday situations. Try our best to keep our actions in accordance with the Dharma teachings. This is crucial for each of us.

# PRACTICE 9

## THE PATH FOR BEINGS OF MEDIUM CAPACITY

### *C2. The Path for Beings of Medium Capacity*

Like dew on grass, the delights of the three worlds  
By their very nature evaporate in an instant.  
To strive for the supreme level of liberation,  
Which never changes, is the practice of a bodhisattva.

### What Are the Delights of the Three Worlds?

#### 1 The Delights of the Three Worlds

*The three worlds* can be interpreted as the three realms: the desire realm, the form realm, and the formless realm. The desire realm is so called because the beings inhabiting it have intense emotions and crave happiness based on the pleasures of the five senses. The form realm is populated by gods who have less desire. The

cause for being reborn in the form realm is the favorable karma accumulated through the practice of one of the four dhyanas. The formless realm is populated by gods without any form who dwell in four types of perception spheres.

The nature of happiness within all these realms is temporary. Whether that of gods or humans, happiness is as evanescent as a dewdrop on a blade of grass, just within one instant it is gone. Since this happiness is impermanent and ever changing, we need to strive for an unchanging happiness, which is the changeless state of liberation.

## 2 The Suffering of Change

The three lower realms are mainly characterized with the suffering upon suffering, which means it is unendurable, undesirable, which is painful when arising, painful when remaining, and pleasant when changing. This can be understood even by animals.

However, in Buddhism, when we say everything is suffering, the meaning of suffering is much more than the suffering upon suffering. It also includes the suffering of change and the all-pervasive suffering of the composite. These two kinds of suffering cannot be understood by animals, and are also difficult to understand even by non-Buddhists.

The suffering of change means that no matter what kind of pleasure appears in any of the realms, such as the higher realms and so forth, it will never be able to last in that same way but is sure to change and vanish. This is because they are not beyond the nature of impermanence. When changing, the previous pleasure itself becomes a cause of torment. Just like the sorrow at the death of one's child, if this lady had never had a child, there would also be no sorrow from the death of this child.

As said in Mipham Rinpoche's *Gateway to Knowledge*, "The suffering of change is that which is pleasant when arising, pleasant when remaining, but painful when ceasing." No matter what the intensity of pleasure experienced, its previous moments gradually cease while its subsequent moments gradually arise such that its continuity eventually ceases. Therefore it is unreliable, like a beautiful white autumn cloud. Or as the root text says, "Like dew on a blade of grass, the delights of the three worlds by their very nature evaporate in an instant." So when we talk about the delights of the three worlds, actually they are none other than the suffering of change.

There are two key points in this process that happiness becomes suffering. The first is the attachment to a pleasure, and the second is that by nature the pleasure eventually changes and ceases. Because of our enjoyment and attachment, the pleasure at that

very moment of arising becomes the source of suffering in the next few moments.

Sometimes we use the word “unsatisfactory” to describe the feeling of the suffering of change. We will for sure become unsatisfied with our pleasant situations if we have strong attachment to them because they are by nature impermanent, keep fading and will eventually cease. So what we experience is none other than the suffering of change.

### **3 The All-Pervasive Suffering of the Composite**

The teaching of the all-pervasive suffering of the composite is even more difficult to understand for non-Buddhists, and it is only taught within Buddhism. It means that no matter whether there is temporary pleasure, pain, or neutrality, all aspects of their existence are the causes of future suffering, like a poisoned meal, or a tumor that grows with time. As said in Mipham Rinpoche’s *Gateway to Knowledge*, “The all-pervasive suffering of the composite is not evident when it arises, remains or ceases. Yet, it is the cause of suffering.”

Here the composite can be also translated into the conditioned. It is because all phenomena in the three realms are compounded and conditioned, that by this nature, they arise and cease within every moment, and they won’t last forever. Once the cause and

conditions are completely exhausted, as a result, such phenomena will totally disappear. When considering this, all noble beings with their eye of wisdom see the whole of cyclic existence as something to be renounced, like a pit of fire. In the *Diamond Sutra*, the Buddha said,

*All conditioned phenomena*

*Are like a dream, an illusion, a bubble, a shadow,*

*Like dew or a flash of lightning;*

*Thus we shall perceive them.*

## **How to Recognize the Nature of Samsara and Generate the Renunciation of It?**

In summary, by recognizing the suffering upon suffering, one will renounce all kinds of pains and torments. By recognizing the suffering of change, one will renounce all delights of the three worlds. By recognizing the all-pervasive suffering of the composite, one will renounce all phenomena of samsara, because they are conditioned and impermanent, and cannot last forever.

Therefore, beings of lesser capacity see the suffering of the lower realms and wish to be reborn in the higher realms. Beings of medium capacity see that throughout samsara, not only in the three lower realms but also in the three higher realms, everything

is unsatisfactory and ends in suffering. They see samsara as like a big house on fire, within which there is nowhere to stay. So, as a practitioner of medium or greater capacity, one should really generate the renunciation of the three worlds and redirect their efforts toward liberation. Like Lama Tsongkhapa said in his *The Three Principal Aspects of the Path*, one should seek renunciation at the very beginning.

In order to develop the genuine mind of renunciation, there are several points we need to focus on. The first is that we should cultivate a certainty to the infallible karmic law of cause and effect, and acknowledge the suffering of samsara. We don't deny any happiness or pleasure in our worldly life, but we need to keep in mind that all of them could be causes of the future suffering, because by nature they are conditioned and ever changing, without any true existence.

Secondly, if we have some understanding of the union of emptiness and the dependent arising of phenomena, we will see how deluded and deceiving the ways of the world really are and, like an old man forced to play children's games, we will find them very tiresome. Then we will see that there is nothing worthwhile in this ordinary world, nor in the whole of samsara. Then very naturally, the genuine mind of renunciation will arise in our mind.



# PRACTICE 10

## THE PATH FOR BEINGS OF SUPERIOR CAPACITY

This section has three parts: the bodhichitta of intention, which is the evocation of supreme bodhichitta; the bodhichitta of application, which is the meditation and practice of the two aspects of bodhichitta; and the precepts for training in those practices.

The difference between the bodhichitta of intention and the bodhichitta of application is usually described as the difference between wishing to go somewhere and actually setting out on the journey.

### *C3. The Path for Beings of Superior Capacity*

#### *D1. The Bodhichitta of Intention*

**If all the mothers who have loved me since beginningless  
time are suffering,**

**What is the use of my own happiness?**

**So, with the aim of liberating limitless sentient beings,**

To set my mind on enlightenment is the practice  
of a bodhisattva.

## What Is the Bodhichitta of Intention?

The bodhichitta of intention has two aspects: compassion, which is directed toward beings; and wisdom, which is directed toward enlightenment. Neither the mere wish to benefit beings nor the mere wish to attain enlightenment expresses bodhichitta. On the one hand, if we do not aim at attaining ultimate enlightenment, then however strong our wish to benefit beings may be, we will never go beyond ordinary kindness and compassion. On the other hand, if we wish to attain enlightenment for our own sake, we will never go beyond the limited nirvana of arhats. So both aspects are indispensable. This is expressed in *the Ornament of True Realization* by Maitreya,

*Bodhichitta is to aspire to enlightenment*

*For the benefit of others.*

Lama Tsongkhapa said in his *The Three Principal Aspects of the Path*,

*Even if renunciation has been developed,*

*If it is not possessed by the mind of Bodhichitta,*

*It does not become the cause of the perfect bliss  
of unsurpassed enlightenment.  
Therefore the wise generate the supreme mind of Bodhichitta.*

One thing we should know is that, until we realize emptiness we must never part from the attitude or the aspiration of bodhichitta. This is ordinary beings' practice of the union of wisdom and compassion. When we realize emptiness perfectly, there will be no effort needed for unconditional compassion, since compassion is the true expression of emptiness.

There is a well-known story about Lord Atisha. When Lord Atisha was at Bodhgava, walking on the eastern side of the Diamond Throne, he saw two beautiful celestial women in the sky before him. The younger said to the elder, "If one wants to swiftly become enlightened, what is the best method?" The elder one said, "Train yourself in arousing bodhichitta." Later Lord Atisha knew that they were manifested by Tara, and since then, he made great efforts on the practice of bodhichitta.

## **How to Generate the Bodhichitta of Intention?**

The Mahayana speaks of all sentient beings as having once been our mother, our father, and our friend. Without exception, there is not a being who has not been related to each of us throughout

all our lifetimes. The mother is most often used as an example because of her kindness.

An infinite number of beings, in our successive lives since time without beginning, have been our parents, have loved us and cared for us, and they were even ready to give up their own lives for our own sake. It would be heartless to forget their indescribable kindness and to ignore their suffering; and it would thus be heartless, too, to practice the Dharma for our own liberation, ignoring the bondage and suffering of others. As the root text said, “If all the mothers who have loved me since beginningless time are suffering, what is the use of my own happiness?”

This practice, visualizing the mother as the person who has been kindest to us, and then meditating on all sentient beings as being our mother, is very beneficial for us to generate the genuine bodhichitta. Before bodhichitta arises in our minds, we must meditate on it from time to time. As Lama Tsongkhapa said,

*Endless reborn in cyclic existence,  
Ceaselessly tormented by the three sufferings—  
Thinking that all mothers are in such a condition,  
Generate the supreme mind of Bodhichitta.*

## How to Make It Stronger?

We should know that the essence of the Dharma is the Mahayana teaching, and the essence of the Mahayana teaching is bodhichitta. Once bodhichitta takes birth in our mind, we are the true children of all buddhas and all buddhas will always look after us with great happiness. So just as all buddhas and bodhisattvas of the past aroused bodhichitta, making the wish to bring all beings to enlightenment, now it's our turn to generate great compassion and arouse bodhichitta.

The attitude of a bodhisattva must be extremely vast, constantly keeping in mind the infinity of beings and the wish to establish them all in Buddhahood. If our mind is vast, the power of our prayers is unlimited, too. If our mind is narrow and rigid, our accumulation of merit and the purification of our obscurations will also be very limited.

We can keep thinking like this. Just as we ourselves wish to be happy, we should wish the same for others; and just as we ourselves wish to be free from suffering, we should wish the same for all beings. If we have this pure attitude, and if we can keep familiarizing ourselves with such thoughts, the bodhichitta will grow in our mind. If we continue to work on our attitude, and to gain stability in our practice, the bodhichitta will become stronger. Gradually,

we will become able to put our love and compassion into action in a way that truly benefits others.

Also in our daily life, we should constantly pray and make such aspirations. If bodhichitta has not yet arisen in our mind, pray that it will arise. And if it has arisen, pray that it will increase. There are many great prayers in the Mahayana teaching, for example:

*Sublime and precious bodhichitta,  
May it arise in those in whom it has not arisen;  
May it never decline where it has arisen,  
But go on increasing further and further!*

*May they not be separated from bodhichitta,  
But be always inclined to enlightened action:  
May they be cared for by the buddhas, and  
May they abandon harmful action.*

Also,

*May all sentient beings be happy.  
May all the lower realms be forever empty.  
May the aspirations of all the bodhisattvas  
of the various bhumis be fulfilled!*

We should know that not a single aspiration vanishes. Dedicating the merit of every positive action we do with such a pure mind will continuously produce positive fruit until we attain enlightenment. We can also aspire like this,

*Until all beings are free from negative emotions,*

*May my prayers never come to exhaustion.*

# PRACTICE 11

## EXCHANGING ONESELF AND OTHERS

Within the part of the bodhichitta of application, there are two parts, the practice of relative bodhichitta, and the practice of absolute bodhichitta. The first part also has two parts, the meditation practice of exchanging oneself and others, and the post meditation practice of using unfavorable circumstances on the path.

### *D2. The Bodhichitta of Application*

#### *E1. Relative Bodhichitta*

#### *F1. The Meditation Practice of Exchanging Oneself and Others*

All suffering without exception arises from desiring  
happiness for oneself,  
While perfect buddhahood is born from the thought  
of benefiting others.

Therefore, to really exchange  
My own happiness for the suffering of others is  
the practice of a bodhisattva.



## Why Does All Suffering Arise from Selfishness?

Intellectually speaking, all of us understand that ego is a very bad thing and selflessness is a noble thing. Ordinary people without any religious background would also like to respect and cherish those people who minimize their self-interest and make all their efforts for the benefit of others. Very often we describe mother's kindness is great love, mainly because a mother loves her child without any reservation and can even give up her own life for the sake of her child.

As a matter of fact, according to the Buddhist teaching, all aggressions and violence in the world and all fear, all sufferings of birth, sickness, old age, and death, come from self-clinging, from our attachment to the nonexistent "I". Actually, "I" is just a conception without true existence, and we stick to this conception of "I" due to our delusion from life to life. As a result, we experience endless suffering. When there is the conception of "I", there are "others", and from "I" and "others", clinging to self and aversion toward others will arise, and from there all negative thoughts or emotions, speeches and actions will be produced, and furthermore, there are endless struggles, fights and sufferings. That's exactly how the whole of samsara manifests.

That's why it is said all suffering without exception arises from desiring happiness for oneself. Whether related to our body, possessions, friends or enemies, all suffering without exception arises because we want happiness for ourselves. The root of desire for personal happiness is exactly ego-clinging. If we concentrate only on our own comfort and happiness, we become self-centered and arrogant, and sooner or later this leads to suffering.

Shantideva says in *The Way of the Bodhisattva*,

*All the joy the world contains  
Has come through wishing happiness for others.  
All the misery the world contains  
Has come through wanting pleasure for oneself.*

He also said,

*Is there need for lengthy explanation?  
Childish beings look out for themselves;  
Buddhas labor for the good of others:  
See the difference that divides them!*

So ordinary beings think only of themselves. The only result from this is suffering both now and in the future. The compassionate buddhas and bodhisattvas, on the other hand, are free from selfish concerns and work for the good of others. In this and future lives

therefore they know only happiness, for they perfectly accomplish their own and others' benefit. So just look at the difference between the Buddhas and ordinary beings, we should rid ourselves of selfishness and work exclusively for the benefit of others.

That's why it is said, perfect Buddhahood is born from the thought of benefiting others. Buddhas arise from the intention to benefit others. This intention is rooted in compassion, and if one has such compassion, one can become a perfect buddha. Then how can we cultivate this intention like the Buddha did, and truly extend our compassion toward all living beings? It is by the practice of exchanging one's own happiness for the suffering of other beings.

## **How to Understand Others' Suffering?**

The first point is to understand others' suffering, and then, because we ourselves eagerly want to stay away from any kind of suffering, so do others. If we can have a deep feeling about this then compassion toward those who are suffered will naturally arise in our hearts. At that moment, driven by our compassion, we are willing to truly exchange our happiness for the sufferings of others and we'll be so joyful if we can release others' suffering.

Due to our habitual tendency, we get used to focusing all our attentions on ourselves, our happiness and our suffering, and we very often ignore others' feelings, others' suffering. Such kind of

ignorance could be the main obstacle for us to cultivate compassion. That's why we need to visualize others' suffering through meditation practice. If we don't have a deep feeling of others' suffering, the practice of exchanging self and others would just become lip-service.

Sometimes we say that going through suffering is not necessarily a bad thing. Why? Because after we experience that suffering by ourselves, we will have a strong feeling about it and can very easily understand others' suffering in a similar situation.

Therefore we should put others where we are and put ourselves where others are, and thus have a deep understanding of their sufferings and their desires. For example, when an animal is being killed, visualize it as if I was being killed; when the animal's head is being cut off, visualize it as if my head was being cut off. Visualize in this way and try to see how we feel if suffered in this way. In that case, we can have a better understanding of others' suffering, and our compassion will naturally arise. With an intense feeling of compassion we can start the practice of exchanging oneself and others.

## The Actual Practice of Exchanging Oneself and Others

As explained by Shantideva in great details in his text *The Way of the Bodhisattva*, the exchange of oneself and others can be approached step by step. The first stage is to see ourselves and others as equally important—others want to be happy and don't to suffer, just as we do. Therefore we should wish happiness for others in the same way that we wish it for ourselves, and wish that they may avoid suffering, just as we do.

The second stage is the exchange of ourselves and others; we wish that others may have our happiness and that we may take their suffering. Then there is a third stage, which is to cherish others more than ourselves. At that point, all selfish preoccupation has completely disappeared and we are solely concerned with the welfare of others.

When we meditate, the actual visualization should be as follows. First we need an object, and Dilgo Rinpoche suggested to start by focusing on our most hated enemy, or someone who has caused much trouble and difficulty for us.

When you exhale, visualize that you give away all your happiness, including your merit, good fortune, health, and enjoyment, in the

form of white light to that person. Meanwhile you pray, “May this truly go to my enemy and be entirely given to him!”

When you inhale, visualize that you take upon yourself that person’s suffering, including all the sickness, obscurations, and mental afflictions, in the form of black smoke, and you perfectly purify it when it reaches your heart. As you take this person’s suffering into you, you feel great joy and bliss.

## **The Merit of Exchanging Oneself and Others**

The practice of exchanging oneself and others has great benefits. If one has attained the bodhisattva levels, by virtue of the realization of the empty nature of all phenomena, this person can truly exchange his or her own happiness for the suffering of others. There’re many great stories of those enlightened beings who manifested in this way.

There was a great master who was practicing the exchange of self and others. One day a woman came to visit him, and she was terribly sad because her husband and son were both dead. After hearing her story, the master said, “I have been practicing the mind of compassion and love recently. My mind is full of happiness. I will give you this happiness and take your suffering upon myself.” No sooner had he said it, than all her suffering suddenly disappeared.

She acquired a great faith in this master and followed him since then. And in the end she became a famous yogini.

Even before we achieve enlightenment this practice has great benefits to us. Temporarily speaking, our mind will become calm and peaceful, more compassionate and joyful. Our mind won't be as rigid as before, but rather turn to be soft and open because we're thinking of others. We can reduce tremendous suffering because our clinging to self is not so strong. Ultimately speaking, the practice of exchanging self and others is the right cause of gaining enlightenment. Without compassion, with a lack of altruistic mind, one will never be able to achieve enlightenment and recognize the true nature of mind.

# PRACTICE 12

## HOW TO USE LOSS ON THE PATH

This part is about the post meditation practice, teaches us how to apply our practice of exchanging self and others in some unfavorable circumstance. These post meditation practice is important because unfavorable circumstances are bound to appear in our daily lives. We should make use of the unfavorable circumstances as assistance for our practice, rather than being driven by our habitual tendency and being defeated by our negative emotions and afflictions as before.

In the text unfavorable circumstances are considered under four headings: (i) four things that you do not want to happen, (ii) two things that are difficult to bear, (iii) deprivation and prosperity, and (iv) hatred and desire.

In the part of using on the path the four things that you do not want to happen, these four things are (a) loss, (b) suffering, (c) disgrace, and (d) disparagement. The first one is about our wealth



or possession, the second one is related to our body, and the last two are about our reputation or fame, all of which are what we care about most.

*F2. The Post Meditation Practice of Using Unfavorable  
Circumstances on the Path*

*G1. Using on the Path the Four Things That You Do Not  
Want to Happen*

*H1. How to Use Loss on the Path*

If someone driven by great desire  
Seizes all my wealth, or induces others to do so,  
To dedicate to him my body, possessions,  
And past, present, and future merit is the practice  
of a bodhisattva.

## **Why Should I Dedicate Everything to This Person?**

Normally we are very concerned with our wealth, but strong attachment to it is actually an obstacle on our spiritual path. Here it says that if someone wants to seize our wealth, or asks others to do so, we should give him even more, and dedicate everything to this person, including our possession, our body, as well as our merit of past, present, and future lives. This is the way that a bodhisattva should practice.

## **1 From the Perspective of the Karmic Law**

From the perspective of the karmic law, if my possessions were stolen or robbed by someone then I must have done a similar thing in one of my previous lives, otherwise this person wouldn't have seized my possessions in this life. With the correct understanding of the karmic law, it is important for us to remember that if we lose something we possess, it can only be the karmic result of our having deprived others of their possessions in the past. Therefore there is no reason to feel angry with anyone other than ourselves. As a result of negative actions in our past lives, we have to undergo this experience in this life.

Since this is the result of our own behavior we should take this opportunity to confess our fault and purify this negative karma. Therefore, instead of being angry and chasing after our possession, a bodhisattva would dedicate all he has to the person who stole it.

## **2 From the Perspective of Compassion**

From the perspective of compassion, this person was one of our parents in a previous lifetime. In some past life this person took care of us with great kindness. Understanding this process encourages compassion for the person who seized our possession. Compassion

enables us to be patient so that we can actually dedicate everything to this person.

To feel compassion for someone who is harming us is an effective way of purifying our obscurations, freeing ourselves from anger, and developing the positive side of our nature. In fact, the harm that the person has done to us will carry us along the bodhisattva's path.

For example, in the Buddha Shakyamuni's past lives he repeatedly met the incarnations of Devadatta, who constantly tried to make difficulties for him. In return, the Buddha always tried his best to help that person. In his lifetime as Shakyamuni, even though Devadatta tried to harm the Buddha, and even tried to kill him on several occasions, the Buddha repeatedly said that he did not see Devadatta as an enemy, but rather the same as his only child Rahula. Also, the Buddha said that Devadatta actually helped him to quickly fulfil the accumulation of great merit, such as generosity, patience and so on.

### **3 From the Perspective of the Drawbacks of Wealth**

From the perspective of the drawbacks of wealth we should know that possessions or wealth is just something that temporarily belongs to us. Everything is impermanent and ever changing. So sooner or later, these materials will move to somewhere else or

their value may decrease. If we have strong attachment to them, we are bound to increase our desire when we have them, and develop strong anger when we lose them. We are fettered by these materials without any freedom, which can only bring us either the fear of their loss, or the desire of holding them.

Therefore, it is better to have someone take our possessions so that we are freed from the fetters that these things have created in our mind and that we are prevented from falling to the lower realms. We should feel nothing but gratitude.

Here the point is that clinging to our possessions does not make sense. If we place too much importance on possessions and people want to rob us, we could fight them and in such process lose not only our possessions but also our accumulated merit. We should not risk our lives and our virtuous roots for something so insignificant.

## **The Actual Practice**

It may be easy to comprehend this bodhisattva practice, but to apply it is quite another thing. In the beginning this may seem difficult to put into practice. For all these practices, it is important to have a solid foundation in the practice of the Four Boundless Attitudes, which are also the preliminary practice of generating the bodhichitta of intention. They are: boundless love, the wish

that all others may have happiness; boundless compassion, the wish that they may all be free from suffering; boundless joy, the wish that all those who already have some happiness may keep and increase it; and boundless impartiality, the recognition that beings are all equally deserving of love, compassion, and joy.

According to Dilgo Rinpoche's teaching, in the morning, our first thought should be the commitment to do whatever we can during the day to help others and bring all beings to ultimate happiness. In the evening, dedicate to all beings the merit that we have gathered during the day. If anyone has tried to harm us, make the wish that they be free from all animosity and vindictive feelings, and that all their positive aspirations may be fulfilled.

# PRACTICE 13

## HOW TO USE SUFFERING ON THE PATH

### *H2. How to Use Suffering on the Path*

If, in return for not the slightest wrong of mine,  
Someone were to cut off even my very head,  
Through the power of compassion to take all  
his negative actions  
Upon myself is the practice of a bodhisattva.

### **Why Should I Take All His Negative Actions upon Myself?**

This verse is the instruction on how we should respond when someone hurts our body. Compared with our possessions we cherish our body much more. Here it says that, given the situation that I've not done anything wrong, but still someone is trying to seriously harm me, or even cut off my head, which is the most violent action since it ends my life, then what should I do? The

answer is, through the power of compassion take all his negative actions upon myself. Of course, for ordinary practitioners it is extremely difficult to do so, but still there is good reasoning behind it.

## **1 A Deeper Understanding of the Karmic Connection with Others**

As practitioners on the Mahayana path, we are motivated by the wish to bring happiness to all living beings and guide them to enlightenment. Firstly, we know every living being had been our mother or father at one time and we owe much gratitude to them; secondly, in this life we've made the vow of helping and benefiting them with all our efforts, then what's the point in developing anger towards them and again make a bad karmic connection with them? In that case, even if we defeated them as our enemies in this life, in our future lives we would again encounter them and have something bad happen between us.

As a matter of fact, a great bodhisattva would transform all those bad karmic connections to the good ones. If a person hates you, then why would they listen to you and receive your help? Although for now we have many negative connections with other living beings due to our previous negative thoughts and actions, we should make

some great aspirations so that we can build auspicious connection with all living beings.

In *The Way of the Bodhisattva*, Shantideva prays,

*And now as long as space endures,  
As long as there are beings to be found,  
May I continue likewise to remain  
To drive away the sorrows of the world.*

*The pains and sorrows of all wandering beings—  
May they ripen wholly on myself.  
And may the virtuous company of Bodhisattvas  
Always bring about the happiness of beings.*

## **2 The Distinguish between a Person's Affliction and a Person Himself**

Those who hurt us are actually ignorant, afflicted, and confused. The darkness of their ignorance inevitably leads them to conduct negative actions. We should distinguish a person's affliction from the person himself. All beings possess the buddha nature, and have innate goodness, compassion and wisdom. However, being covered by their ignorance and obscurations, deluded beings are



driven by their afflictions and are forced to conduct all kinds of negative actions.

Due to ignorance therefore, anyone can be overpowered by anger, lose control, and commit terrible deeds. Thus, sentient beings that harm others do not have power over themselves. Through ignorance, they lose control; through confusion, they cause harm. What's more, because they conduct such terrible actions toward me, again they will have to experience extreme suffering in their future life as a karmic result of that negative action. Once we distinguish between a person's affliction and a person himself, we can easily develop deep compassion and take on all the misdeeds this person has ever committed.

### **3 A Deeper Understanding of the Deluded "I"**

That idea of an enduring self has kept us wandering helplessly in the lower realms of samsara for countless past lifetimes. It is this very thing, ego, which prevents us from liberating ourselves and others from conditioned existence. If we could simply let go of that thought of "I", we would find it easy to free both ourselves and others. If we overcome the belief in a truly existing self, we will be enlightened. But if we never overcome it, we will never achieve enlightenment.

We should remind ourselves from time to time that this “I” is just a thought, a feeling, a habitual tendency without any true existence. This thought does not intrinsically possess any solidity, form, shape, or color. “I” is merely a label that we have given to a transient combination of concepts and attachments to our body, speech, and mind. Just like we call many trees together a forest, in fact a forest is only a conception in our mind. In order to break up our habitual thoughts, in order to disillusion ourselves from this deluded conception of “I”, we should intentionally practice the exchanging of self and others. We do need to practice in such a way to help us to eradicate our belief in a truly existing self, because our true enemies are not somebody else, but exactly our ego, our belief in a self.

## **The Power of Compassion**

Actually we can say all the practices of relative bodhichitta are related to compassion; and only with a strong compassion equally extending to all living beings, are we able to achieve enlightenment and to realize the true nature of our mind. So the power of compassion plays an important role in our Dharma practice, and we should develop compassion deeper and deeper.

Compassion is an innate quality of ourselves, and all living beings are born to be compassionate. It is just due to our conceptions and

limited perceptions based on the thought of “I”, that this quality is somehow not so obvious as it should be. That’s why we should cultivate it by all means, by deeply understanding all the reasoning behind it. Once fully aroused, compassion enables us to have the chance to transcend our limited perceptions and break up the habitual pattern of the thought of “I”. This is indeed the ultimate goal of our Dharma practice.

# PRACTICE 14

## HOW TO USE DISGRACE ON THE PATH

### *H3. How to Use Disgrace on the Path*

**Even if someone says all sorts of derogatory things about me  
And proclaims them throughout the universe,  
In return, out of loving-kindness,  
To extol that person's qualities is the practice of a bodhisattva.**

This verse tells us that if someone is broadcasting something bad about us throughout the universe, or damaging our reputation, then in return, as bodhisattvas, we should tell of that person's qualities with a mind full of love.

The metaphor of a billion worlds is used to suggest how far slander can extend. According to the text of *Abhidharmakosha*, one universe consists of four continents, sun and moon, Mount Meru and the heavens of the gods. Increased a thousand times it defines the chiliocosm. This multiplied a thousand times is the dichiliocosm,

or an intermediary universe. And this once more increased a thousand times is the trichiliocosm, or as described here, a billion worlds.

In our present time, through television, radio, internet, social media, and other technology, it is possible to circulate a slanderous rumor around the globe. Given this situation, great bodhisattvas would never retaliate, and instead of striking back, they would lovingly praise this person and proclaim his or her virtues.

## **The Traps of the Eight Worldly Dharmas**

According to Nagarjuna's *Letter to a Friend*, the eight worldly dharmas are: hope for happiness and fear of suffering; hope for fame and fear of insignificance; hope for praise and fear of blame; hope for gain and fear of loss. Basically they can be summarized as attachment and aversion.

Attachment, the mind clinging to this life, is the particular thing that creates all those problems we experience in life. We try to obtain the immediate happiness of this life through these eight worldly dharmas.

If our mind is controlled by attachment, then either having or not having something can bring us nothing but dissatisfaction. We feel suffering because there is nothing that can bring us complete

satisfaction. We become very fragile to the external situations. We lose control of our own mind and the ability to be calm and happy. That's why sometimes we refer to the eight worldly concerns as the eight traps and, once we fall into one of them, we would become very weak.

Therefore, as Nagarjuna says:

*All gain and loss, all joy and pain,  
All good and ill repute, all praise and blame:  
These eight worldly concerns are not the worthy objects  
of your mind.*

## **The True Nature of Reputation**

With regards to the eight worldly dharmas, even from the relative point of view there are many ways of eliminating the distinction between good and bad, that which you want to happen and that which you do not. From the point of view of absolute truth, there is not the slightest difference between gain and loss, pleasure and pain, fame and disgrace, praise and disparagement. They are all equal, all empty by nature.

In our daily lives our reputation is an alluring mirage that can easily lead us astray. We desire a good reputation because we're proud of ourselves and we always believe we are the best. However,

pride is rooted in our strong ego and is something that blinds our wisdom. For example, if we think, “What a good person I am, what excellent qualities I possess, what a warm and loving heart I have!”, then this is pride. Then, when somebody reveals what a bad person we really are, our inflated self-esteem will suddenly pop out, and we feel so much hurt. Therefore, our slanderer is actually a friend who helps us to recognize our true enemy, pride that is rooted in our ego. So, instead of developing anger against this person, it is more appropriate to feel gratitude.

We should also keep in mind that it is generally better for one’s Dharma practice to be unknown than to be famous. When we are not well known, pride has less opportunity to take root. On the other hand, fame can generate so much pride that we may eventually behave contrary to the Dharma. We may commit negative actions that contradict the Buddha’s path or that destroy our own practice. This is something important for us to know.

# PRACTICE 15

## HOW TO USE DISPARAGEMENT ON THE PATH

### *H4. How to Use Disparagement on the Path*

Even if in the midst of a large gathering  
Someone exposes my hidden faults with insulting language,  
To bow to him respectfully,  
Regarding him as a spiritual friend, is the practice  
of a bodhisattva.

### Expose Our Hidden Faults

This verse speaks of a person who publicly reveals all our hidden faults. How then do we respond like a bodhisattva? Our first reaction may be retaliation. However, if we suppress this impulse and objectively think about the actual criticisms, we may realize that they are accurate that we do have such faults. Thinking in this



way diminishes our pride and helps develop gratitude towards that person.

Indeed, we can hardly make much spiritual progress if we lack the courage to face our own hidden faults. Any person or situation that helps us to see those faults, however uncomfortable and humiliating it may be, is doing us a great service. As Lord Atisha says,

*The best spiritual friend is one who attacks your hidden faults.*

*The best instructions are the ones that hit your hidden faults.*

So what that person has actually done is to instruct us as a guru. Whatever points out our actual faults is a Dharma teaching. If we have a guru, he or she won't constantly praise us, because that would just increase our pride. To keep us humble, the master may occasionally point out our faults, or even treat us rudely. Similarly, we can consider our public abuser the same as a spiritual friend, a helpful guru who restrains our pride. On this basis, we bow respectfully to this person. If we can actually do this, we are behaving like a bodhisattva.

## **Be Aware of Our Pride**

Our pride is deeply rooted in our self-attachment and as long as we have self-attachment, we have pride. Therefore, we must be

very careful that it won't inflate to such a degree that it blinds our wisdom and destroys our practice.

For example, we put so much value in praise and blame that we become weak. The more we hear praise, the more we want. A little bit of criticism, even after a lot of praise, can make us very annoyed. In that case, we can hardly maintain a peaceful mind, let alone make progress on our Dharma path. However, if we really analyze then all those worldly concerns, such as praise and blame, have no essence at all. And if we can contemplate on these eight traps, it will really make us strong. If we realize how harmful our pride can be, we'll become so happy to accept other's disparagements because they are helpful for us to remain humble.

## **The Practice of the Four Principles**

If we want to be a genuine follower of the Buddha then according to the Buddha's teaching, we should always remember the four principles of positive training: (1) if someone abuses you, do not abuse him in return; (2) if someone gets angry with you, do not get angry with him in return; (3) if someone exposes your hidden faults, do not expose his in return; and (4) if someone strikes you, do not strike him back.

In other words, if someone criticizes us, picking on our most sensitive points, or angrily insults us with the most offensive

language, we do not return like for like and never give way to anger. Rather, we should practice patience and use it as a chance to let go of our own pride. These are the basic teachings given by the Buddha to all his ordained disciples, not just to Mahayana practitioners.

# PRACTICE 16

## HOW TO USE ON THE PATH BEING WRONGED IN RETURN FOR KINDNESS

In the section of using on the path the two things that are difficult to bear, the first is how to use on the path being wronged in return for kindness and the second one is how to use humiliation on the path.

*G2. Using on the Path the Two Things That Are Difficult to Bear*

*H1. How to Use on the Path Being Wronged in Return  
for Kindness*

Even if one I've lovingly cared for like my own child  
Regards me as an enemy,  
To love him even more,  
As a mother loves a sick child, is the practice of a bodhisattva.

## The Metaphor of a Mother Who Loves Her Sick Child More

Here Thogme Zangpo uses the metaphor of a mother who loves her sick child even more. In *Four Hundred Verses on the Middle Way*, Ayadeva says that “like a mother specially cares for her sick child, bodhisattvas love and sympathize with bad guys.” Normally a mother gives special care to her baby when the baby is sick. In the same way, after generating bodhichitta we should care more for those who have hurt us or have a bad temper. Chandrakirti used a story to explain this in his commentary on *Four Hundred Verses on the Middle Way*. In the past, a woman had six children. Five of them were able to take good care of themselves but the sixth one always behaved badly. So this mother cared for this child very much. Similarly, a bodhisattva should treat the bad guys who are ungrateful in this way too. Chandrakirti also says, “All compassionate lords treat everyone equally, but they especially love and care for bad guys more.” Therefore, bodhisattvas should give more care to those rude, foolish and miserable sentient beings.

## Why Do They Return Kindness with Ingratitude?

There may be some reason that the person who we’ve lovingly cared for changes his attitude, some justification for his action.

Normally even with those people who are very close to us, we may still not know their secrets or hidden feelings.

We should remember that those people who behave really so ungratefully, are actually incapable of seeing our kindness and good intentions due to their negative state. The situation is like the process of observing a flower. Light allows us to perceive a flower and appreciate its beauty. Without light, perception cannot take place because the conditions are wrong, the circumstances are negative. It is like this when someone we care about imagines we are their enemy.

We should also remember that people who harm us are simply the victim of their own afflictions. Think how good it would be if they could be free of those emotions. Unfortunately, many people do not have the good fortune of having a spiritual teacher, and thus cannot find their way out of delusion. They need our help and our compassion more than anyone else, no matter how badly they may behave. For example, when a thoughtless child does something wrong with a thoughtful adult, the adult will not feel angry, but will try with great love to help the child improve.

The last point is about giving and rewarding. A true bodhisattva never hopes for a reward. He responds to the needs of others spontaneously, out of his natural compassion. Cause and effect are

unfailing, so his actions to benefit others are sure to bear fruit, but he never counts on it. He certainly never thinks that people are not showing enough gratitude, or that they ought to treat him better. However, if someone who has caused him harm later changes their behavior and is set on the path and achieves liberation, then that is something that will make a bodhisattva rejoice wholeheartedly and be totally satisfied.

## **Develop Unbiased Compassion and Act According to the Rules**

Of course, in actual practice, this teaching does not tell us that we should abandon all rules and just show compassion to those persons who don't act in accord with the rules. The unbiased compassion is directed to those persons themselves rather than to their faults. If we just ignore and are tolerant with all their faults, that's not the true compassion but rather indulgence, which actually has no benefit to them at all.

For example, we should not accept those who abandon the mind of bodhichitta, because they break the vow of a bodhisattva. Also, according to the Vinaya and some sutras in Mahayana teaching, someone who has mental disease is not allowed to stay in the Sangha. So in our academy, those who have broken vows or have mental diseases are not allowed to stay. It is not giving up

bodhichitta. The Buddha made such rules in his teachings, and of course we should not doubt the Buddha's compassion. So in order to protect Buddhism and keep the Sangha clean we must obey such rules accordingly.



# PRACTICE 17

## HOW TO USE HUMILIATION ON THE PATH

### *H2. How to Use Humiliation on the Path*

Even if my peers or my inferiors  
Out of pride do all they can to debase me,  
To respectfully consider them like my teachers  
On the crown of my head is the practice of a bodhisattva.

### Respect All Living Beings and Remain Humble

The capacity to patiently bear scorn and injury from those who lack education, strength, and skill is particularly admirable. To remain humble while patiently bearing insults is a very effective way of counteracting our ingrained tendency to be interested only in our own happiness and pleasure, as well as our ingrained pride. We should always take the humblest position and regard everyone as being above us.

Actually, being despised is a wonderful remedy for pride. Instead of deflating pride, praise inflates it. But when people blame us and are spiteful, then very naturally our pride is squashed. Therefore, blame is much more useful than praise, and we should respect those who despise us no less than we respect our guru.

Also, as Mahayana practitioners, we should sincerely respect all living beings. As Shantideva said,

*That I might rejoice the Buddhas' hearts,  
Henceforth I will be master of myself, the servant of the world.  
I shall not seek revenge though crowds may trample on my head  
or kill me.  
Let the Guardians of the world rejoice!*

H. H. Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche always chanted this verse, and prayed in the way that, "Whoever hurts me, steps my head, slanders me intentionally or unintentionally, however they harm me, I am always glad to accept it." We should follow these teachings and respect whoever hurts me.

Normally we can tolerate if someone who is superior to us like our boss or teacher dishonors us. But it is difficult for us to accept those who are inferior to us. Actually when anyone insults us in any way, we should treat him or her as our master. If we can do

this, attaining full enlightenment is not far away. As Nagarjuna says, “Those who seek enlightenment should treat all sentient beings as their own masters.” So we should think in this way that every sentient being can be my master and can bring benefits to my practice.

## **The Distinction between Being Patient and Being Passive**

Certainly this is not to say that we have to bear any insult. We do not have to be passive like that. What this verse means is that when someone insults us, we should not react with anger. If we are overpowered by our negative emotions, we become unbalanced and lose control, and this should not happen. It is better to be stable and centered within ourselves so that we can respond in a good way. We do not have to keep on enduring insults and doing nothing at all but instead we can respond to an insult without losing our balance or letting our negative emotions take over.

In the process, we should have wisdom to distinguish between different people and capacities. For example, should we teach the Dharma to anyone? Actually it is unreasonable to expect that. For those who have no faith or devotion to the Dharma, it is not very meaningful to teach them the Dharma. As the sutra says, “Like moon appearing in sky, its shadows only reflect in the pure water.

Likewise, when the Buddha's moon of compassion appears, it can't light those who have no karmic connection with him." So those people with a lack of devotion or respect to the Buddha, or with a very bad personality, can hardly receive any blessing from the Buddha.

Also, if a person who has broken precepts still stays in Sangha, the merit of the whole Sangha will be destroyed. Just like pouring a drop of yoghurt into a pot of milk, all milk will go bad. The Buddha was the most compassionate person on this planet, but even he would not allow Bhikkhus who had broken precepts to stay in the Sangha. So on the one hand, we should practice patience towards those who blame us; on the other hand, we should not just be passive and accept every wrongdoing without any judgment.

# PRACTICE 18

## HOW TO USE DEPRIVATION ON THE PATH

*G3. Using Deprivation and Prosperity on the Path*

*H1. How to Use Deprivation on the Path*

Even when utterly destitute and constantly maligned  
by others,  
Afflicted by terrible illness and prey to evil forces.  
To still draw upon myself the suffering and wrongdoing  
of all beings  
And not lose heart is the practice of a bodhisattva.

### Make Good Use of Our Own Suffering

Countless people in this world are deprived of everything—food, clothing, shelter, affection. They can hardly keep themselves alive. Many people are stricken by serious illness, or they live under poor conditions and are constantly scorned by others. If difficulties such as these arise in our lives and create intense suffering, what we

should do? This teaching tells us that even then we must not lose our heart. Not only must we endure our own suffering, we must also take the negativity and suffering of every other being upon ourselves. This is the real practice of a bodhisattva.

Suffering, in fact, can be helpful in many ways. It spurs our motivation, and as many teachings point out, without suffering there would be no determination to be free of samsara, and sadness is an effective antidote to arrogance. As Shantideva said,

*Suffering also has its worth.*

*Through sorrow, pride is driven out*

*And pity felt for those who wander in samsara;*

*Evil is avoided; goodness seems delightful.*

So the first quality is to generate and strengthen our mind of renunciation; the second one is to destroy the arrogance in our mind-stream; and the third one is to cultivate our compassion toward all sentient beings within samsara. In this way, suffering greatly benefits us in our Dharma practice.

Therefore, if we are serious about the Dharma, then suffering is preferable to happiness. Happiness is a negative influence coaxing us not to practice, while suffering is a friend always beckoning us to practice and study. When difficult times and circumstances arise,

the difference between genuine practice and its mere semblance is revealed.

## **Be Strong and Abandon Discouragement**

This verse also tells us not to get discouraged even if we are very poor and have no possessions, even if people scorn us and we are sick, and even if terrible things happen to us all at once. Instead, when we suffer such torments, we should make the wish with compassion and courage to take the difficulties and anguish of all beings upon ourselves and to give them whatever happiness we may have.

For example, we should not think, “I encounter unfavorable conditions in my practices, and I cannot keep going on.” This is not a proper attitude. Even if we become the most inferior person in this world, we should not be timid or discouraged. As Nagarjuna said, “Never be discouraged even when you are as poor as a hungry ghost.” Lord Atisha also said, “We should enhance our inner strength when timidity appears.”

Geshe Potowa, one of the main disciple of Lord Atisha, explained this teaching by using an example of Tibetan merchants. In general, snowy weather is unfavorable to merchants. But some wise merchants feel that such bad weather is also good. If horses make a long journey under the sun, their hooves will be injured, but after

the rain, their hooves are rather wet, so they can walk faster the next day. So wise merchants are happy when it rains. Also, when it snows heavily, they can sleep well because they won't worry about thieves. Even if thieves stole something, the next day the merchants can catch them by tracing their footprints on the snow. Therefore, some merchants feel joyful in bad weather.

Similarly, as Dharma practitioners, if we are slandered or blamed by others, disturbed by sickness, or encounter any kind of negative situations, we should think, "This is a great opportunity in my practice. It is the best blessing from the Three Jewels and my guru. I should make good use of my suffering so that my Dharma practice can progress to a great extent." In this way, our practice will be successful.



# PRACTICE 19

## HOW TO USE PROSPERITY ON THE PATH

### *H2. How to Use Prosperity on the Path*

Though I may be famous, and revered by many,  
And as rich as the God of Wealth himself,  
To see that the wealth and glory of the world are  
without essence,  
And to be free of arrogance, is the practice of a bodhisattva.

### Observe Impermanence of All Good Things

A bodhisattva sees that wealth, beauty, influence, prosperity, family lineage, in fact all the ordinary concerns of this life, are as fleeting as a flash of lightning, as ephemeral as a dewdrop, as fragile as a bubble, or not real as the appearance of rainbows in the summer season. He is never conceited or proud no matter what worldly achievements and privileges may come to him. This is a great pith

instruction for us to transform prosperity into the assistance on our Dharma practice.

So we should meditate that fame is impermanent: it changes and it vanishes. Wealth also has no essence. Here the verse speaks about the god of wealth, who is said to be very rich and who protects the riches of others. But even his wealth lacks essence. Wealth is impermanent, subject to change, and without essence. Still, the wealthy strive to maintain and perpetuate their fortune. Thus they suffer. While the rich suffer from fear of poverty, the famous suffer from fear of becoming disgraced. Both experience suffering while they still are wealthy and famous, if they do not recognize that wealth and fame are groundless, impermanent and empty of true essence.

## Be Free of Arrogance

By meditating on impermanence we can see that the wealth and glory of the world are without essence. We can then easily remind ourselves to be free of arrogance. As Shantideva said, “When arrogance inflates the mind, it draws it down to a state of misery.” Arrogant people are easily reborn in miserable realms. Therefore, when we are wealthy, we should consider our fortune as illusions or dreams, having no substantiality; meanwhile, we should destroy our arrogance and act like sentient beings’ servants as much as we

can. As Shantideva also said, “Now I should dispel my arrogance and willingly be the servant to sentient beings.” So we should try our best to dispel the arrogance in our mind, and be willing to serve sentient beings.

We may think that, “May the needs of all beings, even the smallest insect, be fulfilled.” And we can use our wealth and possessions in the best way to help others. Whenever possible, try to provide others with their everyday needs of food, clothing, shelter, and so on. At the same time, make the wish to be able to fulfill their ultimate needs by giving them the sublime gift of the Dharma.

Generally speaking, we should keep in mind that in this world, deprivation or prosperity, gain or loss, beauty or ugliness, all of these are like what happens in our dreams and have no real meaning. If we are able to understand this truth, we will not become attached to any of the worldly goals that ordinary people pursue every day, such as social status, fame, wealth, and so forth. If we can release our attachment to them, we are able to reach certain level of enlightenment. Geshe Venerable Potowa once said, “We should not be discouraged when we receive no food in alms after going through ten cities; and neither should we be happy or attached to what we’ve got when we became wealthy and famous.” This is an excellent state of practice.

# PRACTICE 20

## HOW TO USE OBJECTS OF HATRED ON THE PATH

*G4. Using Hatred and Desire on the Path*

*H1. How to Use Objects of Hatred on the Path*

If one does not conquer one's own hatred,  
The more one fights outer enemies,  
the more they will increase.

Therefore, with the armies of loving-kindness  
and compassion,

To tame one's own mind is the practice of a bodhisattva.

### Recognize the Real Enemy

Our own anger is our real enemy. It is an obstacle that cuts us off from the cause of higher states of rebirth and the cause of liberation. If we do not tame it, then outer enemies will simply increase.

Once we overcome the hatred within our own mind, we will discover that in the external world there is no longer even a single enemy. But, if we keep giving free reign to our feelings of hatred and try to overcome our outer adversaries, we will find that however many of them we manage to defeat there will always be more to take their place. Even if we could subjugate all the beings in the universe, our anger would only grow stronger. We will never be able to deal with it properly by indulging it. So hatred itself is our true enemy.

There's an analogy taught by the Buddha about this. When a man hits a dog with a stone, the dog chases the stone rather than the man. But when a man hits a lion with a stone, the lion directly attacks the man. So this is the difference between the fool and the wise. The cause of suffering is not the outer enemies, but our afflictive emotions inside. If we can tame and subdue our afflictive emotions, all the enemies outside will vanish. Like Shantideva said,

*Harmful beings are everywhere like space itself.*

*Impossible it is that all should be suppressed.*

*But let this angry mind alone be overthrown,*

*And it's as though all foes had been subdued.*

## Tame the Mind with Compassion

The way to master hatred is to meditate one-pointedly on patience and love. Armed with the attitude of loving kindness and compassion, we will no longer have any external enemies. As Geshe Potowa said, “If you see anyone as an enemy and think of others in terms of close and distant, you will not attain buddhahood. So generate love and compassion impartially for all sentient beings, as infinite in number as space is vast.”

If our mind is tamed, we will not feel so much pain, and neither will we have any enemies. Lord Atisha said, “When your mind is tamed, outside enemies cannot hurt you.” That means that neither the disasters caused by four elements, earth, fire, water, and wind, nor unfavorable conditions caused by humans or non-humans, can hurt us. Furthermore, if we arouse bodhichitta in our mind, we will not take rebirth in the lower realms in the next life.

So we should turn our mind inward and apply the right antidotes with pure motivation. Then we will be able to transform ourselves in accordance with the Dharma, and to act in the way of a bodhisattva.

# PRACTICE 21

## HOW TO USE OBJECTS OF DESIRE ON THE PATH

### *H2. How to Use Objects of Desire on the Path*

**Sense pleasures and desirable things are like saltwater—  
The more one tastes them, the more one's thirst increases.  
To abandon promptly  
All objects which arouse attachment is the practice  
of a bodhisattva.**

### **The Outcome of Desire**

Here the term for the sense pleasures refers to beautiful forms, pleasant sounds, fragrant smells, delicious tastes, and pleasing objects of touch. These are the five sense pleasures. If we take them to be true, our attachment to them as well as our suffering will increase. Like drinking salt water to quench our thirst, the more we drink, the thirstier we become. To the extent that we

enjoy these objects we will also be tormented by our desire. Not only are we not satisfied, our desires also increase. This is how desire expands. Like the Buddha said in the *Chapter of Causes and Conditions*, “Even though there is rain of precious jewels, greedy people still do not feel content.” Therefore, it is necessary to abandon immediately whatever arouses attachment. This is the practice of a bodhisattva.

## Let Go of Desire

Talking about desire, big persons have big attachments and small persons have small attachments. Although the objects of attachment and the way they are attached are different, desire itself is essentially the same. For example, ants cling to scraps of food, while lions cling to chunks of meat. Their desire is just expanding according to their own abilities. This is the characteristic of ordinary people. Therefore, when desire arises in our mind, we must try to abandon it immediately. When we encounter attractive objects, we should get rid of it by all means, and keep our mind in a state of being content.

There are two ways of relinquishing sense objects: one is directly to give them up, and the other is to abandon attachment to them. As for our beginners, before we can really abandon our attachment, we may need to force ourselves to stay away from those attractive



objects. In our daily lives, we experience a variety of objects that engage our senses. When we are focused on one of these and feel attachment to it, we should quickly abandon it. As Karmapa said in his teaching, eliminating any object that causes afflictions to appear is an effective way of suppressing these negative emotions. When he received something that he liked very much, he would immediately pass it on to someone else. Holding on to things we strongly desire will just cause problems.

As a summary of the post meditation practice of using unfavorable circumstances on the path, it is for sure that life cannot be free from any difficulty or failure. Under those difficult situations, we should be able to transform all of them into the assistance of our Dharma practice. For example, there once was a famous doctor in Tibet who could use any plant growing in mountains as medicine. Even the poisonous plant that no one dares to touch can be used by him together with other kinds of plant to become a medicine. Similarly, we practitioners should be able to use either good or bad situations on our path. No matter what happens to us, we should regard all of them as assistance to our Dharma practices. In this way, we can reduce our afflictions and increase our happiness.

# PRACTICE 22

## THE MEDITATION PRACTICE OF ABSOLUTE BODHICHITTA

Within the part of absolute bodhichitta, there are two parts, the meditation practice of remaining in a state free of conceptual elaborations without any clinging; and the post meditation practice of abandoning any belief in the objects of desire and aversion as truly existing.

### *E2. Absolute Bodhichitta*

#### *F1. The Meditation Practice of Remaining in a State Free of Conceptual Elaborations without Any Clinging*

**All that appears is the work of one's own mind;  
The nature of mind is primordially free from  
conceptual limitations.**

**To recognize this nature**

**And not to entertain concepts of subject and object is  
the practice of a bodhisattva.**

## The Work of Our Own Mind

According to the Mind-Only School, all appearances are created by our own mind. Briefly speaking, we live in a dualistic world, and have dualistic appearances, which refer to subject and object, or perceived and perceiver. The perceived is the outer perceived object, and the perceiver is the inner perceiving mind. The outer perceived object is merely our own mind's creation, a confused or delusive appearance arising from habitual tendencies. It is just like a dream in which external objects seem to appear, yet nothing that appears has any true existence.

### 1 Perceptual Mind, Conceptual Mind and Emotional Mind

The many different perceptions around us merely arise in our mind. The process starts with the senses, through which the mind perceives various sight, sounds, smells, tastes, and touch. At this level, there's no conceptions being involved, and it is called perceptual mind. So perceptual mind refers to our direct perceptions of sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch, and it includes the first five consciousness, i.e., eye consciousness, ear consciousness, nose consciousness, tongue consciousness, body consciousness. Because they arise and pass so quickly, we usually don't pay much attention to these experiences; we miss them and jump straight into the

second level of mind, conceptual mind, which is related to mental consciousness.

As the mind becomes aware of those objects outside, it labels and categorizes them. For example, this is a book, this is a table, this is a flower, and so on. If there is a table in front of us, very often, by the time we notice it, what we're seeing is just our thought, "Oh, it's a table." So we aren't seeing the actual table anymore; we're seeing the label, a mental construct, an idea we form based on a perception. We continually produce one label after another, unaware of how far removed we are from our own experience, and this is what we call conceptual mind, which is related to mental consciousness.

Furthermore, the mind is attracted to those that it finds pleasant and tries to avoid those that it finds unpleasant. The mind suffers from not getting the pleasant things it wants and from having to experience the unpleasant things it wants to avoid. So we react to these labels or conceptions and get caught up in our habitual feelings of like and dislike, jealousy, anger, and so on. This is the third level of our mind, emotional mind, directly related to the seventh consciousness, which is called emotional consciousness, or deluded awareness. Its main function is to generate this deluded thought of I, the self-attachment.

Above is a brief description of how our mind works day to day. Now we understand that there are different levels, or different aspects of our mind, and we end up living in a world that's made up almost entirely of concepts and emotions. Our mind is always busy running after some pleasant situation, or trying to escape some unwanted one that it finds difficult and unpleasant. But these experiences of things as pleasant or unpleasant are not functions intrinsically belonging to the objects we perceive. They arise only in the mind. For example, materials can never process meaning, and it is our mind that gives meaning to everything. Gold or diamond never knows how precious they are, and it is human beings who give their value. From this perspective, we can say that what we perceive is merely our mind's own projection.

## **2 All-Ground Consciousness**

In fact, our mind has a much deeper level, which functions like an ocean, and all phenomena, including our body, our thoughts, as well as the external world, are just like the waves of the ocean, created by this ocean-like mind, and it is called Alaya, or all-ground consciousness, or storehouse consciousness. It is the basis or ground for the arising of all other types of consciousness, such as eye consciousness, ear consciousness, and so on. Meanwhile, it manifests all the external object in this world, such as this planet, mountain, river, cities and our living places, by the power of

habitual tendency. It is like a big storehouse which contains a varied range of seeds or potentials, such as the seed of being a person, the seed of being an easterner or westerner, and the time that seed will ripen is determined by the power of our habitual tendency. This is exactly the meaning of the first line of this verse.

So within my world, everything is just a projection of my own mind, including my body, my thoughts, and the external world I perceived. Then how about other living beings in my world? Actually, other living beings, if they have a karmic connection with me, are able to project their images into my mind, and then I am able to communicate with them through these images projected in my mind. Meanwhile, they are able to affect my mind in a positive or negative way, and I can in turn affect them. So in actual fact, everything in my world is part of my own mind, and everybody just lives inside his or her own world. But these different worlds created by each individual's mind are able to interact with each other.

How do we understand that we all have a common world? For example, all of us can see an apple as an apple. It's related to our habitual tendency. In this life, as human beings, we all have the habitual tendency of being humans. Therefore we share a common world of humankind. Or, in other words, we have the common karma of taking birth as human beings on this planet in this 21st

century. That's why we share this modern world in this modern time. However, everybody still has their individual karma. In this way everybody has a kind of unique life, unique happiness or suffering, as well as unique perspective.

So this verse is about the mechanism of how our life works, the relative truth of our phenomenal world. Everything is created by our own mind and the feature of this world is determined by our habitual tendency. If we can bring to an end the mental activity that results from these habitual patterns, we can rest in meditative concentration with a one-pointed focus on reality itself.

## **The Nature of Our Own Mind**

If everything is created by our mind, then what is our mind and what's the nature of our mind? The text says that the mind itself, or the true nature of mind, is primordially free from conceptual limitations. It transcends all mental fabrications by itself.

### **1 The Emptiness of Our Mind**

One thing for sure is that, no matter how much we look, there is nothing that we can find and say, "Here is the thought!" The reason is because the nature of thought is empty. There is nothing but emptiness.

For example, when a rainbow appears vividly in the sky, we can see its beautiful colors, yet we could not wear it as clothing or put it on as an ornament. It arises through the combination of various factors yet there is nothing about it that can be grasped. Likewise, thoughts that arise in the mind have no tangible existence or intrinsic solidity. There is no logical reason why thoughts, which have no substance, should have so much power over us, nor is there any reason why we should become their slave.

To formulate the existence of something that has no existence at all is called delusion. It is our lack of awareness and our grasping that makes thoughts appear to have some kind of reality. If thoughts had any inherent existence in the absolute nature of mind, they should at least have a form, or be located somewhere. But there is nothing.

It is the endless succession of past, present, and future thoughts that leads us to believe that there is something inherently and consistently present. We call it “mind”. However, actually as we can see, past thoughts are already gone, they do not exist anymore; future thoughts have not yet arisen. So how could these two, which do not exist, be part of an entity that inherently exists?

We can also examine a present thought. You may be thinking, for example, “I am cold.” Is that thought in your skin, or in your bones



or nerves; or is it perhaps in your heart, or in your brain or liver? Or is it anywhere else? If you think there is something somewhere, then does it have any shape? Is it square, round, or triangular? Does it have a color—is it red, blue, black, yellow, or what? Or is it just like a rainbow in the sky that has suddenly appeared because of the conjunction of various circumstances?

Therefore, to say there is “a mind” is to give a label to something that does not exist. We just assume the existence of something that is no more than a name given to a succession of events. For example, one hundred and eight beads strung together, can be called a rosary, but that “rosary” is not a thing that exists inherently on its own. If the string breaks, then there’s no such a thing called rosary. Likewise, when we examine our mind closely, there is no such thing as a solid entity of true existence. This is the empty aspect of our mind.

## **2 The Clarity of Our Mind**

However, here the state of emptiness is not just like empty space. There is an immediate awareness present. If someone gives you an apple, you are cheerful; if a bee stings you, you feel pain. Nobody teaches us, but naturally we know what suffering is and what happiness is. Indeed, it’s not only us, even small animals such as ants clearly know about these. This is the clarity aspect of mind.

The clarity of mind is like the sun, illuminating the world and allowing us to see and feel everything.

In essence, the mind is what is aware of everything. It is a clarity that perceives all external objects and events. However, we try to find it and it turns out to be as elusive and impossible to grasp as a rainbow. The more we run after it, the farther away it appears to recede; the more we look at it, the less we can find. This is the empty aspect of the mind. Clarity and emptiness are inseparably united in the true nature of mind, which is beyond all concepts of existence and nonexistence.

That is the meaning of the second line, the nature of mind is primordially free from conceptual limitations. Like in the *Root Stanzas of the Middle Way*, Nagarjuna said, “The mind itself is free from the elaborations of coming and going, eternalism and nihilism, existence and nonexistence, oneness and diversity.”

## **How Can We Transcend the Concepts of Subject and Object?**

If we realize that perceived objects do not really exist and that the true nature of mind transcends all mental fabrications, we can give up clinging to dualistic appearances. On the one hand, in order to achieve such a state of realization we should make efforts in studying and practicing the Dharma, and to fulfill the

accumulation of merit and wisdom; on the other hand, we can never be apart from the blessings of our lineage masters.

In other words, we need two things in order to achieve realization. One is our own wisdom of comprehending the profound teachings of Dharma and the ability of putting it into practice; the other is the powerful blessings of our lineage masters, which can only happen if we have sincere devotion to them and consistently pray to them. As it is said in Patrul Rinpoche's *The Words of my Perfect Teacher*,

*Innate absolute wisdom can only come*

*As the mark of having accumulated merit and purified obscurations*

*And through the blessings of a realized teacher.*

*Know that to rely on any other means is foolish.*

## **1 Our Own Practice**

The first thing we need to do is to develop the conviction that everything is created by our own mind, and the nature of our mind is empty. Such a conviction may come from the Dharma practice in our previous lives, so that in this life we have a natural faith in it. However, such a conviction may or may not be stable enough. Within this life probably the best way to solidify it is through the long-term, systematical study on the Buddhist philosophy.

Once we have developed conviction, we should force ourselves to familiarize it. For example, whatever we see we just need to remind ourselves that they are not real, they are empty, they have no real essence, and they are exactly the same as rainbow. By doing so, we'll have the chance to encounter the truth.

## 2 The Blessings of Our Masters

In a sutra, the Buddha told Sariputra, “O Sariputra, absolute truth is only realized through faith.” This means that as we develop a strong faith, by its power the blessings of the teacher and of the Three Jewels will enter us. Then true realization will arise and we will see the natural state as it really is. In *The Words of my Perfect Teacher*, Patrul Rinpoche quoted a teaching given by a great master, saying that

*Wishing for primal wisdom beyond the intellect to dawn*

*Without fervent trust in the teacher*

*Is like waiting for sunshine in a north-facing cave.*

*That way, appearances and mind will never merge.*

Through these two teachings we know that without the blessings of our lineage masters, it is impossible for us to achieve enlightenment. In order to receive the blessings from them, we must have sincere devotion and keep praying to them.

## PRACTICE 23

### ABANDONING ANY BELIEF IN THE OBJECTS OF DESIRE AS TRULY EXISTING

*F2. The Post Meditation Practice of Abandoning Any Belief  
in the Objects of Desire and Aversion as Truly Existing*

*G1. Abandoning Any Belief in the Objects of Desire as  
Truly Existing*

When encountering objects which please us,  
To view them like rainbows in summer,  
Not ultimately real, however beautiful they appear,  
And to relinquish craving and attachment, is the  
practice of a bodhisattva.

#### The Metaphor of Rainbows in Summer

This verse uses the example of rainbows in summer to illustrate that no matter how beautiful an appearance may seem, attachment to it must be relinquished. Beyond what the eye can see, objects which

please us include the four other objects of the senses: pleasant sounds, fragrant smells, delicious tastes, and pleasing objects of touch. Clinging to these as real must be abandoned. All sense objects are like rainbows that, though beautiful and desirable, are mere appearances that lack essence. If we believe they are true, our desire to cling to a desirable object will increase, and our suffering will grow in equal measure. On the contrary, once the object is understood to be empty of essence, it can be enjoyed without attachment, without suffering.

How should we understand these two aspects, emptiness and appearance? All sight, sounds, smells, tastes, and touch have no self-nature and they are absolutely empty of essence. Though from the absolute perspective they do not truly exist, still they appear as mere appearances. This apparent contradiction is called the inseparable nature of appearance and emptiness. It is because our minds are obscured by the idea that phenomena truly exist that we do not see this universal quality of the inseparability of appearance and emptiness of all phenomena. So once we are deluded by concepts, we will strongly cling to the appearance as truly existing. Actually, appearance itself is none other than emptiness, and emptiness does not mean there's nothing at all like a vast space.

## Abandon Attachment by Seeing the Truth

Now we know that the mind contrives everything, the only thing to do is to master the mind. As Tilopa taught Naropa: “It is not what you perceive that binds you, and it is your clinging to it that binds you. Cut through your clinging, Naropa!” If we master our mind, we will even be able to wander around in a crowd without being distracted and carried away by desire or aversion. But if we have no mastery over our mind and are influenced and conditioned by our habitual tendencies, even in an isolated retreat our thoughts will follow one upon another like ripples on water. We will spend our whole time running after thoughts and concepts, a lot of mental activity with no benefit at all for our practice.

Our tasks are to dismantle the idea that appearances truly exist and to become free from conceptual obscurations that block how things really are. In this way, the empty nature of appearance will manifest and our life will become relaxed, open, and spacious. Then, no matter what desirable objects appear to us in our waking life, our enjoyment of them can be free of pain, affliction, and all disturbing emotions because we don’t cling to them anymore.

## PRACTICE 24

### ABANDONING ANY BELIEF IN THE OBJECTS OF AVERSION AS TRULY EXISTING

#### *G2. Abandoning Any Belief in the Objects of Aversion as Truly Existing*

The various forms of suffering are like the death of  
one's child in a dream:

By clinging to deluded perceptions as real  
we exhaust ourselves.

Therefore, when encountering unfavorable circumstances,  
To view them as illusions is the practice of a bodhisattva.

#### The Metaphor of the Death of One's Child in a Dream

We have so many types of suffering. Our body, possessions, enemies, friends, relatives and so on can all cause suffering. But not anyone of these sources of pain truly exists. All are delusive appearances,



nothing but dreams. The suffering is similar to experiencing a child to die in a dream. We dream we have given birth to a child who is the center of our life. The child dies; we cannot be consoled. The truth of the matter is that there is no reason to mourn because no one has died. We have experienced a dream death. Our grief is dream-grief arising from delusive dream appearances.

All appearances are like a dream. When we dream, objects clearly appear to us, but when we analyze these dream appearances, we see they do not exist apart from our mind. Nevertheless, they manifest as appearance and emptiness inseparable. While we sleep, we accept the reality of our dreams because we fail to recognize we are dreaming. After waking, we understand our dreams are only mental activities, mere dream appearances, and our idea or concept about them as solid and real is just mistaken.

## **Be Free from Suffering by Seeing the Truth**

If we do not recognize that all appearances are deluded and confused like the appearances in a dream, our conceptions and emotions will exhaust us. So, we should not take deluded appearances to be true but recognize whatever difficulties and obstacles we meet as delusion. However, it is not enough to glibly think, “Oh, it’s only an illusion.” Only if we have conviction of it, are we able to free us from the deluded appearance.

To develop conviction, first we need to correctly analyze why the situation and all its appearances are delusive. Then we need to apply these analyses in our own life and familiarize it into our mind. We need to do this again and again. Eventually, when difficult circumstances arise, we can still keep the awareness that they are delusions and we won't be trapped by them.

# PRACTICE 25

## TRANSCENDENT GENEROSITY

In the section on the path for beings of superior capacity, we've talked about the bodhichitta of intention and the bodhichitta of application. Now we're going to learn about the precepts for training in those practices. It has five sections, the first one is training in the six transcendent perfections; the second is training in the four instructions taught in the Sutra; the third one is training in how to be rid of the negative emotions; the fourth one is training in accomplishing others' good with mindfulness and vigilance; and the fifth one is dedicating the merit to perfect enlightenment.

The first section on training in the six transcendent perfections expounds the practice of the six transcendent perfections, or six paramitas: generosity, discipline, patience, diligence, concentration, and wisdom. Each of these virtues or qualities is considered to be qualified as truly transcendent (paramita) when it has the following four characteristics: 1) It destroys its negative counterpart, for example, generosity destroying miserliness. 2) It is reinforced with

wisdom, that is, it is free from all concepts of subject, object, and action. 3) It can result in the fulfillment of all beings' aspirations. 4) It can bring others to the full maturity of their potential.

### *D3. The Precepts for Training in Those Practices*

#### *E1. Training in the Six Transcendent Perfections*

##### *F1. Transcendent Generosity*

**If those who wish for enlightenment must give away  
even their own bodies,  
How much more should it be true of material objects?  
Therefore, without expectation of result or reward,  
To give with generosity is the practice of a bodhisattva.**

## **The Difference between Ordinary Generosity and Transcendent Generosity**

Many religions and spiritual paths agree on the importance of giving, because we can all see that this benefits others directly. For Buddhists in particular, generosity is important because it directly counteracts our attachments.

The essence of generosity is nonattachment. Transcendent generosity is the generosity that is free of the three limiting concepts, attachment to there being any substantial reality of a person giving,

a recipient, and an act of giving. To be free from such concepts is precisely how a paramita works as a cause of enlightenment.

By applying the wisdom of emptiness, we are able to recognize all possessions to be like dreams or magical illusions, and so can give them away as offerings without holding back. Through this kind of generosity, we will perfect our accumulation of merit, which leads in the end to the attainment of buddhahood. The key aspect of the practice of generosity is to make sure that it is always permeated with the enlightened attitude of bodhichitta, which is what makes it truly meaningful by turning it into the cause of buddhahood.

True generosity requires some wisdom—a clear understanding of ourselves who are giving, what we are giving, and to whom we are giving. If we give using our intelligence, then generosity benefits both ourselves and others. We should not give just for the sake of giving or from an old habit. When we are generous and wise, our giving benefits others and also helps us to deepen our practice as we move along the path.

## **The Three Types of Generosity**

There are three kinds of generosity. The first is material giving. A bodhisattva should give without reservation and without regret. If an offering is given with pure intention, its size is not important.

The verse tells us that, without hope of return or a good result, to give with generosity is the practice of a bodhisattva.

So to practice generosity properly, we should never hope for anything in return and should not expect that in our next life we will be treated well or be happy and prosperous. Generosity is complete in itself; there is no need for any other reward. If we give something motivated by self-interest, the joy we might have felt will be spoiled, and further unhappiness is certain to follow. However, giving out of sheer devotion, love, or compassion will bring us a feeling of great joy, and our gift will create yet more happiness. The motivation behind the act of giving makes all the difference.

The second kind of generosity is to save life, and to provide beings with protection from fear. Follow example, those great bodhisattvas like Patrul Rinpoche saved thousands of domestic animals from slaughter by buying them and setting them free, convinced people to give up hunting and fishing. For many years, Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro and I have been organizing the Buddhists around the world to release captive animals for 100 days every year.

The third kind of generosity is teaching the Dharma. A bodhisattva should do everything he can to make the Dharma teaching spread all over and to places where it has never been heard before. As

Buddhists we should bring the Dharma to people in a way that they can put it into practice and act in accordance with the Buddha's teachings. This is what enables the activity of all buddhas to flourish and increase.

## The Benefits of Practicing Generosity

People who are generous may not be trying to get rich, but the natural result of their merit will bring them ever-increasing wealth in their future lives. People tied up in their own miserliness, in contrast, will find themselves reborn in the realm of hungry ghosts.

*As the Vinaya says:*

*He who has never given anything away will not be wealthy,  
Nor will he have any way even to gather people to him—  
Let alone to attain enlightenment.*

It is also said that generosity is the gem that fulfills all wishes and the sublime sword that cuts through the knot of miserliness. If we are truly generous, we will be free of all difficulties and will possess whatever wealth we need to carry out altruistic deeds until we attain enlightenment.

# PRACTICE 26

## TRANSCENDENT DISCIPLINE

### *F2. Transcendent Discipline*

If, lacking discipline, one cannot accomplish one's own good,  
It is laughable to think of accomplishing the good of others.  
Therefore, to observe discipline  
Without samsaric motives is the practice of a bodhisattva.

### What Is Discipline and the Purpose of Discipline?

Discipline is the foundation of all Dharma practice. It provides the ground upon which all positive qualities can be cultivated. In the same way that all the oceans and mountains are supported by the underlying mass of the earth, all the practices of the Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana are supported by the backbone of discipline.



Discipline in each of these three vehicles is defined by one of the three corresponding levels of vows: the vows of individual liberation, the vows of the Mahayana, and the vows of the Vajrayana. Briefly speaking, giving up harming others is the discipline of individual liberation, benefiting others is the discipline of the Mahayana, and developing the ability to see all appearances as pure is the discipline of the Vajrayana.

The discipline of individual liberation begins when we take the refuge vows and enter the Dharma path. A person motivated by a strong determination to be free from samsara will then renounce worldly concerns and keep the vows of a lay disciple, the monastic vows of the novice, or the vows of a fully ordained monk or nun.

To this basis, the discipline of the Mahayana adds bodhichitta, the vow to bring all beings to perfect enlightenment. Mahayana practitioners therefore keep either lay or monastic vows themselves, and apply the various precepts of a bodhisattva. Thus, infused with a bodhisattva's motivation, discipline increases greatly in its power.

Specifically speaking, within the vows of bodhisattva, there are three types of discipline to be practiced. The first is to give up all actions that harm either others or oneself. The second is to undertake positive actions by practicing the six paramitas to accumulate

virtue and merit. The third is to do everything possible to benefit others in their present and future lives.

Based on that, it culminates in the discipline of the Vajrayana, which is to maintain the samayas, the sacred links between the spiritual master and the disciple, which is the very life force of the Vajrayana.

These three sets of vows should be kept in harmony with one another. As our practice progresses stage by stage through the three vehicles, the vows of the preceding vehicles are not discarded but rather are transmuted, like iron into gold.

The verse tells us that without discipline, we will never even be able to accomplish any of our personal aims, let alone be able to help others. Without discipline, there is no way to achieve either the temporary happiness or the ultimate bliss of enlightenment. Whatever vows we take, they all need to be observed with great care, like how we would protect our own eyes.

## **How to Maintain Pure Discipline?**

In essence, discipline is to have a peaceful, self-controlled, and altruistic mind. If we can keep discipline, it is the source of bliss but, if we transgress it, it becomes a source of suffering. Perfect discipline

is to keep the vows in a pure way with constant mindfulness, free from conceit or pride.

To keep pure discipline, it helps to stay with virtuous friends. We need to give up attachment and desire, remember the infallibility of the karmic law of cause and effect, reflect on the miseries of samsara, and follow the precepts of the three types of vows. It is said that those who keep perfect monastic discipline will not only be widely respected by humans, but celestial beings will take their robes when they die and place them in stupas in their heavenly realms.

Here the verse tells us that to maintain a discipline free of desire for samsara is the practice of a bodhisattva. Discipline with no longing for samsara or worldly existence, means foregoing all efforts to secure a favorable rebirth, for example as a god or a human. So a bodhisattva practices discipline without any attachment to worldly existence.

Speaking of attachment, Nagarjuna says, "Inferior practitioners break precepts; middling practitioners attach to precepts; superior practitioners do not attach to precepts." Also the Buddha said in the *Great Jewel Heap Sutra*, if a person attaches to the thought that he observes pure precepts, he is the worst type of precept-breaker.

So one can never have such kind of pride like, “I’m observing the pure discipline, I’m the best one.”

As beginners, we should take on discipline joyfully and with a clear understanding of why engaging in it is good. For example, many people nowadays have given up eating meat. Why would we do that? We should not become vegetarian just because someone says we should, or because the Buddha taught that we should not eat meat, or because it is the custom where we live, or because giving up meat would give us a good reputation. If we give up eating meat for these reasons, it might be better not to do it at all, because our decision is not sincerely motivated.

Our decision to follow a certain precept has to come from within, after careful consideration, inspired by real conviction, so that when we follow that precept, it does not become a hardship or a struggle but something we do with joy and intelligence. Whatever we give up or whatever we do, we should first feel a connection to the practice and then be very clear why we are doing this. When we act this way, our discipline becomes very inspiring.

# PRACTICE 27

## TRANSCENDENT PATIENCE

### *F3. Transcendent Patience*

**For a bodhisattva who desires the joys of virtue,  
All who harm him are like a precious treasure.  
Therefore, to cultivate patience toward all,  
Without resentment, is the practice of a bodhisattva.**

As Mahayana practitioners, we should always remember that anyone who hurts us actually shows us a great kindness, and that whatever brings us harm bestows a precious treasure. In other words, whoever or whatever harms us provides the opportunity for wealth. Why? To obtain a wealth of virtue requires a harmful opponent. Without a foe or adversary, how can we practice patience? A bodhisattva wishes to develop virtue and merit, and the prerequisite for these qualities is an enemy. So it is the most precious treasure for a bodhisattva.

## The True Meaning of Patience

The genuine definition of patience is the mental ability to remain unperturbed by negative conditions. Applied to the Dharma, it means forbearance in the face of difficulty. Practitioners should be able to withstand whatever obstacles arise when they practice the Dharma.

Shantideva says:

*No evil is there similar to anger,  
No austerity to be compared with patience.  
Steep yourself, therefore, in patience,  
In various ways, insistently.*

So we should practice patience and infuse it within our mind-stream. If we encounter objects of anger and hatred, we should gladly accept them.

Shantideva also says:

*To cover all the earth with sheets of leather—  
Where could such amounts of skin be found?  
But with the leather soles of just my shoes  
It is as though I cover all the earth!*

If the land were full of sharp stones and thorns, we might try to protect our feet by covering over the whole countryside with tough leather. But that would be a difficult task. It is much easier to put the leather just on the soles of our feet. In the same way, even if the whole world is full of enemies, they can do us no harm as long as we keep loving-kindness and patience in our mind. Whatever apparent harm they do would only help us on the path to enlightenment.

The transcendent patience has more profound meanings, and it is guided by wisdom and emphasizes more on the application of the wisdom of emptiness. As ordinary beings, patience, like generosity and discipline, should not be too extreme, but should arise freely through our understanding. When we have love and compassion, we naturally understand why afflictions occur and do not struggle to become patient.

## **The Three Types of Patience**

There are three kinds of patience. The first is to bear without anger whatever harm people may do us. The second kind is to endure without sadness whatever hardships we may experience for the sake of the Dharma. The third is to face without fear the profound meaning of the Dharma and the boundless qualities of the Three Jewels.

For the first, when we feel we are being harmed by someone, remember that the harm is the direct result of having harmed others in the past. Also reflect that this person is so overpowered by delusion that he or she cannot resist harming us. As a result of this harm, he or she will have to suffer in lower realms in a future life. When we think how terrible that will be, we will feel only sadness and pity rather than anger.

Moreover, when we look even more deeply into what is happening, we will see that the person being harmed, the person doing the harm, and the harm itself are all totally devoid of any inherent existence. Who is going to get angry at delusions? In these empty phenomena, what is there to be gained or lost, to want or to reject? By the wisdom of emptiness, understanding it all as being like the vast, empty sky, we won't be disturbed by people's behaviors, either good or bad. As Shantideva says,

*With things that in this way are empty  
What is there to gain and what to lose?  
Who is there to pay me court and honors,  
And who is there to scorn and to revile me?*

*Pleasure, sorrow—whence do these arise?  
What is there to give me joy and pain?*



*And if I search their very suchness,  
Who is craving? What is craved?*

The second kind of patience is to endure hardships for the sake of Dharma. In order to be able to practice the Dharma, it may happen that we have to endure illness, or suffer from heat, cold, hunger, or thirst. But since these short-term sufferings will help us purify our past negative actions and, in the long term, to reach ultimate buddhahood, we should accept them with joy.

The third kind of patience is to have the deep, inner courage to face the ultimate truth that all phenomena are totally empty by nature, that emptiness is expressed as radiant clarity, and that there is a buddha nature, a self-existing primordial wisdom that is uncompounded, an absolute truth beyond the reach of our conception.

Hearing about this emptiness, some people become fearful. They think, "If everything is empty, then what can I do? I am so afraid!" Therefore, patience also extends to one's ability to tolerate the idea of emptiness, the true nature of being.

When Lord Buddha taught the profound teachings on emptiness, 5,000 monks who were present decided to leave because they were scared to hear the ultimate teaching of emptiness. So these truths are by no means easy to fathom, and it is important for us to try to

grasp their true meaning and not to have a negative view of them. These three kinds of patience should be developed with the aid of wisdom and skillful means.

## The Benefits of Practicing Patience

In the *Sutralankara*, Maitreya describes the four qualities of patience:

*Patience decreases all opposite sides.*

*One possesses nonconceptual primordial wisdom.*

*One can perfectly fulfill all wishes.*

*And one ripens sentient beings along the three vehicles.*

The first two qualities concern ourselves, and the second two concern others, even our enemies, whom we bring to the Dharma and whose practice we help mature.

The first is that it pacifies anger. Anger and patience are direct opposites. If we are angry, we are not being patient. Also remember that if we can patiently accept all harm, many of our own past negative actions will be purified, and we will accumulate both merit and wisdom. Indeed, this person who appears to be harming us is therefore doing us a great kindness, and is a true spiritual friend. As an expression of our gratitude, we should dedicate whatever merit we have accumulated to him or her.

The second quality of patience is that it is endowed with nonconceptual primordial wisdom. Bodhisattvas who completely understand this point realize the selflessness of phenomena and of the individual.

The third quality of patience is that one comes to like all sentient beings. A bodhisattva who has complete patience with everything hurtful or harmful bears affection towards everyone and can bring happiness everywhere. This ability to bestow happiness on all sentient beings is a sign that the paramita of patience has been perfected.

The fourth quality is that through perfecting patience, one can help others to develop their Dharma practice. Bodhisattvas guide beings along the path, helping them to decrease their afflictions and suffering and increase their compassion and wisdom. So the fourth quality of patience is the ability to ripen others on the path.

# PRACTICE 28

## TRANSCENDENT DILIGENCE

### *F4. Transcendent Diligence*

Merely for their own sake, even shravakas and  
pratyekabuddhas  
Make efforts like someone whose hair is on fire  
trying to put it out:  
Seeing this, for the sake of all beings,  
To practice diligence, the source of excellent qualities,  
is the practice of a bodhisattva.

### The True Meaning of Diligence

Shravakas and Pratyekabuddhas, or Hearers and Solitary Realizers, practice for their own liberation and do not take the bodhisattva vow or develop the enlightened attitude, yet they apply as much effort to their practice as if they were putting out a fire on their heads. A bodhisattva must have far greater diligence than a shravaka or

pratyekabuddha, because a bodhisattva has taken the responsibility of accomplishing the ultimate happiness of buddhahood not only for himself but for countless beings. Therefore Mahayana practitioners should apply even greater effort, as it is the source of positive qualities that benefits all sentient beings.

Diligence is also translated as joyous effort. True diligence means taking joy in doing positive things, rather than struggling or pushing oneself too hard. Whatever practices we do should be done in a spontaneous and natural way. There is no need to strain and think, “I don’t want to do this, but I have to.” It should be a natural reaction, as if a fire were burning on our head.

The verse uses this analogy to show how diligent Hearers and Solitary Realizers are, how much effort they apply to their practice just for their own benefit. If our head were in flames, can we imagine how fast we would drop everything to extinguish it? We do not say, “I should probably get rid of this fire, but I don’t want to.” Without thinking, we immediately jump up and extinguish the fire effortlessly.

True diligence happens with a lively interest and joyful spontaneity. We do something because we see clearly that it is important and essential. Therefore, diligence is really about our motivation: we feel totally absorbed and joyful in wanting to do something.

## The Three Types of Diligence

There are three types of diligence. The first, called “armor-like diligence”, is to develop a joyous courage and fortitude, which we wear like armor against discouragement. The second is “diligence in virtuous actions”, which is to set about accumulating merit through the practice of the six paramitas without delay or procrastination. The third is “diligence that cannot be stopped”, an insatiable and unremitting energy to work for the sake of others.

Each of these three kinds of diligence has its opposite in a corresponding kind of laziness. The first kind of laziness is the wish for nothing but our own comfort. It manifests as a tendency to sleep and idleness, to crave immediate satisfaction and comfort, and in so doing to ignore the Dharma. The antidote is to meditate on death and impermanence.

The second kind of laziness is faint-heartedness. We feel discouraged before we have even begun trying to do something, because we think a person like us will never reach enlightenment no matter how hard we try. The antidote is to strengthen our fortitude by reflecting on the benefits of liberation and enlightenment.

The third kind of laziness is a neglect of our true priorities. We become stuck in negative and unproductive habits. Forgetting or ignoring deeper aims, we stay preoccupied solely with matters

limited to this life. The antidote is to realize that all such ordinary concerns are invariably causes of suffering alone, and then to cast them far away.

Diligence permeates the practice of all the other paramitas. Without diligence, bodhichitta and the activities of a bodhisattva will have no means to take root and grow in our mind.

# PRACTICE 29

## TRANSCENDENT CONCENTRATION

### *F5. Transcendent Concentration*

Knowing that through profound insight thoroughly  
grounded in sustained calm

The disturbing emotions are completely conquered,

To practice the concentration which utterly transcends

The four formless states is the practice of a bodhisattva.

### Vipassana & Shamatha: Profound Insight and Sustained Calm

To achieve transcendent concentration, we should practice profound insight thoroughly grounded in sustained calm. Or in other words, we should practice both Vipassana and Shamatha. Only through this way, can we destroy the root cause of samsara, ignorance, and this kind of meditation practice transcends all worldly



meditation, such as the four formless states, and that's why it is called paramita.

Vipassana means the profound insight or deep insight into the true nature of all phenomena, so it is the wisdom of emptiness, the ability of looking at things in a very direct and especially clear way. In order to cultivate such wisdom, we have to rely on Shamatha, which means one-minded concentration on a certain object.

Our mind, like a restless monkey, has been running ceaselessly after forms, sounds, smells, tastes, and sensations outside, and thoughts and feelings inside. But we can learn to take control of it by maintaining mindfulness and vigilance. Without meditative stability, we can hardly realize the profound meaning of the Buddha's teaching. Whether it is about the precious human existence, or relative bodhichitta, all of these can only be tasted and further realized through calm abiding. As Shantideva says in his *Compendium of Learnings*, "We are able to know the Buddha's teachings only through one-minded concentration."

Transcendence of samsara requires the wisdom that realizes the selflessness of all phenomena. How does the wisdom of emptiness manifest? When Vipassana (analytic or insight meditation) arises from Shamatha (peaceful abiding meditation), the two become one.

This union of Vipassana and Shamatha is the key to unlocking the wisdom that realizes emptiness.

Of sustained calm and profound insight, it is profound insight that is the most important because it guides us to see the truth; but profound insight cannot arise without a preliminary calming of the mind. What is crucial here is that we need to practice one-pointed concentration to calm all the wild thoughts that constantly agitate, unsettle, and condition our mind. Meanwhile, without profound insight, such stability only belongs to worldly meditation, not the direct antidote to our afflictions. As Thogme Zangpo said:

*All appearances are one's own mind;*

*Mind itself is primordially beyond conceptual extremes.*

*Undistracted by dualistic subject-object notions,*

*To remain one-pointed is called perfect concentration.*

## Worldly Meditation

Among the three realms (desire, form, and formless), the highest is the formless, which is reached through samadhi, or meditative stability. Such samadhi has four levels, namely, Infinite Space, Infinite Consciousness, Nothing Whatsoever, and Neither Existence Nor Non-existence. The fourth one is the highest possible state in worldly existence, so it is also called the Peak of Existence. No

matter how subtle the Peak of Existence may be, it still lies within the three realms. To conquer afflictions and transcend suffering, our meditation must go beyond all existence.

When we practice meditation, our aim is to subdue our numerous conceptual thoughts step by step and further go beyond any kind of conceptual thought. As Thogme Zangpo says, “Without meditative stability, one cannot realize the true nature of all phenomenon, therefore, one should practice meditation of no thoughts.” Generally speaking, there are nine stages of taming our mind through meditation. Meanwhile, no matter how stable our mind is, eventually it should not be concentrated on any object or any thought. For example, during meditation if we concentrate our mind on the thought such as “Everything is created by our mind” or “Everything is like empty space” or “Everything is neither existence nor non-existence”, this practice can only be the cause of taking rebirth in formless realms, because these are just our conceptual thoughts, and we are not abiding our mind on its true nature.

The true nature of our mind is beyond any elaboration of our conceptual thoughts. That’s why according to the Buddhist tradition, one has to receive direct pith instruction from an enlightened master in order to realize the nature of mind, and also, one has to be examined by an enlightened and experienced master to see whether he or she truly has recognized the nature of mind.

## The Prerequisite of Practicing Meditation

To gain stability in concentration, it is necessary to stay in quiet, secluded retreat places free from distractions. Or according to some teachings from great masters, one should abandon all worldly concerns and meditate on death and impermanence, otherwise, it is impossible to cultivate meditative stability. As Shantideva says,

*Cultivating diligence as just described,  
In concentration I will place my mind.  
For those whose minds are slack and wandering  
Are caught between the fangs of the afflictions.*

Also he says,

*Wandering where it will, the elephant of mind,  
Will bring us down to torment in the hell of Unrelenting Pain.  
No worldly beast, however wild and crazed,  
Could bring upon us such calamities.*

Therefore, we should examine our mind all the time with mindfulness and vigilance. If we always let our mind have its own way and wander here and there, our conceptual thoughts would never come to an end.

# PRACTICE 30

## TRANSCENDENT WISDOM

### *F6. Transcendent Wisdom*

**In the absence of wisdom, perfect enlightenment  
cannot be attained**

**Through the other five perfections alone.**

**Therefore, to cultivate wisdom combined with  
skillful means**

**And free from the three concepts is the practice  
of a bodhisattva.**

### **The Meaning of Transcendent Wisdom**

Generally, when we think of knowledge, what comes to mind is worldly knowledge, which enables us to develop high technologies or have new discoveries. Here in the context of six paramitas, transcendent wisdom is a kind of superior knowledge that transcends the world and is beyond all conceptual thoughts. This

non-conceptual wisdom recognizes the selflessness of the individual and of phenomena, and is united with skillful means of loving kindness and compassion. One of the qualities of non-conceptual wisdom is that it eliminates false or mistaken views, such as denying absolute and relative levels of reality, disputing previous and future lives, or trying to disprove karma, cause, and result.

Transcendent wisdom can be categorized into “seemingly absolute” and “really absolute” wisdom. The difference between them is whether one really achieves the realization of emptiness, or just understands the theory of emptiness through listening and contemplating. So transcendent wisdom has three aspects, which are stages in its progressive realization: first, the wisdom of hearing acquired through hearing the teachings; then, the wisdom of reflecting that arises through reflecting on the meaning of these teachings; and finally, the wisdom of mediating that arises from meditating on the teachings.

No matter whether it is worldly wisdom or transcendent wisdom, the usage of wisdom should be beneficial for living beings. From this perspective, wisdom has a much broader meaning since each of us possess certain kind of wisdom to benefit others. And we should never use our intelligence to do something harmful to other beings, humans or animals. This is crucial.

## The Relationship between the First Five Paramitas and the Sixth One

The verse says, in the absence of wisdom, perfect enlightenment cannot be attained through the other five perfections alone. The paramitas of generosity, discipline, patience, diligence, and concentration can help us to accumulate merit, but they are still associated with concepts. Only wisdom can perfect the accumulation that leads us to realize emptiness free of all concepts. Generosity, discipline, patience, diligence, and concentration could be likened to five blind men who, without the eyes of wisdom, would never be able to find their way to liberation. So if we have perfected the first five paramitas, but lack non-conceptual wisdom endowed with bodhichitta, it will be impossible to attain enlightenment. Indeed, only when accompanied by wisdom do they deserve the name paramita, transcendent, or literally “gone to the other shore”—the shore across the ocean of suffering and ignorance, beyond the concepts of samsara and nirvana. That’s why Shantideva says in the 9th Chapter of Wisdom in *The Way of the Bodhisattva*,

*All these branches of the Doctrine*

*The Enlightened Sage expounded for the sake of wisdom*

*Therefore they must cultivate this wisdom*

*Who wish to have an end of suffering.*

## Free from the Three Concepts

The latter part of the verse goes, to cultivate wisdom combined with skillful means and free from the three concepts is the practice of a bodhisattva. Normally our conceptualizing mind can seize upon something and take pride in it. One way our mind does this is through “concepts in the three spheres”, which relate to the three aspects of any activity: a subject, or someone performing an action, an object of the action, and an action itself. When our mind conceptualizes like this in a very solid and concrete manner, our view becomes extreme and rigid. We are convinced that we have found the “right” way and we are proud of it. This process resembles how the rigid views of ordinary people are developed in this mundane world.

To cultivate wisdom, we should apply skillful means to transcend concepts in the three domains. For example, with regard to meditation, we should not take the meditator, the object of meditation, and the act of meditating to be truly existent. Or if one is attached to the concepts of the practitioner, the object of practice, and the practicing itself, it is just worldly practice.

It is difficult for us ordinary people to be free of all three concepts. The wisdom free of the three concepts is indeed a state of the



realization of buddhas and bodhisattvas. Chandrakirti says in the *Introduction to the Middle Way*,

*Who abandons, what is abandoned, and for whom  
All discipline observed with these three thoughts  
Is said to be a perfect worldly deed;  
But when these three are absent, it transcends the world.*

So ordinary people cannot realize such paramita of wisdom. This state is beyond any word and conceptual thoughts. However, learning the Dharma through study, reflection, and meditation is the way to achieve the paramita of wisdom. Until we attain enlightenment, we must not stop listening, reflecting, and meditating. For example, Venerable Atisha said, “We need to learn the Dharma before realizing the natural state; therefore we should receive the pith instructions from gurus.” Geshe Sharawa also said, “The study of the Dharma will not come to an end until one attains Buddhahood.” So learning, reflecting, and meditating are the only path to develop and achieve the transcendent wisdom.

# PRACTICE 31

## EXAMINING ONESELF FOR ONE'S OWN DEFECTS AND GIVING THEM UP

*E2. Training in the Four Instructions Taught in the Sutra*

*F1. To Examine Oneself for One's Own Defects and to Give  
Them Up*

If I do not examine my own defects,  
Though outwardly a Dharma practitioner, I may act  
contrary to the Dharma.  
Therefore, continuously to examine my own faults  
And give them up is the practice of a bodhisattva.

This is the second part of the precepts for training in the practices of Bodhichitta, which uses four verses to talk about the training in the four instructions taught in the sutra.

## The Purpose of Dharma Practice

If we wish to practice in harmony with the Dharma then it is necessary to analyze our defects, or our confusion. If we don't then our practice becomes no more than a facade, a mask behind which we behave counter to the Dharma teachings.

Here in different English versions, the key word is translated a little bit different. "Defect" is closer to our Chinese version, means that we may have all different wrong behaviors that need to be corrected, otherwise we just act against the Dharma. The other translation "confusion" is also very good, because it directly reminds us that all our wrong behaviors or defects actually come from our confusion, or delusion. It is because we are not fully aware of our motivation and our purpose of Dharma practice, because we are misled and trapped by our ignorance, that we are confused or deluded with what we should or should not do.

### 1 For Our Own Benefits

As Dharma practitioners, what is the purpose of practice? It is for taming our mind. We should carefully examine ourselves, our body, speech, and mind, and become mindful of what we are doing. Otherwise, it is quite possible that although we have the form of a practitioner, we are not really practicing the Dharma.

We all have faults, and this is natural and not surprising. Through learning, we will clearly know what to correct and what to change. What's more, we know that what we are learning and practicing is for our own benefit, to improve ourselves. So if we find some faults or mistakes that we need to change, there is nothing wrong with us; these are just what we need to work on. This is what is meant by "taming our mind". This is the whole purpose of our Dharma practice. If we miss this key point, all our practice could just be another kind of material formalism and a distraction drifting us away from spiritual enlightenment.

## **2 For Others' Benefits**

Nowadays, some Dharma practitioners' behavior may easily mislead others to develop wrong views. We need to examine our own behaviors so as to protect others' faith towards Buddhism.

The Buddha said in the *Sutra Requested by Sagaramati* that, "The one Dharma that summarizes all the Dharma of Mahayana Buddhism is examining one's own faults and protecting all sentient beings." When H. H. Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche was about to enter parinirvana, he also said, "We should always examine our own mind and be stable and not hurt living beings."

How does it work? We should examine ourselves all the time to see if our actions cause them any negative emotions, wrong attitudes,

or bad impressions against Buddhism. If so, we should abandon our action as much as we can. In such a way, through examining our own faults, we can protect all living beings. As Shantideva said,

*All that you have seen or have been told,  
To be a cause of scandal—that you should avoid.*

## **Be Mindful of Our Own Defects**

How do we examine our own faults or confusion? Generally, we look out at the faults of others, such as what problems they have or what is wrong with their behaviors or their thoughts. Our mind is turned outwards to judge others and not inwards to see what we ourselves are doing wrong or what problems we might have. Indeed, we should be looking inward at ourselves to see what to give up and what to change. If we do not try to do this, improving ourselves will be a distant dream.

So the most important thing is to be mindful of what happens within us. For example, when we do not want anything bad to happen to us, we are very cautious in what we do, and we are very careful to avoid any danger. In the same way, when we are working with our mind, we should be alert and conscientious, examining carefully what we are doing. Gradually, we will come to

understand how we are and who we are, and with this knowledge as a basis, we can look within and see what is confused or mistaken and what is not. So when we are looking inwards at our mind, we should observe ourselves with clear attention.

One of the causes of our defects is our wrong motivation. No matter what we do, we need to be mindful of our motivation deep in our heart, whether it is driven by our ego, by our pride, or by a humble attitude to improve ourselves, or by an altruistic mind to benefit others, or just in a neutral state without any strong motivation. If we are driven by ego and pride, then all our activities will be spoiled and become an intelligent and efficient way of strengthening our ego, losing the essential meaning of achieving enlightenment, even though from outside, they are exactly similar to the practice of a bodhisattva. In that case, what we're doing is just a way of self-cheating and hypocrisy.

## **Practice the Dharma Authentically**

The only way to practice the Dharma authentically is to mix the teachings with our mind. If we neglect to examine ourselves for faults and mistakes, we might not be aware of how lacking we are in any obvious learning, self-control, contentment, humility, or other positive qualities. Being blind to our obvious defects, we may begin to believe that we are good Dharma practitioners, while

in fact it is no more than the outer facade, the mere pretense of a true practitioner. This is a major defect. As Gampopa said:

*To be learned in the Dharma but not refrain from wrong  
is a hidden fault of practitioners.*

*To hold profound instructions but not transform oneself  
is a hidden fault of practitioners.*

*To skillfully praise oneself and skillfully disparage others  
is a hidden fault of practitioners.*

Only by being mindful all the time and maintaining a constant awareness of what should be done and what should be avoided, can we keep ourselves from falling prey to such dangers of hypocrisy whatever the situation.

## PRACTICE 32

### GIVING UP SPEAKING OF A BODHISATTVA'S FAULTS

#### *F2. To Give Up Speaking of a Bodhisattvas Faults*

If, impelled by negative emotions, I relate the faults  
Of other bodhisattvas, I will myself degenerate.  
Therefore, to not talk about the faults of anyone  
Who has entered the Mahayana is the practice  
of a bodhisattva.

#### Give Up Talking about Others' Faults

This verse tells us to avoid criticizing other bodhisattvas impelled by negative emotions, otherwise we ourselves will degenerate. The reason is that those beings who have entered the Mahayana path are as precious as a wish-fulfilling jewel in this world, and if we speak of their faults driven by our negative emotion, such



as jealousy, our merit that has been accumulated from life to life would be completely destroyed.

Then some may ask, “I will not talk about a bodhisattva’s fault, but I can criticize an ordinary person.” Indeed it is hard to tell who is a bodhisattva and who is not. As the Buddha said, “An ordinary person cannot assess another ordinary person, only a buddha can.” Therefore, this instruction is not limited to bodhisattvas. We should not say bad things about anyone, whether or not they are bodhisattvas. We should be trying to do whatever brings happiness to ourselves and others. Since faultfinding does not bring any benefit, we should carefully avoid it.

One stanza in *The Seven Points of Mind Training* encourages us to think that all positive qualities belong to other sentient beings and that all faults are our own. Generally, most people think just the opposite: someone else is always wrong, while they are always right. This attitude needs to be given up. Patrul Rinpoche advises his students to acknowledge their own deficiency first; and then, when they recognize it in someone else, to pray that the guru grants blessings to them both.

Generally speaking, pointing out faults is not an effective way to bring about change. Since it is not easy to change another person, we should avoid criticism. Ordinary people do not like to hear bad

words and further, laying out their faults will create problems and troubles for us.

If we're quite sure that pointing out someone's mistakes will help them to change, then we should do it in a skillful way. For example, perhaps we can say something once in a pleasant way so that the person can readily understand, "Oh yes, this is something I need to change." However, it is better not to repeat our comments, because if we keep mentioning faults, not only will it not truly help, it will disturb others to no good effect. Therefore not mentioning the faults of others is the practice of bodhisattvas.

## **Develop Pure Perception of Everyone**

There is profound reasoning that we should avoid criticism and develop a pure perception of everyone. As the Buddha said, each living being possesses the same ultimate nature, which is buddha nature. Buddha nature is present in all beings, and not a single one of them lacks it. This fact gives the basis that each being has the possibility of becoming a buddha. In other words, all living beings are buddhas in the future. So disparaging any one of them is inappropriate; we should rather all respect one another.

However, our impure perception of the world can easily falsify the way we see the actions of bodhisattvas. Indeed, any faults we may perceive in them are only due to our own imperfections. Whenever

we think we have seen some defect in a bodhisattva's conduct or thinking, we should remind ourselves that the problem is our own distorted perception and that in reality that person is free of all defects.

In particular, we should be aware that every action of enlightened beings, spiritual masters, and bodhisattvas has a deep meaning that reflects their intention to benefit beings. As they manifest in infinite ways to help others, it is easy to mistake bodhisattvas for ordinary beings. They might seem to be ordinary people engaged in mundane activities; they may even take the form of wild animals, birds, or dogs. Therefore, anyone we meet could actually be a fully matured bodhisattva who has assumed an ordinary appearance, or even an offensive one; so we should respect all beings and regard them as teachers.

Especially for the Vajrayana, faith and pure perception are the two main roots of practice. We should try all our best to give rise to them, and once we have developed them, we should try constantly to increase them. As soon as we think or do something that goes against faith and pure perception, we should be aware of it, confess and counter it right away.

# PRACTICE 33

## GIVING UP ATTACHMENT TO A SPONSOR'S PROPERTY

### *F3. To Give Up Attachment to a Sponsor's Property*

Offerings and respect may bring discord  
And cause listening, reflection, and meditation to decline.  
Therefore, to avoid attachment  
To the homes of friends and benefactors is the practice  
of a bodhisattva.

### The Drawbacks of Offerings and Respect

This verse again emphasizes that under the influence of desire for gain and recognition, we may end up arguing over possessions and demanding special considerations. Preoccupied with such desires, our activities of listening, reflecting, and meditating will decline. Therefore, we should give up attachment to the households of relatives, friends, and sponsors.

We've talked about the bad consequence of strong clinging to possessions and fame. As Shantideva said,

*Perhaps we'll claim that by our wealth we live,  
And living, gather merit, dissipating evil.  
But if we are aggressive for the sake of profit,  
Won't our gains be evil, all our merits lost?*

He also said,

*For I am one who strives for freedom.  
I must not be caught by wealth and honors.  
How could I be angry with the ones  
Who work to free me from my fetters?*

In the Vinaya texts, it is also said that, "Fame and wealth, which fools love, can harm virtue, like a sword cuts off one's head." It means that if one pursues fame and wealth, the virtue and merit will all be destroyed, just like the head being cut off by a sword. That's why it is the fools who love and seek fame and wealth. If our mind is stained by all kinds of fame and fortune, we will not have any chance to practice.

So we should make a clean break from all ordinary activities, and be content with whatever we have and satisfied with whatever happens. As Thogme Zangpo also said,

*To feel satisfied with whatever you have, that is  
the ultimate wealth;  
Not to crave or be attached to anything at all, that is  
the ultimate happiness.*

In Dharma practice, to begin with we may experience hardships but later, those sufferings give way to great happiness. For worldly activities, however, it is just the opposite. To begin with, they seem to bring happiness. But later, they deteriorate into suffering. This is exactly their nature.

## **The Activities of Listening, Reflecting, and Meditating**

Venerable Atisha once said, “Wealth and fame tightly fetter the monastics; those who are liberated from them are like lotuses in a fire.” Many of today’s monastics are fettered tightly by wealth and fame. Those who can really liberate themselves from wealth and fame are extremely rare, like lotus flowers in the burning fire. Especially due to today’s advanced technologies, the attraction from the outside is very strong, and in such an environment, it is really rare that Dharma practitioners seek only buddhahood and devote all their energy to practice instead of seeking wealth and fame. These days, people are very easy to be distracted by external rituals, materials, imitation monks or fake tulkus. Because

of this, it is difficult to have a right attitude on study, reflection, and meditation.

As Dharma practitioners, what we really need to do is to study, reflect, and meditate. It is very important for each of us to cultivate wisdom and compassion from within through systematic listening, reflecting, and meditating. Whether we are ordained or lay practitioners, as long as we are Buddhists, we must understand the basic teachings in Buddhism. Without knowing the basic teachings, adhering to the external formality will remain meaningless.

In the *Vimalakirti Sutra*, it is said that, “We should enjoy the delights of the Dharma instead of worldly pleasures.” It means that we should seek the true happiness based on compassion and wisdom rather than the superficial worldly delights of material enjoyments. Indeed, whether for Buddhist or other thoughts, the key is to get hold of its essence instead of its formality. But if a long term and systematical study is lacking, there’s no way for us to understand its essential spirit, not to mention to put the teaching into practice. Therefore, to give up attachment to the homes of friends, relatives, and donors and to focus on the activities of listening, reflecting, and meditating are the practices of a bodhisattva.

# PRACTICE 34

## GIVING UP HARSH SPEECH

### *F4. To Give Up Harsh Speech*

Harsh words disturb the minds of others  
And spoil our own bodhisattva practice.  
Therefore, to give up rough speech,  
Which others find unpleasant, is the practice of a bodhisattva.

### The Harmful Results of Harsh Words

If we expose others' faults casually without making any investigations and speak abusive and unpleasant words, then this is very unreasonable because harsh words harm people and disturb their mind. What's more, harsh words upset our own mind and destroy our noble conduct of being bodhisattvas. At such moments, the bodhisattva's way is lost.



The great Ju Mipham Rinpoche once said that friendships and conflicts are mainly caused by speech. It is very true that most of the wars that devastate the world are started by harsh words. Quarrels, resentment, and endless feuds all arise because tolerance and patience are lacking. If we do not know the proper way to speak, we may make great mistakes when talking to others.

As Nagarjuna says in his *Letter to a Friend*, the words people speak are of three kinds, which the Buddha described as being like honey, like flowers, and like excrement. Words that help and please are like honey. Words that are honest and true are like flowers. But violent, harmful words and falsehoods are like excrement and must be abandoned.

There are two reasons to give up harsh words that displease others. First, our conduct disturbs the minds of others. We may recall situations when someone spoke to us sharply or unkindly, or unfairly blamed us. We became disturbed, frustrated, depressed. This is why it is wise to remember that harsh or unpleasant speech causes others pain. The second reason to give up harsh speech is because it compromises a Bodhisattva's right conduct, which is to benefit others. Disturbing someone's mind has the opposite effect, and it causes harm. Thus harsh and unpleasant speech violates the Bodhisattva vow, and to give up rough words not pleasing to others is the practice of a bodhisattva.

## The Discipline of Speech

For Mahayana practitioners, among the three doors of body, speech and mind, the discipline of speech is very crucial. It is said in a sutra that: “One should speak with kind and gentle words, and never use unpleasant words. By using pleasant words, one creates virtuous merit and stays away from negative karma.” Furthermore, by giving up rough words, we are planting the seed of achieving enlightenment in our mind stream that won’t be exhausted from life to life.

Therefore, we should always use pleasant words to please others. No matter in what occasion, and what kind of people we are interacting with, we should talk mildly and pleasantly, and say only meaningful things in an articulate way. We must eliminate all abusive and unpleasant speech when interacting with others, which is of great importance.

# PRACTICE 35

## HOW TO BE RID OF THE NEGATIVE EMOTIONS

### *E3. Training in How to Be Rid of the Negative Emotions*

**When emotions become habitual, they are hard to  
get rid of with antidotes.**

**Therefore, with mindfulness and vigilance, to seize  
the weapon of the antidote**

**And crush attachment and other negative emotions**

**The moment they arise is the practice of a bodhisattva.**

### **Be Aware of Negative Emotions the Moment They Arise**

In general, cutting through afflictions is difficult, especially once they have arisen, because we are so habituated to them. What we can do is to recognize that a negative emotion is about to arise and

then take action. We can use a method or remedy that will deter it from becoming a full-blown negative emotion.

Actually, any emotion only begins as a tiny thought or feeling, then it grows stronger and stronger. If we can recognize that thought the very moment it first arises, it will be easy to let it subside. An emotion recognized at that stage is like a small wisp of cloud in a clear and empty sky, which is not going to produce any rain.

However, if we remain unaware of such thoughts and let them expand and multiply, there will soon be such a rapid succession of thoughts and feelings that we will find it increasingly hard not only to break the buildup of that emotion but also to hold back from the negative actions it is liable to induce. As a result, as *The Ornament of the Mahayana Sutras* said, “The emotions destroy oneself, destroy others, and destroy discipline.”

In *The Way of the Bodhisattva*, Shantideva likens the negative emotions to enemies who must be rejected. However, unlike ordinary enemies, they do not have anywhere to retreat to. We get rid of them simply by recognizing them for what they are. As he says,

*Miserable defilements, scattered by the eye of wisdom!*

*Where will you now run, when driven from my mind?*

Therefore, there's no emotion that we cannot be rid of because emotions are simply thoughts, and thoughts are just like the wind moving through the empty sky. There is nothing to them. What we need to do is to be aware of everything that arises in our mind immediately. If we fail to cut them at the root as soon as they appear, they will be our enemies to spoil our future lives.

## Mindfulness and Vigilance

Why is it so difficult to fight mental afflictions with antidotes? It is because of habit. We have reacted a certain way for so long and have become so accustomed to our mental afflictions that we do not notice when they arise. Even if we know what antidote to apply, we may not be sufficiently mindful and aware enough to apply it. But a mindful and vigilant person holds an armful of remedies.

Mindfulness is remembering at all times what conduct to abandon and what conduct to adopt. Vigilance, or full awareness, means being constantly alert to afflictions the moment they arise in our mind. Mindfulness and vigilance are the weapons that cut afflictions and work as antidotes to habit. For example, we are mindful that patience must be adopted and anger abandoned. Then, if we are alert and notice that anger is arising in our mind, we can remedy it immediately by applying the antidote of patience.

Therefore, in the struggle against our negative emotions, if we lose our vigilance even for a moment, we have to revive it at once. The very instant a negative emotion arises, the thought of using the antidote, which is mindfulness, should follow up. This is how mindfulness and vigilance can help us to deal with negative emotions.

## **Fight Afflictions with Antidotes**

As ordinary people it is impossible that we don't have mental afflictions at all. Whether we are ordained or lay practitioners, each of us must have all kinds of afflictions such as attachment or anger. The most important thing is to fight afflictions with the correct antidotes. As Venerable Langri Thangpa said, "Examine my mind all the time, and as soon as a mental affliction arises, since it endangers myself and others, I shall cut through it immediately." If we fail to do so, and once it becomes one of our habits, it is terribly difficult to uproot it.

Nowadays some people do not pay attention to counteracting afflictive emotions. They may be more interested in gaining supernatural powers. They may think, "If I had supernatural powers, I could benefit others. . ." This is quite wrong. As Drom Tonpa said,

*Whatever works to counteract emotions, it is Dharma;*

*Whatever does not work is not Dharma.*

The difference between Dharma and non-Dharma is whether it can subdue afflictive emotions or not. So no matter what we practice, the key is whether it is helpful for us to counteract afflictive emotions. If it is effective, it is the genuine Dharma that we should keep practicing.

# PRACTICE 36

## ACCOMPLISHING OTHERS' GOOD WITH MINDFULNESS AND VIGILANCE

### *E4. Training in Accomplishing Others' Good with Mindfulness and Vigilance*

In short, wherever I am, whatever I do,  
To be continually mindful and alert,  
Asking, "What is the state of my mind?"  
And accomplishing the good of others is the practice  
of a bodhisattva.

### Be Mindful and Alert of Our Mind

To summarize, we should always examine our mind in every situation, such as walking, standing, sitting, and resting, and at every moment. Examine whether our mind is virtuous or not, whether our behavior is proper or not. How do we examine ourselves? It is through mindfulness and vigilance. We must



maintain mindfulness and vigilance, otherwise, we do not even know what we are doing. That's why Shantideva says,

*All of you, who would protect your minds,  
Maintain your mindfulness and introspection;  
Guard them both, at the cost of life and limb,  
I join my hands, beseeching you.*

So we practitioners must keep our mindfulness and vigilance, and then we will succeed in practices. For example, suppose my name is Michael, I should always remind myself, "Michael, what are you doing now? What is in your mind? Why are you going out today? Will your mind be distracted?" Examining our mind in this way will help us to decrease our clinging to the ordinary concerns of this life, and to increase our confidence in the teachings.

## **Benefit Others**

Here, we come to the conclusion of the text. This verse summarizes all thirty-five practices that have preceded it. Its essence, in summary, is that whatever actions and whatever Dharma practice we do with body, speech, and mind, we should do them with the intention of benefiting the infinity of sentient beings. If our intentions are purely altruistic, without any self-clinging, perfection will naturally arise.

Indeed, all the teachings of the twelve categories of Tripitaka can be summarized as protecting one's mind, examining one's mind, and benefiting others. As Langri Thangpa said, "In the Mahayana, there is nothing else to do but benefit beings. So don't let your armor of helping others be too small." Also Patrul Rinpoche says, "Everyone wants happiness, but the true way to reach perfect happiness yourself is to bring happiness to others."

So everything depends on our intention. We should check our attitude and motivation all the time, and always investigate our true motivation. Whether we are in a remote monastery or in a city, we must be continuously mindful and aware of the state of our mind. It means knowing our real motivation at all times, finding out why we are doing something and for what benefit. Even if we are helping others, we still need to check our motivation, since it is possible to work for others' benefit for some wrong reasons.

## PRACTICE 37

### DEDICATING THE MERIT TO PERFECT ENLIGHTENMENT

#### *E5. Dedicating the Merit to Perfect Enlightenment*

Dedicating to enlightenment

Through wisdom purified of the three concepts

All merit achieved by such endeavor,

To remove the suffering of numberless beings,  
is the practice of a bodhisattva.

#### The Meaning of Dedication

There are three sections to any Dharma activity: a virtuous beginning, which is the arousing of relative and absolute bodhichitta; a virtuous middle, which concerns the illusory accumulation of merit and wisdom; and a virtuous end, which is the dedication of all merit to enlightenment. Dedication enhances its benefits and results. As the *Ratnakuta Sutra* says:

*All phenomena are caused by circumstance,  
And so our destiny is determined by what we wish for.  
Depending on the aspirations that we make  
We shall obtain results that correspond.*

Right dedication is to dedicate our meritorious actions of body, speech, and mind to the enlightenment of all beings. It gathers all the merit accumulated from our practices and dedicates it to all living beings throughout space that they may attain happiness and be free of suffering.

What are the benefits of dedication? If we share with all beings the merit of a practice or positive action, that merit will last until we reach enlightenment, just as a drop of water that we put into the ocean will never dry up for as long as the ocean remains. However if we don't share the merit, it is like pouring a drop of water on a hot stone—it evaporates right away. Or it is like a seed that bears fruit once and then dies. If we fail to seal our merit with authentic dedication, then however vast the offerings and positive actions we have performed may be, their results can only be ephemeral, and can be destroyed by our negative emotions, such as anger, pride, and jealousy.

It is also important to dedicate our merit to the right goal, and not just to the petty achievements of this life, such as wealth, good

health, success, and influence. The goal should be unsurpassable enlightenment for the sake of others.

## **Dedicate through Wisdom Purified of the Three Concepts**

How does a bodhisattva dedicate merit? A bodhisattva applies the wisdom of emptiness to the three spheres. This means that he or she purifies the dedication process by realizing that there is no one to dedicate merit, no merit to be dedicated, and no one to receive the merit. Subject, action, object do not truly exist. This is the meaning of free of concepts of the three spheres, and it cannot be separated from the wisdom with which it is suffused: the wisdom that realizes emptiness. Without understanding that the three spheres do not truly exist, it is quite difficult to comprehend how to dedicate merit in this way.

## **Our Daily Dedication**

To dedicate merit in the best possible way is a way entirely free from the three concepts of a subject, an object, and an action. Actually it is possible only for someone who has fully realized emptiness. Then, how should we ordinary beings dedicate our merit?

One way is to dedicate all our merit with an altruistic mind. Whatever we do, we should dedicate the merit with the mind of

benefitting other living beings and with the wish that they attain the unsurpassed fruit of buddhahood. As Shantideva said,

*Directly, then, or indirectly,  
Do nothing that is not for others' sake.  
And solely for their welfare dedicate  
Your every action to the gaining of enlightenment.*

Another way is by following in the footsteps of those who have achieved full realization. During dedicating, if we think, “I dedicate, in the same way as the past buddhas, bodhisattvas, and masters dedicated their merits”, then the merit of our dedication will be as great as the dedication free of the three concepts. So when we dedicate our merits, we should think, “I dedicate my merits the same way that buddhas and bodhisattvas have done, such as Buddha Shakyamuni, Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara, Bodhisattva Manjushri, and so on.



# Concluding

Commentary on  
*The Thirty-Seven Practices of a Bodhisattva*



## HOW AND FOR WHOM THIS TEXT WAS COMPOSED?

### *A3. Concluding Verses*

#### *B1. How and for Whom This Text Was Composed*

**Following the teachings of the holy beings,  
I have arranged the points taught in the sutras, tantras,  
and shastras  
As The Thirty-seven Verses on the Practice of a Bodhisattva  
For the benefit of those who wish to train on  
the bodhisattva path.**

Thogme Zangpo composed *The Thirty-Seven Practices of a Bodhisattva* in order to benefit all those who follow the practice of bodhisattvas, so that they can obtain the unsurpassable fruit of buddhahood. During the process of composing, he did not add in any personal thoughts, but rather relied on the teachings of the sutras, tantras, treatises, and on the instructions of genuine masters, such as those great masters of Kadampa, and particularly Venerable Atisha



and his root gurus. The instructions of all these holy beings are compiled into these 37 stanzas.

Thogme Zangpo summarized the vast number of bodhisattva practices into a manageable thirty-seven to benefit those who have entered the Mahayana path and wish to train in it. Thus, he has made the practices easy for everyone to apply.

It is a traditional requirement to mention these precedents so that everyone understands the author did not personally make up the practices. He has based them on the teachings of the great masters who have preceded him. By contrast, some writers today write whatever they like, explain the Dharma without making reference to sutras and shastras, which is quite unreasonable.

## THE UNERRING NATURE OF THESE PRACTICES

### *B2. The Unerring Nature of These Practices*

**Since my understanding is poor, and I have little education,  
This is no composition to delight the learned;  
But as it is based on the sutras and teachings of holy beings  
I think it is genuinely the practice of the bodhisattvas.**

These lines are included because the Tibetan tradition requires a verse in which the author belittles himself to counteract pride. Here Thogme Zangpo minimizes his intelligence and learning and states that his verses cannot possibly please scholars. Nevertheless, because he has based his work on authentic teachings, he has confidence that the verses are free of mistakes and confusion.

Thogme Zangpo says, “My wisdom is limited, and my practice is not so experienced. So I don’t use any beautiful and rhetorical words that many worldly wise men prefer to use.” These are his modest words. His biography indicates that Thogme Zangpo had

full mastery of the Five Great Mahayana Treatises, and he had extraordinary accomplishments.

Also he says to us modestly, “Although I don’t write with words that please the wise, I don’t compose it with my imagination, nor just based on my personal thoughts. I rely on pith instructions from sutras and shastras and the teachings of great enlightened beings. Therefore, the content of *The Thirty-Seven Practices of a Bodhisattva* does not contain any error.”

## A HUMBLE PRAYER FOR FORGIVENESS

### *B3. A Humble Prayer for Forgiveness*

**However, it is hard for someone unintelligent like me  
To fathom the great waves of the bodhisattvas' activities,  
So I beg the forgiveness of the holy ones  
For my contradictions, irrelevances, and other mistakes.**

Here Thogme Zangpo says, "Although I think that *The Thirty-Seven Practices of a Bodhisattva* does not have any error, I find it very hard to guarantee, because the realizations and practices of bodhisattvas are as vast as an ocean, boundless and deep. So it is very difficult for me, a man with little wisdom to completely understand and fathom all of their teachings. Therefore, if I made any mistake in the words or in the contents, if there are any contradictions or statements that violate the reality, I sincerely repent them in front of all buddhas, bodhisattvas, dakas and dakinis, Dharma protectors, eminent masters, lineage masters, as well as their followers in all the ten directions. I beg all of you to forgive me."

When we do something, although we have confidence in doing it well without making any mistake, sometimes we still say something modest, and this is the behavior of the wise. We should act in this way so as not to be arrogant, and to let others feel comfortable. Those who really have wisdom and the altruistic mind always speak modestly.

## DEDICATING THE MERIT OF HAVING COMPOSED THIS TEXT

### *B4. Dedicating the Merit of Having Composed This Text*

**Through the merit arising from this  
And through the power of the sublime bodhichitta,  
relative and absolute,  
May all beings become like the Lord Avalokiteshvara,  
Who is beyond the extremes of samsara and nirvana.**

Bodhisattva Thogme says, “I dedicate all the virtuous roots to all sentient beings. May they become like the Lord Avalokiteshvara who is beyond the extremes of samsara and nirvana.”

Relative bodhichitta means to wish all sentient beings to obtain perfect enlightenment of buddhahood. Ultimate bodhichitta means to understand the true nature of all phenomena. We can avoid the two extremes by cultivating these two bodhichitta: We do not abide in the extreme of nirvana with the help of relative bodhichitta; and we are not trapped in the extreme of samsara with the help of ultimate bodhichitta. The two extremes can be avoided by

relying on these two types of bodhichitta. Like the compassionate Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara, wish that all sentient beings obtain the perfect enlightenment.

## THE COLOPHON

### *B5. The Colophon*

*For his own benefit and that of others, Thogme, a teacher of scripture and logic, composed this text at Rinchen Phug, in Ngulchu.*

The text was written by the great master of scripture and logic, Ngulchu Thogme Zangpo in his hermitage, Rinchen Puk, the Jewel Cave of Silver Water, in Ngulchu, the central Tibet.



## Dedication

May the merit resulting from this piece of work contribute in the greatest possible measure to the long life of all great masters, to the flourishing of the Buddha Dharma, and to the welfare of all sentient beings.

It is always our wish to present a work of the highest quality to the readers so that anyone who reads this text would find inspiration. So we would very much appreciate your comments, feedback or suggestions for how this text might be improved and made more valuable. You are also greatly welcomed if you want to make a contribution to any of our other projects of translation.

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