

# The 37 Verses on the Practice of a Bodhisattva

## Introduction and Outline

### Opening Verses

#### **PART ONE: The Preparation**

- First, the need to give meaning to this human existence of yours, so rare and difficult to obtain
- Second, abandoning your native land, the source of the three poisons (2)
- Third, living in solitary places, the source of all good qualities (3)
- Fourth, giving up the concerns of this life by reflecting on impermanence (4)
- Fifth, avoiding unsuitable friends, whose company creates conditions unfavourable to your progress (5)
- Sixth, relying on a spiritual teacher, whose presence creates conditions favourable to your progress (6)
- Seventh, going for refuge, the entrance to the Buddhist teachings (7)

#### **PART TWO: The Main Teachings, Illuminating the Path**

First, the path for beings of lesser capacity (Small Scope)

Second, the path for beings of medium capacity (Medium Scope)

Third, the path for beings of superior capacity (Great Scope)

1. The bodhichitta of intention
2. The bodhichitta of application
  - I. Relative bodhichitta (10)
    - A. The meditation practice of exchanging oneself and others (11)
    - B. The post meditation practice of using unfavourable circumstances on the path
      - i. Using on the path the four things that you do not want to happen
        - a. How to use loss on the path (12)
        - b. How to use suffering on the path (13)
        - c. How to use disgrace on the path (14)
        - d. How to use disparagement on the path (15)
      - ii. Using on the path the two things that are difficult to bear
        - a. How to use on the path being wronged in return for kindness (16)
        - b. How to use humiliation on the path (17)
      - iii. Using deprivation and prosperity on the path
        - a. How to use deprivation on the path (18)
        - b. How to use prosperity on the path (19)
      - iv. Using hatred and desire on the path
        - a. How to use objects of hatred on the path (20)
        - b. How to use objects of desire on the path (21)
    - II. Absolute bodhichitta
      - A. The meditation practice of remaining in a state free of conceptual elaborations without any clinging (22)
      - B. The post meditation practice of abandoning any belief in the objects of desire and aversion as truly existing
        - i. Abandoning any belief in the objects of desire as truly existing (23)
        - ii. Abandoning any belief in the objects of aversion as truly existing (24)
  3. The precepts for training in those practices
    - I. Training in the six transcendent perfections
      - A. Transcendent generosity (25)
      - B. Transcendent discipline (26)

- C. Transcendent patience (26)
- D. Transcendent diligence (28)
- E. Transcendent concentration (29)
- F. Transcendent wisdom (30)
- II. Training in the four instructions taught in the Sutra
  - A. To examine oneself for one's own defects and to give them up (31)
  - B. To give up speaking of a bodhisattva's faults (32)
  - C. To give up attachment to a sponsor's property (33)
  - D. To give up harsh speech (34)
- III. Training in how to be rid of the negative emotions (35)
- IV. Training in accomplishing others' good with mindfulness and vigilance (36)
- V. Dedicating the merit to perfect enlightenment (37)

## CONCLUDING VERSES

1. How and for whom this text was composed
2. The unerring nature of these practices
3. A humble prayer for forgiveness
4. Dedicating the merit of having composed this text
5. The colophon

The way you are now, your mind is powerfully influenced by the clinging attachment you have to friends, relatives, and anyone who brings you satisfaction, and by your hostile feelings toward whoever seems to go against your wishes and toward all those who prevent you from acquiring wealth, comfort, and pleasure and whom you therefore regard with aversion as enemies. In your delusion, you do whatever you can to benefit yourself and those you like, and try to overcome and eliminate all those you consider enemies with such aversion that you can hardly bear even to hear their names. Over countless lifetimes you have been dragged into samsara, this vicious ocean of existence, and carried away by these strong currents of attachment and aversion. Attachment and aversion are the very cause of samsara, the very reason for our endless wandering in the circle of existence.

Consider carefully what you mean by friends and enemies. When you look into it, it is obvious that there are no such things as permanent, enduring friends or enemies. Those you think of as friends have not always been so. Indeed, they may well have been your enemies in the past, or they could become your enemies in the future. There is nothing certain about it. Why should you be so compulsively attached to particular people? Are not all your relationships temporary? In the end, whatever may happen during your life, the time will come for you to die. Then you will have no choice but to part from everyone, regardless of whether you feel attachment or aversion for them. But everything you have done in your lifetime, all those actions motivated by attachment and aversion, will have created within you a force that will then propel you to the next life, in which you will experience their result.

So, if you want to travel the path to buddhahood, give up attachment to friends and relatives, and hatred for enemies.

Why do you feel attachment and aversion, and where do they come from? Fundamentally, their origin lies in the idea you have of being a truly existing individual. Once that idea is present, you develop all kinds of concepts, such as "my body," "my mind," "my name." You identify with these three things, and whatever seems agreeable to them, you cling to it. Whatever is unpleasant or repugnant to them, you want to be rid of it. The slightest suffering, such as being pricked by a thorn or being hit by a spark from the fire, upsets you. If someone wrongs you, you retaliate by doing them as much harm as possible. The minutest good action you might do for others fills you with pride. As long as this self-cherishing attitude remains deeply anchored in your being, there is no way you will be able to reach enlightenment. The idea of being a truly existing individual is ignorance at its most basic level, from which all the other negative emotions arise.

That you are so preoccupied with your own happiness and welfare, and neglect the welfare

and happiness of others, is the reason you are wandering in samsara.

## Introduction

*All experiences are preceded by mind,  
have mind as their master,  
are created by mind. —The Buddha*

The quote above, by the Buddha himself, demonstrates that **our minds and the way we use them, how we think, are central to the Buddhist path.** Therefore, **a method for taming or calming the mind, a way of training it out of its many negative habits, is both crucial and beneficial.** **Why is it so important to train and tame the mind? Why is it imperative to release the mind from its habitual patterns and uncover its true nature? Because a wild mind tends to harm others.** This brings us to the **true heart of Buddhism; the liberation of all sentient beings from all forms of suffering.** Although we Buddhists talk about realisation and enlightenment a lot, that is not our true goal. **Our true goal is to free sentient beings from suffering, to free them also from delusion and ignorance of their true nature. Our own enlightenment is the best and surest way to equip us to do that. This cherishing of others is the essence of Buddhism: nothing is more important or higher than the selfless expression of boundless compassion, or *bodhichitta*.** Training and taming the mind is the way we give rise to this boundless compassion, and ultimately to express our true nature.

This important text on *lojong* that provides a way to tame and calm the mind. The Tibetan word *lojong* literally means “mind training,” but the practice really has more to do with training our attitude, training us out of the habitual ways that we respond to situations that happen to us, especially adverse circumstances. **The idea is that we take everything onto the path; not just when everything is going well, but more especially when they are going badly, when we are faced with adverse circumstances (difficult people, bad health).**

These *lojong* teachings are about how to take everything, especially adverse circumstances, onto the path. How to use everything that happens to us as a means of inwardly maturing and becoming spiritually strong is the essence of *lojong* practice: like a trip to the gym. **We don't resent machines that challenge us; they make us stronger. *Lojong* is rather like that; a “gymnasium for the mind.”** Life itself is a gymnasium of the mind. Life is where we have our workout, this is where we train. We shouldn't avoid challenges or only work out on the easy machines.

This kind of attitude and these *lojong* teachings were taken to Tibet in the eleventh century by a great Bengali scholar called Atisha. Atisha clarified the path of practice, giving emphasis to the importance of refuge in the Three Jewels (Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha) and to *bodhichitta*, the aspiration to attain enlightenment for the sake of all beings. Along with providing that clarification, Atisha gave teachings on how to take the vicissitudes of life onto the path, how to approach everything through the lens of cherishing others, of *bodhichitta*. We now refer to his work as *lojong* tradition, or mind-training tradition.

Our nuns at Dongyu Gatsal Ling (DGL) Nunnery study this text because it is accessible to anyone—monks, nuns, and laypeople, whether Buddhist or non-Buddhist—and because it deals, as all *lojong* texts do, with how to bring the difficult circumstances in our life, our own mental defilements that give us so much trouble and the problems caused by others, onto the path. It is a practical text because it teaches us how to make use of those difficulties by transforming them and taking them on the path. At first it might not sound practicable for us but, actually, it is highly practical because it deals with how to take adverse circumstances and use them as our practice. This is important for everybody.

To complement Thogme Sangpo's text, I shall refer to another *lojong* text, *Eight Verses for Training the Mind* by Langri Thangpa (1054–1123), a revered Kadampa master and a shining light in the *lojong* tradition. I shall intersperse the discussion of this text with commentary on *The Thirty-Seven Verses on the Practice of a Bodhisattva* when the themes of the two texts closely overlap. This way, we will get a deeper understanding of the *lojong* tradition and a clearer sense of how to apply the teachings in our daily life.

Each chapter of this book opens with a verse from *The Thirty-Seven Verses on the Practice of*

a Bodhisattva. The text we rely on here was translated from the Tibetan by the Padmakara Translation Group and previously published in *The Heart of Compassion: The Thirty-Seven Verses on the Practice of a Bodhisattva* by Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche.

*The Thirty-Seven Verses on the Practice of a Bodhisattva* starts with the invocation explaining for whom the text was composed. Thogme Sangpo Avalokiteshvara, also known as Chenrezig: the bodhisattva of compassion, who is an appropriate object of obeisance for a text dealing with the bodhisattva's way of compassion. Texts that deal with the heart and how to incorporate compassion into our daily lives invoke Avalokiteshvara. The text reads:

*Though he sees that in all phenomena there is no coming and going,  
He strives solely for the sake of beings.*

“Phenomena” here is translated from the word dharmas, meaning ordinary things. In Buddhism there is a **great emphasis on impermanence and the momentary nature of all outer and inner phenomena, on the fact that everything arises and disappears each moment, like a flowing river. It looks like the same river, but moment to moment the water is changing, moving, swirling, and flowing ever downstream. Everything is like that, everything comes into being and disappears again, instantaneously, although in our perception it looks like there is a continuity.**

Since impermanence is a fundamental axiom of Buddhist thought we might ask why the text says, “he sees that in phenomena there is no coming and going.” Here it is dealing with ultimate reality. In our ordinary, relative way of seeing, things come and they go, things are up, they are down, things last for a long time or they disappear swiftly. But in ultimate reality all these dualities no longer pertain. There is no coming and going, there is no higher and lower, there is no annihilation or endless existence. All these opposites, all these dualities, are transcended in a state of how things truly are. Although Avalokiteshvara is the bodhisattva who represents compassion, his compassion naturally arises from the point of view of his perfect wisdom.

Images of Avalokiteshvara show him with a thousand arms, which represent his endless compassionate activities on behalf of all beings. In each of the thousand hands there is an eye, which symbolises that he sees the situation accurately, from both ordinary and transcendental levels. Avalokiteshvara knows how to act, or how not to act, because sometimes it is better to leave matters alone, even though we would like to change them. Avalokiteshvara sees things with the total clarity of an enlightened mind; therefore he sees that on an ultimate level there is no coming and going, that all dharmas are in a state of suchness, which is beyond the temporal idea of the constant flow of phenomena.

The first line of Thogme Sangpo's text praises Avalokiteshvara's wisdom; the second line relates to compassion. Avalokiteshvara sees the transcendent, the ultimate, while constantly striving for the sake of others on a relative level with compassion. It is important that wisdom and compassion come together; if we don't see things clearly or fully understand the situation, we can mess things up. Avalokiteshvara sees things vastly and just how they truly are. From that infinite perspective he is able to spontaneously act in a way that is of ultimate and relative benefit for beings. By combining ultimate and relative truth, he is also the sublime teacher, meaning our root guru. You could think of His Holiness the Dalai Lama or the Gyalwang Karmapa, both of whom are considered to be emanations of Avalokiteshvara. (This section from)

*To the sublime teacher inseparable from Avalokiteshvara, the Protector of Beings,  
I pay constant homage with respectful body, speech, and mind.*

In Buddhism we have the three doors: body, speech, and mind. We pay homage to the teacher with these three. Why? Simply because our teacher is inseparable from Avalokiteshvara. Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche said in *The Heart of Compassion*, his own commentary on the *The Thirty-Seven Verses on the Practice of a Bodhisattva*:

*The sublime spiritual master is inseparable from Avalokiteshvara, the embodiment of the compassion of all the buddhas. Although he manifests in infinite ways for the sake of beings, and displays countless different forms, Avalokiteshvara's nature never changes. Fully enlightened, he has actualised primordial wisdom. His mind is the non-dual, unchanging enlightened mind of all the buddhas; the absolute, Dharmakaya.*

The buddhas and bodhisattvas are not separate from our teachers nor from us. They are our true nature; who we really are, if only we could see clearly. We think we are ordinary sentient

beings, but we are not. This is our tragedy. But the teacher, a genuine realised being, or lama, is not inherently different from us, and so in Buddhist meditations we absorb either the deity or the lama or both together into ourselves, thinking that our minds and their minds are mixed together like water with water so that we recognise that there is no distinction. The distinction comes from our side. We think we are ordinary and they are special, but that's part of our delusion, and so we have to work away at that conceptual distinction, cleaning and polishing. It is like a beautiful silver pot that is so thickly tarnished that it looks black. We have to keep polishing until we get back to the silver which has never, in its essential nature, been tarnished.

However much outer gunk there might be around it, if we diligently clean the pot then it will shine. This silver pot was there all the time; it doesn't go away and come back when we clean it. It is always there, but we don't recognise it. All we see is the black covering. Whereas the great *mahabodhisattvas* and the lamas, the true genuinely realised lamas, are very much in contact with their silver base. They do not have that tarnish the way we do because they have already done the work necessary to polish it up and maintain its innate shine. But their essential nature is the same as ours. This is important to remember. *(This section from)*

*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.*

The buddhas, like Shakyamuni Buddha, on a relative level, had to strive for countless eons to clear away the tarnish and come back to their true metal. How did they do that? How did all the buddhas of the universe become buddhas? They became buddhas by actually practicing the Dharma. It is important that we practice and take it to heart rather than merely read about it. This is why this text is so important. It is not high philosophy that we need to go away and think about, that is all up there somewhere in the sky. It is absolutely down to earth, which we can all use, all day with whomever we meet. In fact, only by meeting people can we truly practice.

## 1. Making Life Meaningful

*Now that I have this great ship (boat) , 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.*

*Cross the sea of emotions  
On the boat of human existence.*

- A precious human birth does not mean just being born as a human. There are many other factors in the context of Buddha Dharma that make a **precious human birth**: being born in a Buddhist country or place where Buddha Dharma is still accessible, having all our faculties, having faith in the Dharma, finding a teacher, and so forth. We are not born in the higher realms where everything is pleasant and there is no incentive to practice, and we are not born in the lower realms where there is so much misery and suffering that we are completely caught up in our own paranoia. Nor are we born among the animals who, loveable as so many of them are, do not have the ability to really practice the spiritual path in this lifetime.

- We have our human birth, we are relatively healthy, and we can think, our minds are clear. We have the freedom to think what we want, to read what we want, have an interest in Dharma, we want to transform ourselves, and have aspiration outside our own interest. All of that is very, very rare. That gives us the opportunity, but we must study and more importantly, practice.

- Ultimately there is light and love and intelligence in this universe. And we are it. It is not just something out there; we carry it within us. This is what we are trying to reconnect with, our original light and love and intelligence, which is who we really are. It is hard to get a well-endowed human birth that has the freedoms and the advantages. If we waste this opportunity now, it will be difficult to regain it in the future. All the causes and conditions have come together because of our past efforts in other lifetimes. If we don't make an effort to create the right causes and conditions in this lifetime, we are going to lose the opportunity. Now is the

time because we don't know what the future holds. The only time we can be certain of in our lives is right now, so this is important.

- **My objective is to get myself and others across the samsara ocean (Bodhichitta).**
- **Practice to free yourself and all others from the suffering that is samsara.**
- At the time of death, what is going to help us: a head full of book knowledge or genuine understanding and realisation in the heart?
  - We need to *study, understand what we have read, and then really practice it and put it into our heart.*
  - We actually don't need to study so much. What we have to do is "listen, reflect, and meditate." First, we have to accumulate the knowledge, we have to listen to the Dharma teachings. 'Listening' includes reading, studying. Listening means to study the Dharma. We take it in, we read about it, and we hear about it, but then we have to think about it, to "reflect" on it. It is not enough that we just take it in. We have to think about what we have read, what we have heard, and really try to understand. If we have doubts, no problem. We do not have to believe blindly. The Dharma says that we have to believe because we understand. If you don't believe something, put it aside and go study more. We need an intelligent belief, a belief based on our own reasoning. Buddhism is "enlightened common sense." Think things through, really try to understand. If you don't understand, then read more about it, think more about it, ask questions. Reflection is a crucial part of the Dharma.

- **First I hear and study, then I think about it and meditate, then I become it.**
- **These three things are very important. First we have to study to know what we are trying to do, then to really think it through so that we really understand it, and then incorporate it into our lives and become it.**

***To listen, contemplate, and meditate is the practice of a bodhisattva.***

- Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche noted the following with regard to this verse:  
*Every day, remind yourself that if you do not study and reflect upon the teachings, meditate, recite prayers and mantras, at the moment of death you will be helpless. Death is certain. If you wait for the moment of death to begin your practice, it will be too late.*

**When buddhas look at samsara with the eyes of their omniscience, they do not see it as an enjoyable place. They are acutely aware of the sufferings of beings, and they see how senseless are the pointless, temporary goals that beings try so hard to attain. It is important to become more and more clearly convinced that the only thing worth achieving is supreme enlightenment. Contemplating the sufferings of samsara, you will naturally develop a strong wish to be liberated from it. Rather than meaninglessly wasting your energy, you will concentrate on practicing the Dharma.**

**If your mind is in accord with Dharma, you will not experience any problems with the things of this life; while if you are constantly preoccupied with your ordinary pursuits, your problems will increase, and nothing will be accomplished.**

**Determination to be free from samsara, based on disillusionment, is the foundation of all Dharma practice. Unless you have made a clear decision to turn your back on samsara, then however many prayers you recite, however much you meditate, however many years you remain in retreat, it will all be in vain.**

**A practitioner who yearns to leave the miseries of samsara behind will make use of all the ways in which that can be done, such as taking refuge, generating the mind set on attaining enlightenment for the sake of others, undertaking positive actions, and so on, with a firm determination to get out of samsara constantly in mind.**

**When the Buddha first turned the wheel of Dharma, he taught the Four Noble Truths. The First Noble Truth is that there is suffering, and it should be recognised. The Second Noble Truth is that suffering has a cause, which therefore needs to be given up. That cause is the kleshas, the negative emotions or afflicting mental factors. Although there are many such**

obscured states of mind, the five principal obscurations are desire, aggression, ignorance,<sup>1</sup> pride, and jealousy. The Third Noble Truth is that there is a path that leads beings away from suffering; this path therefore needs to be followed. The Fourth Noble Truth is that suffering can thus be brought to cessation. Through the Four Noble Truths, the Buddha urged us to renounce worldly concerns and strive for liberation from samsara.

In our search for the means to be free from samsara, the first step is to listen to the teachings, which explain the different methods of so doing. The second step is to reflect on what you have heard and try to find the essential meaning in it. Examine your own mind to see whether it is really as the teachings describe or not, and whether you can keep it focused on an object of meditation.

Third, once you have a clear idea of the essential meaning of the Dharma, you must try to realise that meaning through your inner experience, and assimilate it into your being. This is called meditation.

## 2. Abandon Attachment, Aversion and Ignorance

*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.*

- It is our mind that has all this attachment, hatred and darkness of unknowing. We get locked into habitual relationships.

- Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche put it this way:

*The meaning of leaving behind your native land is to leave behind the emotions of attachment, hatred, and the obscuring ignorance that permeates both. These three poisons, generally speaking, are most active in the relationships you establish with family and friends in your own homeland.*

- People react to each other out of old habits, without even really thinking about it anymore.

**Many negativities come up because of the way people habitually act and talk to others with whom they are familiar.** The patterns may continue that started in childhood.

- **“Native land” means our ordinary habitual responses; these are what we have to leave behind. And the way to leave them behind is first to be conscious of them.**

- The Buddha **said the cause of our suffering, of our *duhkha*, is attachment, clinging and grasping.**

- The waves of our hopes and fears send us surging up and down. **It is all our attachment. Attachment doesn't mean love;** there's a huge difference between love and attachment.

- Love and compassion (essential qualities on the path) are the opposite of attachment and grasping.

- Attachment is tricky, it basically means “I want you to make me happy and to make me feel good. Conversely love says, “I want you to be happy and to make you feel good.” It doesn't say anything about me. If being with me makes you feel happy and good, wonderful; if not, then so be it. **The important thing is that love allows us to hold things gently instead of grasping tightly. It is an important difference.**

- Michael Leunig did a series about how to respect and show love for others. One of his examples was holding a day-old chick in your hands. You hold it carefully, gently, because if you grasp it—no more chick! Love is like that.

- Love is an outpouring of caring and wishing the other to be happy, but not with you stuck right in the middle of it. **Not grasping, = *I want you to be happy but only if it includes me.***

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<sup>1</sup> **Ignorance** includes (a) basic ignorance, the non-recognition of primordial awareness and of the empty nature of phenomena; (b) a dense mental state, chiefly a lack of discernment regarding what should be accomplished and what should be discarded in order to gain freedom from samsara; (c) doubt regarding the truth of karma (the law of cause and effect), the existence of past and future lives, and so on; and (d) obscured view, the belief that the aggregates (*skandhas*) form an individual self, and that phenomena have a real, inherent, and autonomous existence, and so on.

- What it does mean is that we have to start thinking in a different way about our loved ones; a way that genuinely cherishes them and wishes them well; and allows them to be who they are without trying to manipulate them or make them say and do what we want them to because that would make us happy. It's about allowing them to be who they are and giving them the freedom to have *their* life, whether or not that includes us.

- **It is easy to cultivate antipathies and conflicts. We like this person, but we don't like that one. It is easy to feel long-term hostility toward our neighbours or even our siblings, when we have not examined why we feel the way we do. It is hard to see people who we know well, like our family, as they really are and not as our 'projection'.**

- So it is helpful sometimes to just step back and look at people who are very familiar to us as though we had never seen them before. To just drop all our preconceptions, all our ideas, all our opinions and just see them, without any kind of judgment at all. Listen to them. Hear them as if for the first time. See them as if for the first time, afresh. **We get locked into our habitual reactions and judgments, with usually too much attachment or with antipathy.**

- This is what it means to leave one's homeland. **To start seeing things from a different angle as if we were in a new place, meeting new people for the first time, and seeing them with affection and a wish for their happiness: seeing people with no prejudgments.**

- **Another helpful practice is to step back and just hear oneself speak. Not judging, just listening. The tone of voice. The kind of language we use.** The way we speak and what we say. So often we are not even conscious anymore. It is so automatic. How we speak to one person compared with how we speak to another. Just listen.

- **Lojong teaching is all about how to cultivate skilful responses in place of our habitual unskilful responses. We need to look, question and see without pretending; cultivate inner change. Where we see things in our responses which are negative or not helpful; that is our path. That is our practice. To change and transform. Everything can be changed.**

- **"The darkness of stupidity"** refers to the fact that the whole problem is that we just don't see.

- Why do we get so obsessively attached to some people? Why do we get angry with people who don't do what we want them to do? Why do we keep doing and saying the wrong things when we know it is stupid? Why do we not do the things we know would be helpful?

- **Ultimately it is because of this darkness of our own unknowing, and also because of our habitual inertia. It is so much easier to go along with the way we've always done things. It takes such a lot of self-awareness and effort to change.**

- Even though we know that going along the way we have been going doesn't lead to anything that we want and just creates more problems; **there is this heaviness when it comes to actually making the effort to change. Like a thick fog which comes into the mind and prevents us from seeing with clarity: what could be done differently, what would be skilful and what is unskilful. Even if we've read about it a thousand times, we still find ourselves caught up in the same old habitual responses.**

- To change physical habits is a challenge, but to change mental and emotional habits is much more of a challenge. We can create new pathways. Imagine a forest with a familiar path that we always use. After a while this path becomes well worn, compacted and clear so we know exactly where we are going. But **what if now we don't want to travel on that road anymore.**

- **For instance, somebody says something unkind and we get all upset, angry, and hurt; which is just the ego being sad that people don't love it.**

- We don't want to go on that unprofitable road that doesn't lead anywhere. We want to go on this new road of skilful responses, but there isn't yet a road. We have never before tried this new road of thinking, **"Well, thank you, I'm glad that you're so horrible because now I can practice patience."** We don't have a road in our brain for that one, so we have to create one. We start to go along this new road, but then the grass springs back and it doesn't look like we ever went that way before. But if we keep going along this same path every day, eventually we will create a road.

- Then gradually the grass and flowers start pushing up through the old pathway that seemed



so permanent, and after some time, we don't see the old pathway anymore. The new way has become the pathway. But this only comes from repeated effort. It doesn't happen overnight. It just doesn't. Anyone who promises that it is all effortless is just deceiving you, because these habits are deep inside our psyche, like thick, deep roots. It takes a lot of conscious awareness and effort and determination to transform. But the good news is we can all change.

- **As the Buddha said, "Yes, we can change. If we could not change, I would not tell you to do so, but because you can, I say "for goodness sake get on with it."**

- **It is important to remember that nobody, not even the Buddha, can do it for us.** It is up to us. Teachers can help. They can guide and they can encourage, but they cannot do it for us; if they could, they would. **We must accept that we are responsible for our own heart-mind,** even though other people are there to help us; either by being **kind and encouraging or by being absolutely awful and obnoxious.** Either way, they are genuine spiritual friends.

- **We recognise that these three poisons inside our heart (our attachment, our hatred, and our basic unknowing or ignorance) are the cause of our suffering in samsara. It is not out there; it is inside us. We can do something about it.** This is the whole message. We don't need to discard anything thinking it is an obstacle to practice. In fact, everything is a help to our practice if we have the right attitude. It is a matter of changing our responses. That's all.

### 3. Benefiting from Solitude **Renunciation**

*When unfavourable 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.*

- Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche said,  
*When you live in a solitary place,  
your negative emotions gradually diminish,  
and your self-control and moderation increase.*
- These texts were written for monks and hermits who typically live in solitary places, but we can also understand this in a deeper way. It doesn't just mean outer solitude. **It also means an inner solitude. "When unfavourable places are abandoned, disturbing emotions gradually fade."** The point is, **what are "unfavourable places?"**
- **The foundation of Buddhism is renunciation.** In Tibetan, the word for renunciation is *ngejung*, which means **"to really get out of something."** **If we are serious about becoming the masters of our minds, instead of the slaves of our emotions; if we are dedicated to leading a life that will be of benefit for ourselves and others, then we have to be selective.** We cannot do everything in this lifetime. (Eg, we cannot spend all our nights partying and then get up at five in the morning to do our practice).
- **We have to decide in our lives what is really important to us and what is not. Then simplify. This is renunciation. Letting go of distractions.**
- **Renunciation is looking at our life and our activities and recognising what is counterproductive to our spiritual path; what is a distraction; what encourages the growth of negative emotions and discourages the growth of positive ones. Then we can decide that we are not interested in going along with that anymore.**
- As the wonder of the Dharma takes over our life more and more, we lose interest in other things that previously had seemed so important to us. As our interest and involvement in the Dharma deepens, our involvement and interest in many other worldly distractions naturally fades away. **The Buddha called ordinary people caught up in worldly distractions "the childish."** **We are trying to mature, to grow up and become adults. Often the path is called *mindrol*. The word *minpa* means "to ripen, to mature," and *drol* means to be liberated, to be free. We have to ripen or mature our mind stream in order to be liberated.**
- When the instruction says, "When unfavourable places are abandoned, disturbing emotions gradually fade," it means changing outer circumstances that don't serve us. It is beneficial to avoid activities (like endlessly watching television or looking at the computer or mobile phone,

drinking and partying, or just talking a lot of useless gossip and worldly talk) and instead frequent places where people are interested in more spiritual topics, such as Dharma centres or anywhere that has a positive atmosphere. We should associate with people who are kind and have good values and talk about subjects that have some genuine meaning. These are good places where one's negative emotions begin to subside.

- As much as possible, **we should look for environments where the afflictive emotions such as our anger, aggression, jealousy, and attachment begin to grow less. At the same time, our good qualities are given a chance to increase because everybody else is trying to be kind and friendly, and so naturally one wants to be kind and friendly too.** It becomes natural when we are in an environment where these qualities are admired and appreciated.

- It is also important to **be selective with the company that we keep.** Later on in the text it talks about **avoiding bad company.** What it means is that as ordinary sentient beings, we are influenced by the society around us, usually much more than we would like to admit. Unless we are careful, we often take on the values of the people with whom we habitually associate. Therefore, if we are with people who are only thinking about worldly distractions and worldly aims, then gradually, bit by bit, our interest in the Dharma could begin to subside, and our fascination with outer things begin to increase. Even though we don't intend it, it just naturally happens like that.

- This means we should closely associate with people who basically have the same kind of values and appreciation for the Dharma life. Even if they're not Buddhists, they should at least be genuinely good people. (As they say, if we put even an ordinary piece of wood in a sandalwood box, then it will take on the smell of sandalwood. But if we bury it in a dung heap, then, of course, it will smell like dung. We should be careful.)

- As we begin to practice and our minds begin to calm down and our innate virtue begins to appear, our appreciation for the Dharma deepens. (Nobody adores the Dharma in the way that the great realised masters do. They hear just one word of Dharma, and their eyes fill with tears, even though they've heard the same thing a million times. Because they know how precious the Dharma is: they have not just studied it, they have not just thought about it, they have become it. Their appreciation and devotion is genuine, so they are deeply grateful.)

- **When our minds gradually begin to see more clearly, with less delusion, less judgment, more clarity, and all our upsets, anger, and ego defences quiet down, then our incredible gratitude to the buddhas** (and all the masters who came later and have preserved this precious lineage) spontaneously arises in the heart. Our faith is uncontrived. **When we imagine a world (and our lives) without the Dharma, we feel deeply grateful. Deeply grateful.**

- While the practice of abandoning unfavourable places and allowing disturbing emotions to fade is not necessarily easy, it is certainly possible. As we go through each of the practices in turn, we find that the text is actually describing **the four thoughts that turn the mind away from ordinary worldly activity and toward the Buddha Dharma. These five thoughts are a powerful practice in themselves and entail:**

1. **Contemplating our precious human life so that we are grateful for our existence.**
2. **Contemplating impermanence and death so that we seize the opportunities of this life right now.**
3. **Contemplating karma (the law of cause and effect) so that we understand that our every action impacts ourselves and others.**
4. **Contemplating the suffering of cyclic existence (samsara) so that we are no longer entranced by worldly things and want to escape samsara forever.**
5. **Contemplating bodhicitta and helping all sentient beings out of samsara.**

## 4. Remembering 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.*

- This verse goes completely against the mentality of our modern consumer society, which is

so centred on this life and how happiness depends on close relationships, success, money, possessions; the more you have, the more you are. The text points out that **our consciousness is just a guest in a hotel**. This body is only here for a short time. However long life lasts, in cosmic time it is less than a finger snap. Then the guest has to leave and find another hotel. In other words, absolutely everything is impermanent. This includes ourselves. All the stuff that we've accumulated has to be left behind for somebody else, even if our whole life was spent gathering and accumulating. At the end, no matter who we are, we don't take one single coin with us, nothing. However many loved ones and friends, disciples or groupies you have around you, not one of them can go with you.

• **You're all alone. Naked. The only thing we carry with us is our karmic imprints. And what have we done about that?**

• Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche points out the following:

***Ordinary, worldly concerns bring only suffering and disappointment in this life and the next. The appearances of samsara are highly unstable, ever changing, and impermanent, like lightning as it flashes across the night sky. To reflect on the impermanence of all phenomena helps turn your mind toward the Dharma.***

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

• People in hospice undergo tremendous transformation as they accepted that they were going to die, which most people don't ever want to think about. They acknowledged that death was there. Of course we are all going to die. We don't have to be a cancer patient to know that. But normally people don't want to think about it. Now these patients had to think about it.

• This transformed their lives because they began to recognise what is important and what is not important. One of the major regrets was that they had spent so much of their life working so hard to accumulate all their possessions (big houses, more cars, an important position in their company, and so forth) instead of giving more time and energy to what was really important. Had some time to say they were sorry to people that they had hurt and to tell their loved ones that they really loved them.

• **Not a single stable phenomenon can be found anywhere in the world.**

• **The same is true of people. We change with every passing moment. We change minute by minute, from youth to old age, and from old age to death. Our opinions, ideas, and plans are constantly changing and evolving. It is never certain that a project once begun will ever be completed, nor is it certain to unfold in the way we intended.**

• People are lulled into believing that what really mattered was getting on in life.

• What was important was more about what they had done for the world than about what the world had ever done for them.

• One of the good things about Buddhism is that it talks a lot about death. This is important because by talking about death, it reminds us that we are alive and that we need to assess what we are doing with our life because we are not going to have it forever.

• It is important to recognise that even the closest people who have been together with us since the beginning are one day going to separate from us and we don't know when. Just because we love somebody doesn't mean that we can stay with them forever. It is not possible. Where are the people for whom in our last lifetime we would have given our life because we loved them so much? And in the next lifetime there will be a whole new cast.

• **"I will die, you will die." And then he added, "That's all my guru taught me; that's all I practice. Just meditate on that. I promise there is nothing greater."**

• **Look at the number of people you have known since you were very young; how many are still alive? For the moment, you may still be with parents, friends, a partner, and so on. But you cannot escape the fact that at death you will be taken away from them.**

• **The timing of your death is uncertain, and the circumstances that will bring it about are unpredictable. Like a frog in the mouth of a snake, you are already in Death's mouth.**

Death may strike at any moment, without warning, and result from all sorts of causes and circumstances. Some people die young, some old, some from sickness, some in war, or because of a sudden violent accident such as falling off a cliff. Some die in their sleep, some while walking, some while eating. Some die serene, some wracked by attachment for their relatives and possessions. We all have to die, no matter how.

- **We have to recognise that whatever we have gathered we leave behind. We take only the karmic seeds, our *samskaras*, our habitual mental patterning, with us. But we are usually careless about the karmic imprints in our substratum consciousness. And yet, that's our wealth. That's what we can take with us.**

- When you think about samsara, if you feel as if you were aboard a sinking ship, as if you had fallen into a pit of deadly snakes, or as if you were a criminal about to be handed over to the executioner, these are sure signs that you have discarded the belief in the permanence of things. **It is the authentic understanding of impermanence dawning in your mind.<sup>2</sup> As a result, you will no longer get entangled in discrimination between friends and enemies. You will be able to cut through the dense weave of meaningless distractions. Your endeavour will be strong, and everything you do will be oriented toward the Dharma. Your good qualities will bloom as never before.**

- The body is the servant of the mind; it can act positively or negatively. You can use this body as an instrument to achieve liberation, or as something that will plunge you deeper into samsara. Do not waste your time. Take advantage of the opportunity you now have to meet spiritual teachers and practice the Dharma.

- Right now our whole future, not just this lifetime but future lifetimes, is being decided. It is in what we do with our mind, with our speech, with our body. Moment to moment we are creating our future. Nobody else can do it for us. Therefore, how we choose to spend our time, on practice or on frivolity, and who we choose to spend our time with, are clearly of paramount importance.

## 5. Valuing Good Friends

*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.*

- We come back to the fact that we are easily influenced, and if we hang out with the wrong set of people, we start to take on their attitudes, and we want to be part of the group. Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche explains that:

*A crystal, when placed on a piece of cloth, takes on the colour of that cloth, whether white, yellow, red, or black. In the same way, the friends with whom you keep company the most often, whether suitable or unsuitable, will greatly influence the direction your life and practice take.*

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<sup>2</sup> **Meditation on impermanence** has three roots, nine considerations, and leads to three definite conclusions:

- (1) death is certain,
  - no one in the past has ever escaped death,
  - the body is compounded and bound to disintegrate,
  - life runs out second by second.
- (2) there is no certainty what will cause it,
  - life is incredibly fragile,
  - the body is without any enduring essence,
  - numerous circumstances can cause death, while few circumstances prolong or support life.
- (3) anything other than Dharma is totally useless at the moment of death.
  - relatives and friends will be of no use at the moment of death,
  - wealth and food will be of no use,
  - my own body will be of no use.

The three definite conclusions:

- (1) we should practice the Dharma, since it will definitely help us at death;
- (2) we must practice it right now, since we do not know when we will die;
- (3) we should devote our time exclusively to practicing the Dharma, since nothing else is of any use.

- We begin to imitate and get into bad habits. We know very well that among young people one of the reasons that so many get into drinking, drugs, and promiscuous sex and so forth is not necessarily because they are really that interested. It is because they want to belong. They get in with the wrong crowd and down they go. It is hard then to pull out. Sometimes they end up addicted or in serious trouble. So we have to be careful. The Buddha himself said that **good companionship was essential on the path.**

- **As much as possible we try to be with people who inspire us, whose example we want to follow since this will increase our virtues and help decrease our negative emotions.**

- **An unsuitable friend is one who is fond of distractions, totally immersed in ordinary worldly activities, and who does not care in the least about achieving liberation; a friend who has no interest or faith in the Three Jewels. The more time you spend with such a person, the more the three poisons will permeate your mind.** Even if you do not initially agree with their ideas and actions, if you spend a lot of time with unsuitable friends, you will eventually be **influenced by their bad habits. Your resolve to act positively will decline, and you will waste your life. Such people will prevent you from spending any time studying, reflecting, and meditating; which are the roots of liberation. And they will make you lose whatever qualities you may have developed, especially compassion and love; which are the very essence of the teachings of the Great Vehicle.** An unsuitable friend is like a bad captain who steers his ship onto the rocks. **Such people are your worst enemy. You owe it to yourself to stay away from them.**

- **In contrast, being with people who embody or aspire to gentleness, compassion, and love will encourage you to develop those qualities so essential to the path. Inspired by their example, you will become filled with love for all beings, and come to see the inherent negativity of attachment and hatred.** Even though we are not buddhas radiating light, if we try to be a person of integrity, honesty, and kindness, people will be attracted to us. We don't even have to say a word. People will be drawn to us. This question of how easily we are influenced by the company we keep is important. As much as possible we try to associate with friends whose values and way of life we truly appreciate and honour. They aren't necessarily Buddhists or even on any particular spiritual path, but they are good people. Then we begin to emulate that.

- We are like tiny saplings that need protection from strong winds that can come along and destroy them. This process has to be nurtured, protected, and fertilised. If we start spraying it with noxious chemicals, then it is finished. These negative ideas and thoughts are like poison.

## **6. Relying on Spiritual Teachers**

*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.*

- The ultimate good friends are like the buddhas, the bodhisattvas, and one's spiritual teachers. They are obviously the kind of company we should hang out with. "True spiritual friends" doesn't just mean those kinds of people. It also means other companions on the path, whichever path they're going on (if it is a good path), and who therefore **demonstrate for us genuine goodness.**

- His Holiness the Dalai Lama again and again talks about cultivating a good heart, and this is what we are trying to do here.

- **Associate as much as possible with people who are good hearted because they remind us how to act in situations where we are not feeling very good hearted.**

- **This is about changing and improving. We have to surround ourselves (or at least associate whenever possible) with people who exemplify what we are aiming for and remind us of how it can be.**

- **It is helpful to be with people who value the things we value and are sincerely striving toward overcoming their negative qualities and cultivating positive qualities. It is**

especially helpful to associate with those who are much further along the path than we are who will be a big inspiration for us.

- Dalai Lama. His Holiness doesn't care who you are. He just looks straight into your buddha nature and acknowledges that. That's why even a brief encounter is so powerful, even though they only meet him for two seconds.

- The Buddha said, **“What I think I say, and what I say I do. This I can say for myself.”** **Such perfect integrity! As much as possible, we should not only try to exemplify that in our own life but also associate with good friends, because they will always remind us of our own potential and where we are going.**

- “Through reliance on a true spiritual friend one's faults will fade, and good qualities will grow like a waxing moon” means that if we are under the guidance of a genuine teacher, then that teacher will help by pointing out our faults and encouraging our virtues.

- Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche notes:

*All accomplished practitioners of the past attained enlightenment by following a spiritual teacher. They would start their search by listening to accounts of the doings of different masters. When the stories they heard about a teacher were particularly inspiring, they would examine [their] qualities from a distance before committing themselves. Once they had complete confidence in [the teacher], they would go into [their] presence, serve [them], and one-pointedly put whatever instructions [they] gave them into practice.*

- For those who are genuinely serious, it is helpful to have personal guidance on the path if you can find it, because without a teacher it is an incredibly difficult process to turn our ordinary samsaric mind into a buddha mind. In fact, it is almost impossible. But in the meantime, that doesn't mean that we have to sit around waiting for the perfect lama to appear. I often say to people, “With an untamed mind, what can anybody do?” **If the Buddha himself were sitting in front of us, all he could say is “practice.” That we can all do.**

- **Imagine that the mind is like a wild horse.** Although it is absolutely wild, it still has potential; it is a good horse. But when we want it to go this way, it goes that way. When we want it to go up, it goes down. Anybody who's sat in meditation for five minutes knows what I am talking about. **The mind is like a wild horse, but it has great potential to be trained. However, we cannot train a wild horse without first taming it.** Taming it means that it **quiets down**, becomes trusting and interested in what we want it to do. It becomes friendly, cooperative, and amenable. Then we can start to train it. We can teach the horse to do anything within the capacities of what is possible for a horse once the horse has agreed within itself that it wants to cooperate. But as long as it does not want to collaborate, we cannot train it.

- **Likewise with the mind. We start with *shamatha* practice to allow the mind to quiet down and become calm and single-pointed.** In Tibetan it is called *lesu rungwa*, which means “workable.” **We make the mind workable, flexible, and cooperative. Nobody can do that for us,** and it wastes a teacher's time to wait while we try to get our mind into some kind of condition where they can really teach us. This we can do for ourselves.

- **Get the mind calmed down, more clear, more conscious. Develop the qualities of being mindful and being inwardly vigilant, alert; know what's going on in the mind. Have the power of attention so that if we want to stay here, the mind will just rest here instead of going off everywhere else. This takes time with patience and perseverance. Whether or not we have teachers, all of us can learn to tame the mind. Once the mind is tamed, then it can be trained.**

- **The first step is to learn how to make the mind workable. That alone is a huge step forward; we can do this. Nobody else can do it for us. We all have to struggle with that. As one great lama said, “If you have good *shamatha* practice, then the rest of the Dharma is in the palm of your hands.”**

- **Everybody is so interested in all these high practices which we can't do properly because the base is not there. It is like wanting to build a golden roof when there are no foundation and no walls.**

- **Once we have established the foundations and have a consistent daily practice, then**

we will benefit from the guidance of a teacher who can help us deepen in our practice through their experiential wisdom of the path. There is no point repeating the mistakes many others have made along the way, nor taking unnecessary detours. The teacher helps us avoid mistakes, shows us a direct way forward, and keeps us on track. This is a practical thing. The teacher saves us time and unnecessary effort. Although we still have to walk the path ourselves, it will be much harder without an experienced guide.

## 7. Going for Refuge

*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 previous six verses have explained the preliminaries for developing bodhichitta. You are aware of the importance and the rarity of the human life you now have, and you realise the stark immediacy of death. You feel a great disillusionment with this world, and have decided to rid yourself of distracting conditions and misleading influences, and to try to tame your mind according to the instructions of an authentic teacher. Now, you are ready to cross the threshold of the Dharma and take refuge in the Three Jewels.**

- The previous verses were basically presenting us with the problem, and now comes the solution. This is the situation we are in, so how do we get out? Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche summarises the issue:

*People naturally search for refuge, for someone or something to protect them from sorrow and torment. Some people turn to the powerful with the hope of achieving wealth, pleasure, and influence. Others seek protection through natural forces, such as the stars, or mountains. Some seek aid through the power of spirits. But none of **these mistaken objects of refuge are free from ignorance and samsara, and they therefore cannot provide ultimate refuge. Their compassion, if they have any, is partial and limited.***

- **True refuge can only be provided by “something that is itself totally free; free from the bonds of samsara, and free from the limited peace of a one-sided Nirvana.”**

- **True refuge is found only in the Three Jewels (the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha); considered to have “absolute wisdom, non-biased compassion, and unimpeded ability.”**

- Our purpose is to get out of samsara. Only beings who are themselves beyond samsara can help us to likewise go beyond. Beings still trapped in samsara cannot do that.

- “Never fail those they protect” doesn’t mean that if we are having trouble with our business and we pray to the Three Jewels, we are going to hit the right market. What it means is that if we sincerely believe in Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, and we sincerely practice, this refuge won’t let us down. Our practice will definitely flourish. Our ability to come closer and closer to a liberated mind will definitely improve. The Dharma (being truth) cannot let us down, but our own practice of it can.

- The Dharma itself cannot fail us, because it is how things really are. It won’t fail us because the protection that the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha give is to the mind. How they protect our mind is what is explained in the verses to follow, on how to use the adverse circumstances we are likely to meet in samsara and transform them into our opportunities for practice. That’s where the mind is protected, because it can never be crushed; because we have the methods by which we can always surmount, transcend, and transform the difficulties we meet. This is one way that the Three Jewels are a protection for our own mind.

- Dharma helps us to overcome the inner poisons of our mind and to connect with our true nature and to become liberated, so that we are really able to benefit other beings. It helps us to get beyond this egoistic self-absorption in which most of us are drowning.

- **The first step is the belief and trust in the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha.** What does this mean? Well, **traditionally the Buddha is considered to be the supreme physician, the ultimate doctor. Because we are all poisoned by our negative emotions, especially our greed and attachment, anger and aversion, jealousy and pride, along with the underlying quality of our delusory lack of understanding: our ignorance. We don’t recognise who we**

**really are. This underlying grasping at a false identity (who we are not) and not recognising who we really are is the cause of all these other poisons. We are sick with afflictive emotions.**

- **The Buddha says, “Yes, you have a big crisis, but there’s a reason why you’re so sick.” The underlying cause is the grasping, clinging, attached mind based on our wrong perception of our identity, which creates a lot of problems. The Buddha said that suffering is birth, old age, sickness, and death as well as not getting what we want and getting what we do not want. In fact, it is the whole quandary of living tossed up and down in the ocean of existence called samsara.**

- The therapy to get us out of samsara is the noble eightfold path which basically encompasses the whole of Dharma. The Buddha is like the doctor.

- *Sangha* has basically three levels of meaning. The first is the Arya, or Noble Sangha, which comprises those—whether monastics or laypeople—who actually have had a genuine perception of reality. In the Tibetan tradition this is realisation of emptiness or *shunyata*. At that point one becomes an arya, or noble one. That is the Sangha we go to for refuge because they know what they’re doing. They are like nurses who have been trained. They are not qualified as doctors, but they have experience and they can help with our treatment.

- The second level of the Sangha comprises the monastics, which means all those who are ordained and receive vows as monks or nuns.

- The third level is the Maha Sangha, or Great Sangha, the fourfold community of fully ordained monks, fully ordained nuns, laymen, and laywomen.

- **“From here until life ends, I take refuge in the Buddha, I take refuge in the Dharma, I take refuge in the Sangha.”**

- So in Buddhism we take refuge, and this can remind us to place the Dharma at the centre of our life instead of at the periphery, only practicing when we have a bit of spare time. We are practicing the Dharma in whatever we are doing. It is not something abstract that speaks of a higher philosophy or the advanced levels of meditation. It is, instead, a beautiful and useful text dealing with the kind of situations, problems, and challenges that come up in everyday life and teaches how to transform them into a Dharma practice by responding in a genuinely skilful way that can help us transform our heart-mind.

- He (Atisha) emphasised refuge and bodhichitta.

- The three things to be avoided are: (1) Having taken refuge in the Buddha, you should not take refuge in worldly gods and powerful people of this world. (2) Having taken refuge in the Dharma, you should give up all forms of violence, whether in thought, word, or deed. (3) Having taken refuge in the Sangha, you should not willingly share the lifestyle of those who live in a totally wrong way, nor distrust the karmic law of cause and effect.

- The three things to be done are: (1) Having taken refuge in the Buddha, you should respect any representation of the Buddha, including paintings and statues, even those in disrepair, and keep them in elevated places. (2) Having taken refuge in the Dharma, you should respect all the scriptures; this even extends down to a single letter of the alphabet, since letters are the support of the Dharma. Never step over books; the Buddha himself said that in this decadent age he would manifest in the form of scriptures. (3) Having taken refuge in the Sangha, you should respect members of the monastic community and all fellow Dharma practitioners.

- **Our minds are like heavy dough, and we need to keep practicing until the mind lightens up and becomes flexible and pliant.**

## **8. Valuing Virtue**

*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.*

- This verse deals with karma. Karma is the third of the four thoughts that turn the mind toward Dharma. Without karma the whole Buddhist path is nonsense and the Dharma is reduced to a therapy to make this life more tolerable. There is no place for bodhichitta.



- The Buddhist view is that we have all experienced thousands if not millions of rebirths in every possible realm we can imagine. Not just as humans but as animals, in the spirit realms, higher realms, and lower realms. We should remember that if we met ourselves in our last lifetime, we wouldn't know ourselves at all. It is not me that gets reborn.

- If we could see ourselves in the next lifetime, who would that be? I would be a completely different being, but that being would also be thinking, me. **There is just a stream of consciousness going forward that, as long as we believe in a me, is endless.**

- “How can we ever end it, since we are always doing actions with our body, speech, and mind?” The master explained it with a *mala*, or rosary of beads. Taking a bead, she said, “All right, we do this act, thinking ‘I did this’ and then that bead pulls the next bead which pulls the next bead; they just keep following, one after the other after the other. So what to do? Well, obviously we need to cut the thread, then we pull one bead but the other beads don't move. They are just left behind. The thread is the belief in an I who did the action.”

- **As long as we believe “I” performed this, “I” did this, “I” said that, then that thread keeps the karma coming along with us. This is important because it is the reason why in Buddhism we can be liberated. Once we realise the emptiness of our false identification with a sense of “me and mine”, there is no “I” in the centre. Karma is not being made. Karma, or action, depends on an actor. So long as we believe I am doing something, there are seeds being sown, and if we think of all of our past endless lifetimes, we've done everything.** Good, bad, indifferent; you name it.

- We've taken on many roles in many lifetimes, and all the seeds of our intentional actions of body, speech, and mind have been accumulating in what is called the “substratum consciousness.” When the time comes, when the causes and conditions come together, certain karma seeds will sprout. We don't know which seeds or when or how. It is never arbitrary; there are always causes and conditions; things we did at some point. That's why bad things happen to good people and fantastically good things happen to really awful people. It is not that there is someone up there judging us and meting out rewards and punishments. It is just that at certain times certain things will come up because of past causes.

- We can't do much about that. We can do some purification practices, but there are endless seeds to be purified. **Moment to moment we are creating our future by how we respond to what is happening in this moment. It is like a tapestry that we are endlessly weaving. The best purification practice is to take whatever happens onto the path.**

- From a simplistic point of view, we say “good” and “bad,” because we think good is when things go according to our wishes and bad is when they don't. But actually from a more expansive point of view, it is hard to know what is good and what is bad.

- During good times, one tends to free float and not make much effort to change. It is often harder to take the good times onto the path than the bad times.

- When the text talks here about good karma and bad karma, we have to understand this is meant in a conventional sense. When difficulties come, especially sickness and poverty and the many problems that appear in our lives, they are the result of negative actions that were performed in this life or former lives. Now those seeds have come up, and we need to respond skilfully and take this on the path. Then that negative karma transforms into positive karma.

- **Through the ages, there are thousands or even millions of people who have killed other people and animals. We ourselves have probably killed thousands of people and animals. From a karmic point of view, we have to accept the consequences of those actions.**

- The important thing is **not to worry about what is going to happen to us but to create inner strength to deal with whatever does happen. We will be able to take it on the path with us. Something that outwardly looks negative can inwardly be exactly what we need as a real help and aid to our practice.**

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- **Lojong** is developing the confidence and the qualities that will help with whatever happens to us in our lives as our practice. Instead of moaning and complaining and feeling sorry for ourselves, we appreciate that this is our opportunity to practice properly. It is pointless to be a fair-weather Buddhist who practices when the sun is shining but runs for

cover as soon as it starts storming.

**The Buddha taught that the unendurable suffering of the lower realms  
Is the fruit of unvirtuous actions.**

- **We live in a world of our own projections.** When we are happy, everything is sunny. When we are depressed, the brightest day is gloomy. Since we have an apparent physical basis (which according to quantum physics is not as apparent as we assume), our projections are totally subjective. As humans we are all equipped with certain kinds of sense organs and consciousness so there is a general consensus about how things are, despite the distortions of our emotional reactions. Two people might go to the same place and experience a completely different version of the situation depending on their mental state. **Everything depends on our state of mind: we project our psychic state outward and then react to it.**

- Most people are basically good-hearted. We have our good qualities and our failings. However, when we die we are likely to encounter circumstances that correspond to our usual way of thinking while we were alive. **It is important to be careful what we think about and respond to situations now when we have some choice. We don't want to create more problems for ourselves in the future, so we should be careful of our actions right now while we have a choice.**

- **We can decide to avoid doing anything non-virtuous, even at the cost of our life. *Non-virtuous* basically means "that which harms others." Just don't harm anybody, with our body, speech, or mind. No harm makes sense and has unforeseen and profound benefits.**

- Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche puts it as follows:

*The more careful you are in whatever you do, the easier it is to realise emptiness; the more profound your view, the clearer your understanding will be of the relationship between cause and effect.*

## 9. Recognising the Truth of Things

*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.*

- This verse, like verse 4, is about **impermanence**. **Dew on grass lasts for such a short time**; the sun rises, and it is gone.

- **Once you have understood the union of emptiness and the dependent arising of phenomena, you will see clearly how deluded and deceiving the ways of the world really are, and, like an old man forced to play children's games, you will find them very tiresome.**

- **Once you have realised the utter foolishness of spending your life attached to friends and scheming to subdue your enemies and competitors, you will find it tedious. Once you have been struck by the pointlessness of letting yourself be forever influenced and conditioned by your habitual tendencies, you will become sick of it. Once you know that it is sheer delusion to be preoccupied by thoughts of the future, and to lose your mindfulness and vigilance in the present moment, you will weary of it.**

- All these things that we imagine will give us pleasure and delight are ephemeral. Practically speaking, even the most delicious meal in the world is going to end. Then what? We probably get indigestion. **Any pleasure that we can think of is short-lived and often hardly worth all the trouble that we went through to get it.** Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche explains it this way:

*All those illusory goals and ambitions, even if you could ever manage to follow them through and bring them to some kind of conclusion, would that lead to a lasting result? You will recognise that there is nothing permanent in any of them. You might be the heir to a throne, but it is obvious that no king has ever maintained his power indefinitely; if nothing else, death will snatch it away. You might be the most formidable general, but you will never subdue all of your country's enemies, no matter how many wars you wage. You might have tremendous power, influence, fame and wealth, but it is all meaningless and hollow.*

- **Acknowledge the suffering of samsara, you will recognise that the source of suffering lies in your obscuring emotions and the negative actions they engender, and that the source of your obscuring emotions lies in your clinging to the idea of self. If you can rid yourself of that clinging, suffering will cease.**

- **Liberation means freeing yourself from the ties of your emotions and negative actions. The way to free yourself from them is to practice the Dharma; to train in discipline; in concentration; and in *prajñā*, the wisdom that allows you to realise the nonexistence of the individual self and phenomena. Discipline is the basis of concentration; concentration is the basis of wisdom. If you practice the Dharma properly, even for as little as an hour a day, the results of countless lifetimes and kalpas of negative actions can be purified.**

- **One of the problems in our modern society is the idea that happiness means pleasure.** Therefore a really happy life will be one of unending pleasure. But actually unending pleasure would be extraordinarily boring and unsatisfactory.

- Psychiatrists find that many people may have a life that appears full and prosperous, but **inwardly their life is utterly meaningless. There is no purpose.**

- **They appear to have everything, yet they ask, “Is this all life is about?” Increasingly, people experience a sense of hopelessness, because they’ve got everything that society tells them is needed for happiness, satisfaction, and fulfilment; and they are miserable.**

- Many people now have enough sense to understand that getting another car or a bigger house is not going to solve the problem. Beyond a certain level of security and comfort, no matter how much they get, it’s not going to fulfil them. What then? Is that all the struggle is for? People work so hard, struggling like rodents on wheels, endlessly moving and getting nowhere.

- Psychologists found that; the only thing they have ever found that raises the happiness level and keeps it raised is meditation, because it gives one an inner joy that is not dependent on outer things. Feel uplifted so long as keep doing it.

- Assuming that our happiness depends on outer circumstances is a false trail. Therefore, what is the right way to go? Start on our inner possessions???

- **In order to renounce the world, you need to keep eleven pledges:**

1. *Not to conform to the attitudes of ordinary people, but to stay alone.*
2. *To leave your native land far behind.*
3. *To feel that you have had enough of sensual pleasures.*
4. *To maintain the humblest possible condition, thereby being free from caring what others think.*
5. *To keep a spy posted in your mind; the meditation on ridding your mind of attachment to loved ones.*
6. *Not to not pay attention to what people say; whatever they may say, simply leave it be and let them say what they will.*
7. *Not to feel distress, even if the winds carry away all that is dear to you.*
8. *To have nothing to regret in this life, as though you were a dying beggar.*
9. *To continually recite the mantra “I need nothing!”*
10. *To keep the reins of your destiny firmly in your own hands.*
11. *To remain enveloped by the cloud of authentic practice.*

## 10. Valuing Others

*If all the mothers who have loved me since beginning-less 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.*

- The first level of aspiration is **seeing that samsara is impermanent and understanding that outer acquisitions are not going to make us happy. Since everything is impermanent, we should strive for liberation or Nirvana. Get me out!** When really in the depths of our heart we recognise the uncertainty, the insecurity in samsara, no matter where we are, then, like

being trapped in a prison house we search for the key to escape.

- **The bodhichitta of intention, of aspiration, has two aspects: compassion, which is directed toward beings; and wisdom, which is directed toward enlightenment. You need both: if you do not aim at attaining ultimate enlightenment, then however strong your wish to benefit beings may be, you will never go beyond ordinary kindness and compassion; if you wish to attain enlightenment for your own sake alone, you will never go beyond the limited nirvana of Hinayana practitioners. Both aspects are indispensable.**

- Dream of being in a prison with penthouses and parties. People content to be there. Escaped by running away. When decided to help others escape, her escape became possible.

- Verse 9 deals with striving for the supreme level of unchanging liberation. We are **aiming for Nirvana in order to escape from samsara**. However, there is a problem here. **Example of this is a burning house. The house is on fire, and there is a huge blaze, but we have managed to get out. But our parents, our children, our loved ones, and our cat are still in the burning house. Can we just walk away? No. We have to go back in and try to get them out of that burning house. We wouldn't just leave them inside to burn to death. We would take the fact that we ourselves are out as the reason to help pull them out, too.**

- Another example is that we are **all drowning in the swamp of samsara**, but we have finally managed to get onto dry land. Yet looking back, we see our loved ones who are all drowning. Who would say, "You're drowning! Sorry about that, but I'm on dry land, so you take me as an example and swim hard. I hope you can get on dry land too. Bye!"

- No. We would find a rope or anything to pull them out. We can use that firm land to help pull everybody else out. We wouldn't let our mother drown in front of us if we could prevent it. Or our children, our partner, our friends, or anybody. Even a street dog we would try to rescue. Of course we would.

- This brings us to the next level of motivation, which was mentioned earlier. Bodhichitta. *Bodhi* means "enlightenment" or "awakening," and *chitta* means "heart" or "mind." So ***bodhichitta* means "mind of enlightenment" or "spirit of awakening."**

- It's that awakened heart quality that helps us travel the spiritual path, not just for ourselves, but so that we can help others to escape, too. **Through wisdom and compassion one is in the position to benefit beings in a meaningful way.** Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche taught:

**The bodhichitta of intention, of aspiration, has two aspects: compassion, which is directed toward beings; and wisdom, which is directed toward enlightenment. You need both: if you do not aim at attaining ultimate enlightenment, then however strong your wish to benefit beings may be, you will never go beyond ordinary kindness and compassion; if you wish to attain enlightenment for your own sake alone, you will never go beyond the limited nirvana of Hinayana practitioners. Both aspects are indispensable.**

- If we could learn to deal with our negative emotions, if we could have a deep insight into the nature of reality, then we would be in a position to really benefit all these other beings who so desperately need to be helped.

- If we look back through the endless panorama of all our past lives, then how many beings have we actually had a close relationship with? It's hard to say because we have completely forgotten.

- **We have a debt of gratitude to repay; to many hundreds on people in this lifetime alone and millions through all lifetimes. The greatest way to repay that debt is to attain enlightenment in order to liberate others; all our mothers from endless lifetimes.**

- **According to this aspiration, we are not just practicing to make ourselves feel better. We are practicing so that in this lifetime or in future lifetimes we may be in the position to genuinely help beings, who are so desperately in need of help, whether they realise it or not. That's the motivation.**

- **Right now, we can't. We are helpless. We can't even help ourselves much less other sentient beings. But the aspiration is there. We may not be able to help effectively now, but we will from this point onward use our time to really create the causes and conditions**

**that in the future will enable us to genuinely help in a deep and meaningful way.**

- After taking refuge, to enter the Mahayana path that emphasises compassion, the path of a bodhisattva, one receives the bodhisattva vow, which is the vow to strive spiritually, not just for one's own liberation but to attain enlightenment so that in time all beings will be benefited. This doesn't mean just humans but also animals and insects, all the creatures living in the seas and the lakes, all the birds, and all the beings in the spirit realms, hell realms, and heaven realms.

- **This aspiration completely transforms one's own motivation: I am not doing this for me but for all beings.**

- The verse says, "If all the mothers who have loved me since beginningless time are suffering, what is the use of my own happiness?" **How can I be happy escaping from the burning house, if my mother is still burning? My own liberation doesn't make sense unless it is a direct cause of the liberation of all beings. To set our mind on enlightenment with the aim of liberating limitless sentient beings is the practice of a bodhisattva, because only enlightenment will give us the power, the wisdom, and compassion to liberate all beings.**

- **To set our mind on enlightenment with the aim of liberating limitless sentient beings is the practice of a bodhisattva, because only enlightenment will give us the power, the wisdom, and the compassion to liberate all beings. Nothing else will do.**

- Langri Thangpa's revered *Eight Verses for Training the Mind*:

*Wishing to attain enlightenment  
For the sake of all sentient beings,  
Which excels even the Wish-Fulfilling Jewel,  
May I constantly cherish them all.*

- Our wishing to attain enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings makes our sacred aspiration something far more rare and precious.

- **This means all living beings. We are aspiring to attain awakening in order to help enlighten and liberate all sentient beings because, like us, all beings are trapped in the prison-house of samsara. If we find the way to escape, we cannot just leave by ourselves; we have to open the door and help shepherd everyone else out too. This is the aspiration.**

- **This means that all these sentient beings we have to deal with are not obstacles to our enlightenment, they are wish-fulfilling gems who help us cultivate our loving-kindness, our compassion, our patient endurance, our generosity, and all the qualities of the heart. How could we do this if we didn't have people to practice on?**

- We can sit in solitude and wish, "May all beings be well and happy!" Then somebody comes by and makes a noise, and we shout, "Shhh. Be quiet! I'm doing my loving-kindness meditation!" To help us avoid that kind of hypocrisy, we need other beings.

- **The only way to get enlightened is to make use of everything that happens to us (especially the adversities that befall us) by transforming and taking them on the path. We have to take whatever comes to us as it comes and make use of it. Then we advance.**

## **11. Practicing Kindness and Compassion**

*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.*

- **The reason why we suffer is because we are in the grip of our egoistic delusion, and we imagine that as long as we serve our own interests and can fulfil all our wants and desires, then somehow we will be happy. Our concern is to make ourselves happy. But it doesn't work.**

- The most unhappy, desperate people are those who are only thinking about their own happiness. **We get caught more and more because our desires grow and grow and are endless. We are never going to be satisfied anyway. When one desire is satisfied, another desire takes its place. It is not like we can fulfil our desires and end desire for good. More desires come up, then more and more. It is endless. Our desires spiral around and around**

until we just end up desperate and farther and farther away from liberation.

- **The ego just gets so bloated that in the end we are slaves to our own desires and our own grasping at material satisfaction and power.**

- Our society presents happiness as the result of acquiring more possessions, gaining higher status, staying forever young and beautiful, being desirable to others, and along with it, defending our own territory. **These are just the familiar five poisons: greed, aggression, pride, jealousy, and envy; all of which make up our ignorance or fundamental ego delusion, which Buddha himself said is the cause of suffering.**

- **Yet our modern society projects these emotional afflictions (the very causes of suffering) as the causes of happiness.** Everyone is racing after satisfaction like a mirage in the desert. What looks like water and palm trees is all an illusion, and we die of thirst. It is sad that so many people are desperately chasing after a mirage.

- **“All suffering without exception arises from desiring happiness for oneself.” Yet perfect Buddhahood, which is genuine happiness, is “born from the thought of benefiting others.”** If we think about others and their happiness, and we stop worrying so much about our own happiness, suddenly we find we are happy. **Therefore, “to exchange my happiness for the suffering of others is the practice of a bodhisattva.” = practice of tonglen. Tonglen is the important practice of “giving and receiving.”** In *Eight Verses for Training the Mind*, Langri Thangpa also advocates this practice:

*In brief, directly or indirectly,  
May I give all help and joy to my mothers,  
And may I take all their harm and pain  
Secretly upon myself.*

- The mother was given as the example of the one person that we really wish would be free from suffering and be well and happy. **We can extend that feeling of warmth and caring to all sentient beings because at some point or other we were in that same intimate relationship with them.**

- When Langri Thangpa says “**directly**,” he means that if we are with somebody who needs help, we help them right then and there. We help them ourselves, directly. **“Indirectly” means that if we are not actually in their presence, which is true of most sentient beings, we can nonetheless do meditations focused on wishing them well and happy; meditations on loving-kindness and on compassion.**

- **This more deliberate and focused practice of tonglen has many different applications, but in general it is based on love and compassion. Here is the basic practice: imagine someone who is suffering in any way. They could be actually present, or we can just think about them or use a photo. On the incoming breath, visualise drawing in dark light, rather like a vacuum cleaner sucking up all their suffering, including the causes of their suffering; present and karmic. Visualise drawing in their suffering in the form of black light or smoke and pollution. This goes down into the heart (the centre of the chest, not the physical heart) and forms into a little black pearl that represents the self-cherishing mind; the egotistic mind doesn’t want other people’s suffering however sorry we may feel for them. This is the mind thinking, *Well I’m really sorry you’re sick, but I’m glad it is not me!* Or *This is a very good practice, but I hope it doesn’t really work.* Although we are sorry for the other’s suffering, we don’t want to take it on ourselves.**

- **Visualise this dark light of others’ suffering coming into ourselves and dissolving into that little black pearl of “I-ness” (because the last thing I want is somebody else’s problems), deliberately inviting the suffering with the wish “I will take it in on myself,” which crushes our self-cherishing attitude. Then as the dark light transforms into the pearl, the pearl itself transforms into a diamond and shines brightly, representing our true Buddha-nature, the pristine nature of the mind, which can never be polluted by suffering. It is eternally blissful and healthy. It cannot be anything else. It is the unconditioned and that is never polluted by the conditioned.**

- Rather than just feeling helpless in the face of suffering—apart from anything material we can do to help—inwardly, we can do these spiritual practices. If we can practice sincerely, it really does change the atmosphere. Often people just feel that something has changed. They don't know what's happened, but they feel better inside themselves. **Our thoughts have tremendous power. This is important to remember.**

- **When in a situation where there is a lot of fear and paranoia, where there is anger and hatred, please do not connect with that dark energy. In the face of anger and fear, give out loving-kindness and compassion. We don't need to plug into and increase the paranoia. It doesn't help. Becoming fearful and paranoid is just increasing the problem. What we all really need to do is to replace that negative energy with positive energy. Send out loving-kindness.**

- **Our thoughts have great power, and tonglen is a practice that is motivated totally on compassion. Its genuine result not only benefits the person who is the object of the practice, but it also helps to highlight and reduce our own egotistic self-concern. This quality of selfless love that we develop really opens our heart to the suffering of the world and allows us to breathe it in and give out all the goodness within ourselves to other beings without any reservations. This is our challenge. It is both a foundational challenge and a challenge leading to the ultimate achievement: realisation or awakening.** Dilgo

Khyentse Rinpoche explains:

*Some people may have the idea that these teachings on compassion and exchanging self and others are part of the "gradual path" teachings of the sutras, and are not nearly as effective as the more advanced "direct path" teachings of the Great Perfection or the Great Seal. That is a complete misunderstanding. Only if you have developed the love and compassion of relative Bodhichitta can absolute Bodhichitta (the very essence of the Great Perfection and the Great Seal) ever take birth in your being.*

Below is the tonglen practice in essence. May it be of benefit to you and all other sentient beings.

- Visualise someone who is suffering
- With the in-breath imagine taking in all their suffering and the causes of their suffering in the form of dark light or polluted smoke.
- This dark light descends with the inhalation to the heart chakra at the centre of the chest. It takes shape as a small black pearl (symbolising the self-cherishing mind).
- The black pearl immediately dissolves and is transformed into a brilliant diamond (symbolising our Buddha-nature).
- On the out-breath imagine that this diamond radiates a bright light that goes out and dissolves into the person being visualised, filling every cell of their body and mind with the clear bright light of health and happiness.

a. With an intense feeling of compassion, begin the practice of sending and receiving. Start by focusing on your most hated enemy, or someone who has caused much trouble and difficulty for you. Consider that as your breath goes out, all your happiness (all your vitality, merit, good fortune, health, and enjoyment) is carried out to him on your breath in the form of cool, soothing, luminous white nectar. Make the following prayer: "May this truly go to my enemy and be entirely given to him!" Visualise that he absorbs this white nectar, which provides him with everything that he needs. If his life was to be short, imagine that now it is prolonged. If he needs money, imagine that now he is wealthy; if he is sick, that now he is cured; and if he is unhappy, now imagine him so full of joy that he feels like singing and dancing.

b. As you breathe in, consider that you take into yourself, in the form of a dark mass, all the sickness, obscurations, and mental poisons your enemy may have had, and that he is thereby completely relieved of all his afflictions. Think that his sufferings come to you as easily as mountain mist wafted away by the wind. As you take his suffering into you, you feel great joy and bliss, mingled with the experience of emptiness.

c. Do the same for the infinity of beings you are visualising before you. Send them all of your

happiness and take on their suffering. Repeat this, again and again, until it becomes second nature to you.

- d. You can use this precious, vital practice at any time and in all circumstances, even while engaged in the activities of ordinary life, whether you are sick or well. It can be practiced both in and out of meditation sessions. By constantly practicing the exchange of self and others, you will reach the very core of the practice of compassion and the bodhichitta.
- e. Sometimes, visualise that your heart is a brilliant ball of light. As you breathe out, it radiates rays of white light in all directions, carrying your happiness to all beings. As you breathe in, their suffering, negativity, and afflictions come toward you in the form of dense, black light, which is absorbed into your heart and disappears in its brilliant white light without a trace, relieving all beings of their pain and sorrow.
- f. Sometimes, visualise yourself transformed into a wish-fulfilling jewel, radiant and blue like a sapphire, a little larger than your own body, on top of a victory banner. The jewel effortlessly fulfils the needs and aspirations of whoever addresses a prayer to it.
- g. Sometimes, visualise that your body multiplies into infinite forms of yourself, which go to the hells and throughout the six realms of samsara, immediately taking on all the sufferings of each and every being they encounter, and giving away all your happiness to them.
- h. Sometimes, visualise that your body transforms into clothes for all those who are cold and need clothing, into food for all those who are hungry, and into shelter for all who are homeless.
- i. Sometimes, visualise that you are calling all the spirits who harm beings in various ways. You give them your flesh to eat, your blood to drink, your bones to gnaw at, and your skin to wear. With compassion, consider that bodhichitta takes birth in their minds as they happily revel in all of these offerings.

**Desire is the compulsive attraction and attachment we feel toward a person or an object. Start by considering that if you tame your own desire, you will be able to reach enlightenment in order to best help beings and to establish them all in buddhahood. Then think about someone you do not like. Arousing great compassion for that person, add all his desires to your own, and think that as you take them, he becomes free of them. Progressively take all beings' desires, whether manifest or latent, upon yourself, and as you do so, think that all beings become free from desire and achieve enlightenment. This is the way to meditate on taking negative emotions according to relative truth.**

**To meditate according to absolute truth, arouse in yourself an overwhelming feeling of desire. Fuel it by adding the desires of all beings, to make a great mountain of desire. Then look right into it. You will see that desire is nothing but thoughts; it appears in your mind but does not itself have even the tiniest particle of independent existence. And when you turn the mind inward to look at itself, you become aware that the mind, too, is without any inherent existence in either past, present, or future. The nature of the mind is as insubstantial as the sky.**

**Using these same methods, you can meditate on anger, pride, jealousy, and ignorance, as well as on anything else that obscures the mind.**

As you practice this core practice of the bodhisattva path, you should try to see very vividly all your happiness going to others, and all their sufferings coming to you. Think that it is actually happening. Of all the practices of the bodhisattvas, this is the most essential. There is no obstacle that can disrupt it. Not only will it help others, but it will bring you to enlightenment, too.

The exchange of yourself and others can be approached step by step. The first stage is to see yourself and others as equally important; others want to be happy and want not to suffer, just as you do. So you should wish happiness for others in the same way that you wish it for yourself, and wish that they may avoid suffering, just as you do. The second stage is the exchange of yourself and others; you wish that others may have your happiness and that you may take their suffering. **There is a third stage, which is to cherish others more than yourself, like the great bodhisattvas who, meeting a blind person, would**



**have no hesitation in giving him their own eyes. At that point, all selfish preoccupation has completely disappeared and you are solely concerned with the welfare of others. Keep right on with this practice until it becomes a reality.**

## 12. Embracing Adversity

*If someone driven by great desire*

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

*To dedicate to him [or her] my body, possessions,*

*And past, present, and future merit is the practice of a bodhisattva.*

- When cruel things happen to us, especially when we don't think we deserve them, how should we respond in order to carry this adversity onto the path? **Tibetan Buddhism emphasises taking everything onto the path and not discarding anything, even those things we see as big obstacles and problems, which make us think, *I would be a much better practitioner if only...***

- Rather than discarding the obstacles and problems in our lives, we can make use of them in our practice because the understanding is that if things always go too smoothly, we can be lulled into thinking that we are much more advanced practitioners than we actually are. If everyone is loveable, it is easy to be loving. Of course we want people to be friendly and kind to us, but the problem is that if we are only meeting with kindness and friendliness, it can make us think that we have no problems inside; *I'm always so kind and friendly*. **This can give us a false idea that we have overcome anger, that we have overcome jealousy, that we have overcome feeling hurt, but this might not be true. Often these afflictive emotions are lying latent inside us still, only to come surging right back up when we meet with adverse people or circumstances.**

- Instead of feeling upset either at the person causing this negative reaction, or at ourselves for feeling angry, we think, ***Oh good, this person is so obnoxious. What a wonderful opportunity! Now I can really practice. Thank you so much for showing me how much work I still have to do. You really are my teacher. I didn't notice how sensitive I was about that and you have shown me. I'm really very grateful to you for that.***

- So instead of regarding somebody who is annoying or hurtful as being the enemy, as being somebody antagonistic to us, and then getting all upset and angry, we might recognise that actually this has given us a great opportunity. It helps us to see ourselves much more clearly; what work needs to be done still and at the same time the opportunity to get to work on the remedy.

- Just changing our attitude can change everything. We can regard situations that once seemed so difficult as being a great spiritual opportunity for us to develop and learn. It is like going to a gymnasium and being faced with a machine that is challenging and designed to test our muscles. We don't resent that machine.

- **This practice of lojong is a workout in the spiritual realm that really challenges us, but the resulting inner strength is truly profound.**

- When we come across people who create difficulties for us or who shame us, there is this sense of me that comes across quite strongly: *They are insulting me, humiliating me, cheating me*. That sense of me that is so strong at those times can be helpful, because we see clearly what we are dealing with. If there were no me, there then where would the problem be? There wouldn't be any problem.

- To feel compassion for someone who is harming you is such an effective way of purifying your obscurations, freeing yourself from anger, and developing the positive side of your nature that, in fact, the harm that the person has done to you will carry you along the bodhisattva's path. As it is said, therefore, "I take refuge in whoever harms me, as he is the source of all happiness."

- Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche lucidly points out:

*To practice in such a way also helps to eradicate your belief in a truly existing self. For, finally, your true enemies are not some ruthless people in power, some fierce raiders or merciless competitors who constantly harass you, take everything you have, or threaten you with legal proceedings. Your real enemy is your belief in a self.*

*That idea of an enduring self has kept you wandering helplessly in the lower realms of samsara for countless past lifetimes. It is the very thing that now prevents you from liberating yourself and others from conditioned existence. If you overcome it tomorrow, you will be enlightened tomorrow. But if you never overcome it, you will never gain liberation.*

- When we come into opposition with people who are humiliating or criticising us, especially if their criticisms are not even true, then that sense of defensiveness becomes clear. Since this is what we are dealing with, we feel grateful for their help. **This is exactly the central part of this text; how to take these challenging situations involving the eight worldly concerns (praise and blame, gain and loss, pleasure and pain, and fame and infamy) onto the path and use them for our spiritual progress toward inner transformation.**

- This is the heart of the matter in many of the verses, and each verse is dealing with a slightly different nuance of problems that arise in our daily life.

- Theft. Instead of getting all upset if people steal things from us, we can say, “In this and future lives, I will offer all my body, possessions, and merit.” We don’t even get caught up in creating a nice merit bank account for the future. We offer everything; take it all, you are welcome.

- The idea of cherishing even those who are committing misdeeds is the focus of the fourth verse of Langri Thangpa’s *Eight Verses for Training the Mind*:

*When I see ill-natured people,  
Overwhelmed by wrong deeds and pain,  
May I cherish them as something rare,  
As though I had found a treasure trove.*

- **This is the essence of the lojong approach: to take situations that are normally regarded as obstacles and transform them into spiritual opportunities.** Jetsunma Palmo was complaining to a lama about all the problems I was having, and he said exactly this:

- **“If you say it’s an ‘obstacle,’ it’s an obstacle. If you say it’s an opportunity, it’s an opportunity.” It all depends on how we take it.**

- We need to develop compassion, loving-kindness, patience, and generosity with the behaviour of others; especially those we find ‘unpleasant’. If everyone is pleasant and lovely we learn nothing.

- The carrot is the assurance that with practice we will feel better, more calm and clear, and we will feel more at ease within ourselves and able to help other sentient beings.

- The stick, or whip, is the difficulty in our daily life. These are the things that drive us on to develop a wholly different relationship with adverse circumstances and difficult people, which is what is going to help us to cultivate compassion and patient endurance and kindness and generosity.

- Whenever we see “ill-natured people overwhelmed by their strong misdeeds and sufferings,” we need to “treasure them as something rare.” These are the people who are going to help with our practice. People who are difficult, people who challenge us in any way are the people who are going to help us on the spiritual path. **Rather than avoid them, we are grateful for them, for their support in helping us to cultivate these qualities.**

- How are we going to learn otherwise? **If we don’t exercise we are never going to get strong muscles. Inside we are going to be spiritually flabby. We can manage when everything is nice and pleasant, and the road is smooth and beautifully paved. But the minute it gets a bit bumpy, with ruts and potholes, then we can’t drive. We just stall. This**

**is the most important point.**

- Theft. If people stole, it is because they have negative emotions in their minds or maybe they have a great need. If they took money then we can think, *I hope he really needs that money; maybe he needs to educate or feed his children. Hopefully he doesn't just use it on drink and puts it to some good use. I'm happy for him.*

- *If the money's gone anyway, why worry? Whether or not the money is returned, the point is either we feel upset, angry, and deprived, or we say to ourselves, Oh well, that's cleared up that karma, and I hope that now he's content because he made a really good haul. Good that I made one sentient being happy today!*

- **It is usually not the situation itself that causes the problem. It is our reaction to it that causes the problem. When we create the suffering for ourselves, it is not the perpetrator who is suffering. We have the suffering of loss, and we have the suffering of resentment, so we have double suffering.**

- This doesn't mean we don't lock our doors and take sensible precautions, but **it does mean that when we lose things then we accept we have lost them, but really, so what? When things happen in life that I don't want to happen, I usually say to myself, If this was the worst thing that was happening in the world at this moment, this would be a pure land.**

- **To have a truly good heart is something for which everyone has the capacity. Take all the suffering of the person harming you into your heart, and send him your own happiness, with great compassion. With the same attitude, you can also offer a water tormas, the burned offering of sur, and the visualisation practice of giving away your body as an offering to the Three Jewels, a present to the Dharma protectors, a gift to suffering sentient beings, and repayment of your karmic debts to harmful spirits and obstacle makers.**

- **For all these practices, it is important to have a thorough grounding in the practice of the four boundless attitudes. They are as follows: 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, or nonexistent relationship you may have with them in the narrow perspective of the present.**

- **In the morning, your first thought should be the commitment to do whatever you can during the day to help others and bring all beings to ultimate happiness. In the evening, dedicate to all beings the merit that you have gathered during the day. If anyone has tried to harm you, make the wish that they be free from all animosity and vindictive feelings, and that all their positive aspirations may be fulfilled.**

- **To bring about a true change in your attitudes is hard at first. But if you understand the meaning behind this mind training, and keep on trying to apply it, you will find that it helps you in every difficult situation, just as a well-designed vehicle can travel any distance quickly, and with ease.**

## **13. Bringing Suffering onto 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.*

- Tibet is a good example. So many great lamas and others were imprisoned and cruelly treated, interrogated, and tortured for twenty to twenty-five years. They hadn't done anything wrong as far as this lifetime was concerned. Many of them were great masters. They probably recited to themselves this exact text, which they would have learned when they were young monks, because when they were released after years of imprisonment in labor camps, instead

of being bitter and angry and feeling they had just wasted their lives, they came out radiant—thin but shining, with their eyes just glowing.

- As is well known, **His Holiness the Dalai Lama asked one of these political prisoners what had been his greatest fear, and he former prisoner said, “My greatest fear was losing compassion for my tormentors.” Clearly he didn’t lose compassion, because he just radiated that love.** We also hear these real practitioners say how grateful they were for undergoing these hardships. Otherwise all of this stuff is just theory, precepts that we can learn by heart. But **when we are faced with someone whose only thought is to harm us (even though we have never done anything to hurt them in this lifetime) how are we going to respond? Well, either we can react with anger, fear, hatred, and fantasies of retaliation, or we can think, *This poor person is acting like this because of their own delusions. How sad! I take all their negativity onto myself, and I give them all of my virtue and merits. May they have great happiness, may they find peace!***

- **Either we go under (and end up bitter, revengeful, and full of self-pity) or we surmount and take everything that happens to us as a teaching on the path.**

- Although few of us are going to be imprisoned, beaten, and interrogated, **there are always situations happening in life, such as people who don’t act the way they should for no ostensible reason. Why should they be so nasty? How do we act or react to them? Do we take it as an opportunity for enhancing our practice and benefiting them through our thoughts of loving-kindness; or not? Do we act like ordinary people who have never heard a word of Dharma?** Sometimes I remind our nuns that it is not having a shaved head and wearing robes that make us a **Dharma practitioner; it is how we respond to everyday circumstances. If someone does something we don’t want them to or speaks to us rudely or criticises us, how do we respond?**

- When an Australian friend of ours drives on Indian roads, which are a great challenge (especially when someone cuts you off on a blind curve or stops dead with no indication), she comes out with quite ripe language to express her feelings and then immediately adds, **“And may you be well and happy!” So as long as we remember that bit...**

- **In the case where we haven’t done anything wrong and others are being mean, the other point to consider is that we ourselves created the causes from past lives. Nothing just happens without a cause either in this life or in some past life; these seeds were planted and they are now coming up.**

- **If we respond with anger, indignation, or fear, we are just creating more negative karma, whereas if we respond with patience and love and understanding then that karma becomes purified completely.**

- **If we are faced with someone who is especially difficult, we can try to just put ourselves in their shoes. How would we like to have their mind? What would it be like? Then we feel natural compassion because people don’t harm others unless they themselves are hurting inside. A person who is completely happy and at peace with themselves doesn’t need to hurt others.**

- **In the end, it all comes back to our own inner response; not what happens to us but how we deal with what happens to us, skilfully or unskilfully**

- **Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche taught that “in return for harm, a bodhisattva tries to give help and benefit.”**

## 14. Not Retaliating When We Are Harmed

*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.*

- Now it is common that if someone says something unkind about us then we will want to say

something nasty about them. Then they say something even meaner, and we respond predictably and nothing is resolved. This just creates a lot of bad feelings, anger, and aggression, and obviously this is not the way to behave.

- **If someone says something critical about us, then the first thing to consider is whether or not it is true. Are they pointing out some hidden fault that we hadn't noticed? If so, we can be grateful. Or, if it is totally untrue, so what?**

- **Far from retaliating, we are advised, out of kindness, to extol that person's qualities.**

- **The antidote to criticism is praise.** So when someone says something unkind about us, we can say everything we can think of that is truly good about that person. We are not just pretending and over-inflating so that everyone knows really we are just gritting our teeth. But genuinely, out of loving-kindness, from our good heart, we can appreciate that person's good qualities. Then instead of ending up in a battle, we can end the conflict by neutralising it. If we have drunk poison, we don't administer another poison; we use an antidote. The antidote to criticism is praise; responding with praise might also undermine their negativity because they are not expecting us to turn around and say nice things about them. It may well be that when they hear these good sounds, they will start to change their opinion also.

- Before speaking nicely about that person we can cultivate our good thoughts about them, speaking from a mind of loving-kindness. We can say to ourselves, *Although they might be difficult, from my side I will not retaliate, I will take that challenge onto the path. I will honestly aim to think good things about that person since we all have good qualities as well as difficult ones, and I will think and act as a genuine Dharma person should.*

- Everything comes from cultivating the right attitude in the first place. We are not just pretending to be bodhisattvas. **The essence of our practice is to learn how to overcome our self-cherishing attitude. Therefore, in all these unpleasant situations what is hurt? It is that sense of I have been harmed. I have been humiliated. I want to have a good reputation. I want people to say nice things about me, so then I am happy. But when somebody says mean things about me, or doesn't do what I want them to do, this creates problems for me. It is all about me.**

- **Genuine bodhisattvas act spontaneously, without this sense of self and other. All genuine spiritual traditions try to deal with the "little self" so that it can dissolve and open up into something so much more.** In Buddhism there are many ways offered for doing this (meditations on emptiness, meditations on the nature of mind) **all of it helps us to see through the delusion of this seemingly solid, eternal, and unchanging me at the centre: to dissolve into pure awareness so much more vast and spacious.**

- **If someone defames and disgraces you, that is simply the result of having criticised and dishonoured others in the past, especially bodhisattvas. Instead of feeling angry with such people, you should feel grateful to them for giving you the opportunity to purify your past misdeeds. In all circumstances, it is important to act in accordance with the teachings—but especially at such moments. What is the point of having received teachings if you do not apply them? Unfavourable circumstances are the best opportunity you will have to put the teachings into practice.**

- Lojong<sup>3</sup> training does this from the point of view of everyday thoughts and emotions, because we can talk about emptiness, Buddha-nature, and the nature of mind, but if someone says something nasty to us, and we growl, “Well it is all empty...yeah, but you said...” we discover that we haven’t yet integrated those ideas into practical application in our lives.

- **Buddhism teaches us to practice on all levels, and this is the level that deals with everyday life, relationships, and challenging things that come up. How do we respond? Do we respond genuinely as someone sincerely wishes to integrate the Dharma into our lives or just like an ordinary person?**

- **It is when we deal with everyday occurrences that we can see how we’re responding, not when we go to Dharma centres and chant beautifully. In everyday life, when someone does something that we don’t like and hurts us, how do we react? If we do become angry, upset, and humiliated, we ought not to be angry with ourselves because we are angry since that creates a spiral. Instead we should reflect on the fact that this shows us how much work we still have to do. Good, now we know; we can cultivate humility and try again. Perhaps later we can rerun that scene and try to imagine a different and more positive response. As we continue to do this, gradually new patterns of behaviour grow.**

- **This doesn’t happen overnight, but gradually we can change until to our own surprise we find that even when someone does something really mean, we actually don’t care.**

- **“So what? May you be well and happy!”**

- The fifth verse of Langri Thangpa’s *Eight Verses for Training the Mind*:

*When someone out of envy does me wrong*

*By insulting me and the like,*

*May I accept defeat*

*And offer the victory to them.*

- **When people say bad things about us; they are nasty, and use harsh language and criticise us, what are we supposed to do? Normally, when we are in opposition to others, our main objective is to crush them and be victorious. Here, we are turning the whole situation around and thinking, “If they want to be victorious, let them win. May they be happy. I will take the defeat. It doesn’t harm me. If they want it, they can have it.”**

<sup>3</sup> **Lojong** is a Tibetan Buddhist practice that involves training the mind to develop compassion, wisdom, and the ability to transform adverse situations into opportunities for spiritual growth. "Lojong" translates to "mind training" or "attitude training." It consists of a series of teachings and meditation practices designed to help practitioners cultivate positive mental states and overcome negative ones. Overall, lojong is a powerful tool for personal transformation, offering a structured approach to developing the qualities of a bodhisattva.

#### **Core Aspects of Lojong:**

1. **The Seven Points of Mind Training:** Lojong is often associated with a set of instructions known as "The Seven Points of Mind Training," which were compiled by the Tibetan teacher Geshe Chekawa in the 12th century. These points consist of 59 slogans or aphorisms that guide practitioners in developing a compassionate and wise approach to life. The slogans cover a wide range of topics, from the cultivation of bodhicitta to the transformation of suffering into spiritual growth.
2. **Tonglen Practice:** One of the most well-known practices within lojong is **Tonglen**, which means "giving and taking." In Tonglen, practitioners visualise taking in the suffering of others with each in-breath and sending out love, compassion, and healing with each out-breath. This practice is designed to diminish self-centredness and increase empathy and compassion for others.
3. **Transforming Adversity:** A central theme in lojong is the idea of transforming adversity into the path of enlightenment. Rather than avoiding difficulties, practitioners are encouraged to view challenges and obstacles as opportunities to practice patience, compassion, and wisdom. This approach helps to weaken the ego's grasp and allows for a deeper understanding of the nature of suffering.
4. **Overcoming Self-Cherishing:** Lojong teachings emphasise overcoming the tendency to prioritise one's own happiness and well-being over that of others. By recognising the harmful effects of self-cherishing, practitioners work to develop an attitude of selflessness and genuine concern for the welfare of all beings.
5. **Cultivating Bodhicitta:** The ultimate goal of lojong is to cultivate bodhicitta, the awakened mind that seeks enlightenment for the sake of all beings. This involves developing both relative bodhicitta (compassion for all sentient beings) and absolute bodhicitta (realisation of the ultimate nature of reality).

#### **Practical Application:**

Lojong is not just theoretical but deeply practical. Practitioners are encouraged to apply the teachings in everyday life, using the slogans and principles as reminders to stay mindful, compassionate, and aware in all situations. The practice of lojong helps individuals to remain grounded, reduce negative emotions like anger and attachment, and foster a sense of peace and equanimity, in the face of life's challenges.

- **“May I take defeat on myself and offer the victory to others.”**
- We ourselves determine what it means to win or lose. If we can just cheerfully hand over the victory to others, then we have also won.
- Patient endurance itself is a strength; not a weakness. Getting upset and angry and wanting to fight back is not strong. Having the ability to stand back and look at the situation and decide from an inner poise the most skilful way to act; that is strength. The most skilful way is just to say, “All right, you win,” and walk away. Lay down the burden of having to be right. There is no problem then. They are happy, you are happy.
- Whether you have a good reputation or a bad one, it has no objective reality at all. It is not worth caring about. The great teachers of the past never bothered about such things. They always answered slander and disparagement with kindness, and patience.
- Some people spend all their energy, and even risk their lives, to achieve fame. Fame and notoriety are both no more than an empty echo. Your reputation is an alluring mirage that can easily lead you astray. Discard it without a second thought, like the snot you blow from your nose.

## 15. Respecting Even Our Enemies

*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 bodhisattva.*

- Humiliation is the emotion we feel when someone says something nasty or critical to us in private and it is much worse if they expose our faults on the internet and even announces them to a crowd of people. It is a sense of incredible humiliation that gives rise to tremendous anger and a desire to hit back.
- Imagine if, during a question-and-answer session following some Dharma teaching, someone stands up and insults all my views with critical language and exposes my hidden faults to everyone present. What do I do? Well I can defend myself: “Who are you to tell me anyway? How dare you challenge my authority?” or, as **Thogme Sangpo sagely recommends, I can bow respectfully and regard the critic as a spiritual friend.**
- Why? Because anyone who reveals to us our hidden faults is a great friend. If they do that with insulting language in a large gathering, they are even more our friend because it gives the ego the opportunity to get up on its high horse and go at that person with a raised sword for daring to reveal to everybody my true nature **(well, my untrue nature) and my hidden faults. Because that is the ultimate humiliation and reveals the ego in all its radiant glory. Then it is so clear and naked. Ego exposed!”**
- If somebody does accuse us, whether it is true or not, there is the sense of nakedness. The lamas say that sometimes through shock we can get a clear view of the nature of the mind because conceptual thinking drops away in that moment. We certainly get a few view of ego.
- If anybody did get up and insult us and expose our hidden faults whether we actually have them or not, then from our heart we should be grateful. It is important to know where our faults are. We see some, but there are others we just don’t see and until something happens to bring them up, we don’t even know they are there.
- Instead of being defensive and upset, we should be grateful and, as it says, take our accusers as a spiritual friend. **Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche reminds us that, if we want to be a genuine follower of the Buddha, we should never retaliate when we are harmed.**
- **The four principles of positive training**, which are as follows:
  - (1) If someone abuses you, do not abuse him or her in return;*
  - (2) if someone gets angry with you, do not get angry with him or her in return;*
  - (3) if someone*

*exposes your hidden faults, do not expose his or hers in return; and (4) if someone strikes you, do not strike them back.*

- If someone criticises you, picking on your most sensitive points, or angrily insults you with the most offensive language, do not return like for like, no matter how difficult it is to bear. Practice patience, and never give way to anger. Take it positively, and use it as a chance to let go of your own pride. Practice generosity and compassion by giving the victory to others and being happy to lose. Allowing others to win is a characteristic of all Buddhist paths. In fact, what is there to be won or lost? From an absolute viewpoint, there is not the slightest difference between winning and losing.

- There should be no insult or humiliation that is too great for you to bear. If you were ever to feel it was justifiable to respond vindictively, the exchange of bitter words and recriminations that ensue would be bound to inflame and escalate the anger on both sides. This is how people start to fight and kill each other. Murders and wars all begin with just one angry thought. As Shantideva says,

*No evil is there similar to anger,*

*No austerity to be compared with patience.*

- Never give way to anger, therefore. Be patient; and, moreover, be grateful to someone who humiliates you, as they are giving you a precious opportunity to strengthen your understanding and practice of bodhichitta. The great Jigme Lingpa said:

*Ill treatment by opponents*

*Is a catalyst for your meditation;*

*Insulting reproaches you don't deserve*

*Spur your practice onward;*

*Those who do you harm are teachers*

*Challenging your attachment and aversion—*

*How could you ever repay their kindness?*

- Indeed, you are unlikely to make much spiritual progress if you lack the courage to face your own hidden faults. Any person or situation that helps you to see those faults, however uncomfortable and humiliating it may be, is doing you a great service.

- 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.

## 16. Showing Kindness When We Are Wronged

*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.*

- One of the most painful things to accept is when we have helped and done favours for other people, and they turn around and treat us like an enemy.

- For instance, consider parents who have done so much for their child (lovingly raised them and given them an education) and then the child reaches teenage years and turns against the parents, blaming all their problems on the parents and being totally ungrateful.

- If you do something good for others, it is a mistake to expect anything in return, or to hope that people will admire you for being a bodhisattva. All such attitudes are a long way from the true motivation of bodhichitta. Not only should you expect nothing in return; you should not be disturbed in the slightest when people respond ungratefully. Someone for whom you have risked your very life may return your kindness with resentment, hatred, or harm. But just love him all the more.

- Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche suggests:



*To meet someone who really hurts you is to meet a rare and precious treasure. Hold that person in high esteem, and make full use of the opportunity to eradicate your defects and make progress on the path. If you cannot yet feel love and compassion for those who treat you badly, it is a sign that your mind has not been fully transformed and that you need to keep working on it with increased application.*

- 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. But if someone who has done him harm later changes his behaviour, is set on the path, and achieves liberation, that is something that will make a bodhisattva rejoice wholeheartedly and be totally satisfied.

- If people treat us badly even though we have been kind to them, in a way it is because they are sick. A person who is inwardly balanced and healthy would not act like that.

- Obviously they have a lot of problems inside themselves and that's how they are reacting. Instead of getting upset and angry, we can treat them like a mother treats a sick child, giving them even more sympathy and understanding.

- The following verse from *Eight Verses for Training the Mind* suggests that **even if people who we have treated well treat us badly, our compassion should be no weaker than the compassion we feel for a person we love who needs our help:**

*Even if someone whom I have helped  
And in whom I have placed my hopes  
Does great wrong by harming me,  
May I see them as an excellent spiritual friend.*

- Even if somebody whom we trust and in the past we have helped turns against us and tries to harm us through their speech or their actions, instead of feeling upset and self-pitying or wanting to get our own revenge, we can see them as our most precious spiritual friend.

- Why? Because they are teaching us the most difficult of qualities: patient endurance or forbearance, which is one of the six paramitas or perfections of virtues needed on the bodhisattva path toward awakening, or Buddhahood.

- We absolutely have to practice tolerance or patient endurance, and we cannot do that unless somebody or something really upsets us.

- When somebody we care for turns around and harms us, and this makes us feel hurt and angry, this gives us an excellent opportunity. We think - *Oh, thank you, you're so kind. You have acted despicably, but I'm so grateful! Without you, how could I practice this most precious quality? So really, you are like my teacher. You are mirroring to me my own shortcomings because if you say something I don't like, I get all upset and angry. The problem is not you. Here, the problem is me. I'm going to learn how to cultivate loving-kindness, compassion, and patience in the face of your abuse and your hurtful actions.*

- *"Without you, how would I have learned? You were so helpful for my practice of the path." In order to take the most difficult circumstances onto the path and transform them, we need conditions in which to practice.*

- All of these verses are about not getting upset, not making a double wound. To harbour resentment in our hearts and regurgitate it over and over again, what does it do? It doesn't make us happy, it doesn't help or harm the other person, and it creates negative karma for us. **We do to ourselves what only our worst enemies would wish for us. It is better to practice patience and tolerance and move on.**

## 17. Respecting Those Who Disrespect Us

*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.*

- Again, this is dealing with the ego and feeling humiliated. If ordinary people, like our friends or those who serve or work for us in some way (employees, taxi drivers, garbage collectors, waiters, and so on) create problems for us and say bad things about us, then instead of trying to put them down in return, we raise them up. Why? Because they are showing us our own pride, arrogance, and narrow-mindedness and how much we resent other people treating us in a way that we don't want to be treated.

- Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche put it this way:

*See and respect such people as kind teachers showing you the path to liberation. Pray that you may be able to do as much good as possible for them. Whatever happens, do not wish for a moment to take your revenge. The capacity to patiently bear scorn and injury from those who lack your education, strength, and skill is particularly admirable. To remain humble while patiently bearing insults is a very effective way of countering your ingrained tendency to be interested only in your own happiness and pleasure.*

- Often we have an attitude that makes us want people to admire us and treat us nicely. When people treat us well, we are all smiles and friendly. However, when people criticise us or don't give us the respect we think we deserve, then we get upset and think it is their fault. But again, rather than being upset and miserable, we can feel gratitude and consider how lucky we are because without adversaries how could we travel on the bodhisattva path?

- We can think, *Thank you. Obviously my good karma brought you along so I can get better and better. This is wonderful! I am so grateful to you for being so difficult, but at the same time I have compassion because your attitude is so horrible and I really hope that from now on you will be well and happy!*—and mean it.

- Someone with your own ability or status, or an inferior without any good qualities, might (despite being treated politely and considerately by you) criticise you contemptuously out of pure conceit and arrogance, and try to humiliate you in various ways. When such things happen, do not be angry or upset, or feel badly treated.

- Never be proud, but instead take the most humble position and regard everyone as being above you, as though you were carrying them on your head. It is said, "Carrying all beings above one's head is the torch and banner of the bodhisattvas." It is also helpful to maintain a sense of humour, as it greatly diffuses anger and humiliation. If we can see the funny side of things then we can laugh. The ego hates to be laughed at; it takes itself very seriously, so it is important to practice not taking ourselves so seriously whenever the opportunity arises.

- As an antidote, Langri Thangpa suggests in *Eight Verses for Training the Mind* that we adopt this approach:

*Whenever I am in the company of others,  
May I regard myself as inferior to all (as the lowest; the least important),  
And from the depths of my heart  
Cherish others as supreme (higher than myself).*

- Because Westerners always appear like we know it all, and we go around the world telling everybody else how they should do things. We present a façade of total confidence and belief in ourselves. It is only when we take off that mask that we find underneath there is low self-esteem, inner criticism, a sense of inner failure, and so forth that is masked by this persona of total confidence.

- **The four Brahma-viharas (four immeasurable qualities) of loving-kindness, compassion, joy, and equanimity are traditionally practiced by sending these positive thoughts ①first to ourselves, ②then to those we feel affection for, ③those we feel neutral about, ④those we have problems with, and ⑤ finally to all living beings in general.**

- Westerners have such low self-esteem that cannot deal with loving-kindness to themselves and this needs to be reversed. “Start with somebody you love. Start with your partner, your children, your parents, or your pet dog or cat, whoever you love. Just give them loving-kindness. Just imagine how wonderful it would be if they were happy and free from suffering. Then, when you feel that warm glow inside, turn it on yourself.”

- **In Buddhism, pride means thinking we are superior to other people, but it also means thinking we are inferior to other people.** If I think, *Oh, I'm the most stupid person here, I'm hopeless, I can't do anything. All these people, they're so wonderful. When they're in retreat, they're deep in the first dhyanana or at least samadhi. I'm the only one that's been caught up in all the wandering thoughts.*

- **Thinking “I'm the most stupid here, is not humility. That is just the inverse of ego clinging, the dualistic mind beating itself up. The ego is happy to be miserable because if we are miserable, especially full of self-pity about how awful and hopeless and stupid we are, what are we thinking about? Me, me, me. Poor me! Oh, stupid me! Hopeless me! Me.**

**All about me.**

- **Better translated as “Whenever I'm in the company of others, may I consider myself least important,” more accurately conveys the point.**

- **When we meet with other people, we consider them more important and more interesting. Our attention should be on the other people, making them happy. Our attention should not be on what they are thinking about us. We shouldn't be thinking, *Do they like me? Don't they like me? Do I give a good impression? Do they think I'm stupid? Blah, blah, blah.* If we are thinking like that, we are trapped in our ego, and we cannot see or deeply listen to the other person because we are too busy talking to ourselves about ourselves.**

- **The point about our attitude when we meet with others is that the other person, whoever it is, at that moment is the most important person in the world because that is the person we are with. When we have that attitude, we can get out of the way and truly see the other person. We hear them.**

- **What Langri Thangpa is saying: in the company of others, just get out of the way. That person is the most important person at that moment because they are who we are with right now.**

- The Buddha said, **“To each one, her own self is most dear.”** In other words, each individual is the centre of their own universe until they awaken. One way to help dissolve that self-absorption, that total preoccupation with ourselves, is to cherish others as most dear, most important; because, just like us, they would rather be happy than miserable.

- **May all beings be well and happy. May all beings be free from suffering.**

- This is a practical teaching on how to make use of the difficulties in life without getting upset, without getting uptight or reactive, and also without getting tense toward ourselves. Because if we are really giving out loving-kindness and compassion, these are warming emotions that also heal our own heart. While we are giving loving-kindness and compassion to others we are also giving loving-kindness to ourselves. We are sentient beings, and we are the sentient being that we are most responsible for, so we definitely need to send lots of loving-kindness and compassion to ourselves, too. In fact, if we genuinely had loving-kindness and compassion toward ourselves, we would naturally have it toward others; it would just naturally overflow.

- **The reason we get upset and angry quickly is because inside we do not feel at peace with ourselves and, ironically, since we are always criticising ourselves, we get defensive when others criticise us too.**

- **Inside ourselves we should feel relaxed and peaceful with a sense of humour, more at**

home with ourselves, so that whatever happens on the outside will not be so difficult to handle; we can deal with it.

• With our minds, when these situations come up, in our mind we should think, *Now pause a minute; this is my opportunity to practice.* That's why this is called *mind training*. Lojong. We are training so that we don't respond unskillfully with negative reactions but instead with understanding and compassion.

## 18. Being Compassionate When Things Are Difficult

*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.*

• This verse also emphasises the practice of tonglen toward someone who is suffering or who is ill or who has any problems. We visualise taking on their suffering.

• We can also practice for ourselves, if we are suffering or ill or maligned or when something difficult is happening to us or if we are completely destitute, instead of just despairing, we can practice tonglen and think of all those beings in the world who are suffering what we are experiencing right now. We can say, **“May all their suffering ripen in me and may they be free of their suffering. May all my inherent good qualities, the endless potential of my Buddha-nature, along with whatever good karma I may have, may all of that be given to them. May they be free of suffering, may all their suffering ripen upon me.”**

• In that way, surprisingly enough, we do not end up feeling totally despairing and suicidal. Actually, **what happens is that we feel a kind of inner empowerment and a meaning and purpose to our suffering. We are not just thinking poor me.**

• As Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche suggests:

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

• With this attitude to suffering, we find ourselves willing to be the surrogate for all the other beings in the world. We can think, *If only their suffering could come to me, how happy I would be.* When we are caught in suffering, we can open our hearts away from our own personal woe to recognise the universality of this particular anguish.

• We can also practice if we lose a loved one, by just thinking, *May the sorrow of all those in the world who have experienced the loss of a husband or a child or a parent, may all that pain come onto me. I will take their suffering. May they be free of suffering.* This may be a difficult practice, but it opens the heart when we recognise that this is a universal problem.

• This is helpful because it prevents us from getting so caught up in our own misery that we can't admit anyone else's: *I don't care about other people's suffering, it is my suffering that counts.*

• This is also a skilful way of taking suffering onto the path. We can use this practice as a way of connecting with other beings who share this problem. We are not the only one, so there arises the sincere aspiration born of compassion, *Wouldn't it be wonderful if I could take on all their suffering and they would be free from that. I am happy to suffer as much as possible if others could just be free.* Then that suffering is not felt as suffering.

• Mental pain can be avoided. One way to do this is to open up our hearts to the pain of others instead of allowing our pain to make us more introverted, more self-pitying. This again is an important lojong practice; taking suffering on the path and using it to develop compassion and empathy. Usually when we suffer we are caught in our own dungeon of

**misery. This practice opens the doors & windows, allowing us to reach beyond ourselves.**

## 19. Recognising What Is Truly Valuable

*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.*

- Some people are good at dealing with misfortune and taking difficulties on the path, but as soon as things start to go well, they fall apart spiritually. Others can practice nicely when things go well, but when something goes wrong, they don't know how to deal with it skilfully. Usually we are either one or the other extreme, and **we need to bring balance into our lives, whether everything is going really well or problems and obstacles appear to challenge us. Either way, without hope or fear, we are learning to take whatever comes and use it as our path.**

- **Samsara is often described as an ocean, and oceans have big waves: sometimes we are up and sometimes we are down. We need to develop inner equanimity so that whatever happens we can maintain that inner stillness and be able to cope with situations in a skilful manner without getting carried away by grief, hostility or exaltation.**

- **Thogme Sangpo is saying that even if things go well, if we are famous and wealthy and everybody loves us, we should not grasp at that because we cannot take it with us. No matter how rich we are, how many friends we have, how large our family is, or how many thousands of devotees surround us, at the time of death we go empty-handed and alone.**

- Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche makes this clear:

*A Bodhisattva sees that wealth, beauty, influence, prosperity, family lineage (all the ordinary concerns of this life) are as fleeting as a flash of lightning, as ephemeral as a dew drop, as hollow as a bubble, as evanescent as the skin of a snake. He [or she] is never conceited or proud, no matter what worldly achievements and privileges may come to him [or her].*

- **If we attach our sense of self and happiness purely to external values and what other people are saying about us, then we will always be insecure. It is the nature of everything to change** and as Thogme Sangpo says, **“The wealth and glory of this world are without essence.”** **People can say the most fantastic things about us, whether true or untrue, and actually it doesn't alter anything; it doesn't change who we are or even make us happier.** People can own a million corporate jets, but does that make them happier? It does not. It does not make them feel any better inside. Many wealthy and famous people are under a lot of pressure to maintain that glossy outer image. They are terrified that they may lose their glory and that someone will come up and be more popular. Imagine the tremendous tension pop stars and movie stars are always under. Once you get to the pinnacle, how are you going to maintain it? You are not.

- **If our sense of well-being and happiness depends on other people's opinions and our external possessions, that's sad, because that's not who we are at all.**

- Just as people saying bad things about us, whether right or wrong, should not really affect us, likewise people's praise and unrealistic projections should not change who we are. **If we are dependent on the good opinions of others, then we will suffer because they are ephemeral like bubbles.**

- **It is important to take both pain and difficulties on the path as well as bring good situations. We bring not just pain on the path but also pleasure; not just loss but also gain; not just blame, but also praise; and not just insignificance but also fame. All of it has to be taken and made use of on the path.**

- Usually we imagine that our problems would be solved if only we could avoid the unpleasant and gain only the pleasurable. However, these are two sides of the same coin. If we cling to one and try to avoid the other, then we are trapped in a mundane state of being that is insecure,

because we are never going to get all the things we want and avoid all the things we don't want.

- The point is to remain open to whatever comes, to whichever side of the coin turns up. To just stay balanced like a boat on the waves. The waves go up and the waves go down, but the boat just glides through.

- The princess wisely said, **“You didn't ask for this, you didn't seek it, but because of your good karma it has come to you. It is not going to last for long, and maybe afterward you will be poor and live in difficult conditions. When things go well, be happy, and when things are difficult, be happy also. Just keep an even mind.”**

- Perversely, we can sometimes cling to poverty as much as we cling to wealth. I know some people who are quite ascetic in their practice, and if they are taken to a nice restaurant, they feel uncomfortable. They are only happy hanging out in the local cheap Indian *dhabas*. The point is, if we are in a nice restaurant, that's great; if we are in a scruffy old *dhaba*, that's nice too; who cares?

- **Whatever comes, just take it and enjoy, don't cling to it. Practicing equanimity of mind toward whatever comes is best. When things ride smoothly that's nice, and when the going gets bumpy that's okay too.**

## 20. Giving Peace a Chance

*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.*

- **If we get angry at people who are difficult for us and retaliate, it is like pouring oil on the fire; it just burns brighter and brighter. As Buddha said, hatred never ceases through hatred; hatred ceases through non-hatred or love. The more we retaliate, the more the problems continue to increase, as we see in world politics.**

- **Aggression will persist until we agree to let go of our differences.**

- If we are endlessly in conflict with each other, fuelled by jealousy, greed, and aggression, then even though it could be a pure land, it remains samsara. The planet is not samsara. It is the minds of the beings that inhabit the planet that creates samsara; or Nirvana.

- If we entered Nirvana, we wouldn't suddenly disappear! We would still be living on this same planet, but everything would be transformed because the mind transformed. **It all depends on the mind. Everything depends on the mind.** If we don't deal with our own mental defilements, then nothing will ever evolve on this planet. Even though people are becoming more aware of how we are destroying our only home, the devastation continues unchanged regardless of how many laws are passed or how many environmental groups are formed.

- **All of this originates from the uncontrolled mind, raging with greed, anger and envy and confusion.** So many mental negativities! Then there is the human arrogance that thinks we can do whatever we want to other species, or that we belong to a superior race, which permits us to suppress others and seize their assets to use for ourselves.

- **The arrogance and ignorance of believing our own ideas are the truth: What I think must be right, because that is what I think.**

- When Thogme Sangpo says, **“If one does not conquer one's own hatred, the more one fights outer enemies, the more they will increase,”** he is speaking about anger.

- **When there is anger inside our heart, we fight with one person, then another, and then we get irritated and quarrel with someone else. It goes on in an endless cycle. We can always find something to complain about, and it is always somebody else's fault. All of us know people with angry minds who regard themselves as blameless and other people as difficult and problematic. They don't see that on one or two occasions that might be true, yet a history of conflictive relationships indicates that the problem is not out there, but within themselves. The more one fights outer enemies, the more they will increase.**

- As Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche explains:

*Once you overcome the hatred within your own mind, you will discover that in the world outside there is no longer any such thing as even a single enemy. But if you keep giving free rein to your feelings of hatred and try to overcome your outer adversaries, you will find that however many of them you manage to defeat there will always be more to take their place. Even if you could subjugate all the beings in the universe, your anger would only grow stronger. You will never be able to deal with it properly by indulging it. Hatred itself is the true enemy, and cannot be allowed to exist. **The way to master hatred is to meditate one-pointedly on patience and loving-kindness.** Once loving-kindness and compassion take root in your being, there can be no outer adversaries.*

- To counter this endless cycle of hatred that creates more and more enemies, Thogme Sangpo suggests we recruit loving-kindness and compassion:

*Therefore, with the armies of loving-kindness and compassion,  
To tame one's own mind is the practice of a bodhisattva.*

- **To assemble these armies of loving-kindness and compassion we start by befriending ourselves. As the Buddha recommended, loving-kindness and compassion should first be sent to ourselves. A lot of our anger that is directed toward others stems from our initial anger toward ourselves. First we have to cultivate peace within ourselves, forgive ourselves, and appreciate that despite all our faults and problems, essentially we are good. We do have Buddha-nature, so there is definite hope that we can improve, and we must be friends with ourselves.**

- If we want to tame a wild horse, first we have to befriend that horse. Certainly we can beat it into submission and then the horse, though he hates us, will obey. But who wants a broken-down hack for a mind? A more skilful way is to befriend the wild horse, allow it to gradually calm down and recognise that it is not going to be hurt, that actually this could be a worthwhile and fun relationship. Then gradually the horse begins to quiet and slowly become more amenable. Once the horse begins to trust, then we can start to train. **Ditto for the mind. Tame first, then train.**

- **All this emphasis on how to deal with others is based on the idea that we have pacified and befriended our own mind, which then trusts that this is a good path that will benefit us all. Although Buddhism is concerned with overcoming the ego and seeing through the delusion of the ego, we can't overcome the ego by beating it to death. It simply doesn't work. We dissolve the ego by seeing through it, and this comes about by cultivating an introspective practice.**

- In order to cultivate an introspective practice, we first have to tame the mind. That means the mind has to become trusting and *want* to cooperate. In other words, right at the beginning the ego needs to be willing to cooperate. Our problem is often that our aspirations go one way, but our selfish desires and ego go another way.

- Actually when the ego becomes more tamed and begins to cooperate, gaining enthusiasm for the path, this is an enormous step forward. Which is why **the Buddha said that first we give loving-kindness and compassion to ourselves.** First we calm our minds, and the ego begins to trust the path, even though this path is ultimately the death of the ego. Ironically the ego will help toward its own annihilation because something inside us knows that this will open into something so much greater than the mere ego can imagine.

- **If we are fighting the ego all the time, we are going to have endless problems. We need to get all levels of our mind cooperating willingly. This is important. Sometimes Buddhism seems heavy into ego bashing, but on our relative, conceptual level where we are starting to practice, we have to take *everything* we've got onto the path. And that includes our sense of self, which will remain with us anyway until we reach the eighth *bhumi*, or spiritual level. These texts dealing with the transformation of the negative states into positive are not talking about the ultimate nature of the mind, which is unchanging. Our pure awareness is naturally compassionate and wise and doesn't have to be transformed. What Thogme Sangpo is discussing is the egotistic, relative level of mind, with which we**

all mostly live unless we are really high-level bodhisattvas.

- This teaching is how to accept who we are right now and instead of making it into an obstacle, we recognise this as our big opportunity to advance on the path. If we have to start with our sense of self then at least let us try to be a happy, cooperative, kind, sensitive, compassionate being who can travel the path to the point where the whole illusion will dissolve into something so much vaster. While it is important to recognise this is about the conventional or relative level, the relative level is where we are right now.

- Since we can't just say about our sense of self, our sense of I, *Okay, I don't believe in you! It says in this book that ego is all delusion and it is emptiness anyway, so from now on I'm just going to be empty awareness.* If we could do that it would be lovely, but it just doesn't work.

- **We have to start from where we are and with what we've got and use that as the path, and then there's no problem.**

- Once we recognise the nature of the mind, then we can practice how to relax in that natural awareness, but until we are high-level bodhisattvas, we are still mainly dealing with the relative level of our mind. Things are happening all the time, and we have to know how to develop skilfulness to take everything onto the path. It makes sense to befriend the ego in a nice way to render it cooperative. Then our thinking is transformed from a greedy and obsessive self-grasping into an open spacious consciousness that places others before itself. Others' happiness is so much more important than our own since we are just one among all the other people. **We can rejoice in the happiness of others, which gives us far more happiness than to rejoice only in our own happiness.**

- Instead of being angry, we cultivate loving-kindness and compassion starting with ourselves. If our heart inside is feeling happy and peaceful, what other people do is not going to worry us nearly as much. It is because we have this anger inside ourselves that we are not dealing with that makes everyone else an enemy. When we give loving-kindness and compassion to ourselves then naturally this is also going to spread out toward others.

- **May I be well and happy. May I be free of suffering. May I be peaceful and at ease.**

- When you think, "May I be happy" you are sending loving-kindness, and when you think, "May I be free from suffering," you are sending compassion. Even though at first this may seem artificial and contrived, **gradually we begin to feel a kind of peacefulness and warmth inside ourselves. We have to forgive ourselves. We have all made mistakes and acted stupidly. So what? If we were perfect, then we wouldn't need a path; we would already have arrived. It is because we have problems, because we have faults, because we've made stupid mistakes that we need a path. Therefore as we accept ourselves we can reach out and forgive others. We can start by befriend ourselves and being a little more tolerant of ourselves, and that will help us be friendlier and more tolerant of others.**

- To begin, we sit and quiet down the surface of the mind and send loving thoughts to ourselves. After that, we send them to somebody whom we feel particularly loving toward, wishing that they might be well and happy and imagining them well and happy, free from suffering. This is the easiest part; to wish happiness to people (or animals) whom we already really care for.

- Then we spread this goodwill to somebody we feel neutral about, whom we don't care about one way or the other. Imagine really wishing every single person to be happy and free from suffering. Everybody in their heart of hearts wants to feel well and not suffer. As the Buddha said, "To each one, his own self is most dear." We wish that for them, imagine them being happy, imagine all their problems solved, and see them free from suffering; their children attend good college and marry nice people and their partner stays healthy. Everything is really nice; all their worries and problems are resolved, and they are just filled with happiness. Imagine it.

- Ditto for someone we don't like or with whom we have problems. Wish them well and happy, imagine everything they want being fulfilled for them, and all their worries and anxieties, all their



problems fading away. They're just happy. Feel pleased for them.

- Ditto for all animals and plants and all those beings in realms we cannot see. Imagine that all these beings finally experience having all their worries and anxieties melt away to be replaced by great happiness and joy and satisfaction. May it be!
- Because there's so much negative energy in the world, it's good to send out positive energy as often as we can. Perhaps while we are sitting in the plane or on the train, we could practice loving-kindness meditation, or tonglen. We don't have to change our posture; we can just send out thoughts of loving-kindness. Imagine beautiful light radiating to fill the cabin and
  - being absorbed into the cells of the passengers' bodies, taking away their suffering and replacing it with light and love and happiness.

## 21. Dropping Greed

*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 Buddha himself said that **greed is like salty water; the more we drink, the thirstier we become. Even if we drank the whole ocean, we would still be thirsty.**
- **The more one tastes, the more one's hunger increases, this desire has diminishing returns.** We are always hoping to regain that initial sense of satisfaction. There is a moment of feeling real pleasure and then it is gone. Like ice cream that is delicious at first, but if we keep eating the whole container then we feel sick.
  - After the initial moment of pleasure the feeling of satisfaction lessens, so then we try something else and then something else...we always need something more until one is enslaved. It becomes an obsession, an addiction, which is sad.
  - **Sometimes greed seems harmless compared to hatred and jealousy. Around the world people are always asking how to get rid of anger, but few people ask how to overcome greed, because greed appears innocuous and seems quite pleasurable.**
  - **Being greedy and attached appears natural and the way to happiness.**
  - **But the root of dukkha, of suffering, is not anger. The root of suffering is clinging and attachment.**
  - **Greed or desire looks so innocent on the surface, but underneath in the psyche it has deep, thick roots reaching throughout all the levels of our consciousness.** Because it is "underground," buried in the subconscious, or store consciousness, we don't recognise it. This is why it is so difficult to uproot. **We are attached to attachment.**
  - **Anger is relatively easy to deal with because we don't like it, and so we are happy to work on trying to overcome it.**
  - **To uproot attachment doesn't mean that we stop loving. It means that our love becomes purified because it is not tied up with attachment. Mostly what we think of as love is really just grasping or clinging, and it is this grasping mind that causes us suffering. It is deeply embedded in our psyche.**
  - This doesn't mean that we have to give up everything or outwardly renounce the things that we love, but we can renounce them inwardly. **We can have possessions and appreciate and enjoy them, but if we lose them, we don't care much, we can let them go.**
  - **The test of whether we are attached or not is how we feel if we lose something or someone we love. Are we holding on with both hands or are willing to let go? We need to be able to let go. It's only when we grasp tightly that we have a problem. On the wheel of birth and death, there are no chains, there are no ropes that tie us to anything or anyone.**
  - **Our predicament is that we want to be free; but we want to take everything with us too.**
  - **To abandon all objects that arouse attachment doesn't mean that we have necessarily to give away everything, but it does mean that we should look carefully at what we are**

really attached to. There's nothing wrong with appreciating and enjoying something. Likewise with people, to love and care for them and do one's best to make them happy is not the problem. **It is the grasping that is the problem. The idea that now they are mine.**

- **We need the ability to hold things gently and caringly but without grasping.** That's much more difficult than just leaving, but **if we can do that, then inwardly we become free.**
- Somebody said that **if there were only one mantra in Buddhism it would be "Let Go!"**
- **Outwardly we can have everything, but inwardly we need to let go. It is not the things themselves; they are innocent. It is our attitude to the things that is the problem.**
- Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche said in explaining this verse, *To know how to be satisfied with what you have is to possess true wealth. The great saints and hermits of the past had the ability to be content with whatever they had and with however they lived. They stayed in lonely places, sheltering in caves, sustaining their lives with the barest necessities.*
- In most of Asia the qualities most cultivated in Buddhism are generosity and devotion, so people take great delight in giving.
- **The joy of giving is important because generosity is one of the main antidotes to grasping. If we have something and we are happy to share it with others, then there is nothing wrong with having it.**
- This quality of delight in giving to others is important and is why it is placed at the beginning of our spiritual training. Because even if our ethical conduct is a bit suspect or we get bad tempered quite often or we never meditate and our diligence is weak, still we can be generous and learn to give beyond what feels like our comfort zone. We can practice giving away things we actually like rather than just the stuff that we have outworn or no longer use or something that an aunt gave us last Christmas that we want to get rid of anyway. Open hands are important because open hands lead to an open heart.
- Swami was pleased that people gave him nice things because then in his mind he was thinking, *Oh, this is really nice, so who would like this? Who can I give this to?*
- Developing that kind of intention is a good thing. **Delighting in having something so that we can share it with others helps to break down our total absorption in our own pleasure and happiness. It helps to begin loosening those fingers that are grasping so tightly onto the things we desire,** which is why the Buddha himself always encouraged people to be generous and kind. It opens up the heart.
- **Generosity is a direct antidote to our greedy grasping mind that's thinking, What's in it for me?** Instead of believing that if we accumulate more and more somehow we'll feel satisfied, we recognise that if we give away more and more, we'll feel lighter and deeply content.

## 22. Embracing the Nondual

*All that appears is the work of one's own mind;*

*The nature of mind is primordially free from conceptual limitations.*

*To recognise this nature*

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

- **Here we are dealing with two aspects of the mind: our ordinary conceptual thinking and the ultimate nature of the mind, which is primordial pure awareness. Normally as ordinary sentient beings, we are mostly aware of the conceptual level of the mind, which means our thoughts and emotions, our memories, our judgments, and our ideas and beliefs.** As Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche points out:

*The many different perceptions of everything around you in this life arise in your mind. Look at your relationships with others, for example. You perceive some people in a positive way—friends, relatives, benefactors, protectors; while there are others whom you perceive as enemies—those who criticise and defame you, beat, fool or swindle you. The*

*process starts with the senses, through which the mind perceives various forms, sounds, smells, tastes, and feelings. As it becomes aware of those objects outside, it categorises them. Those that it finds pleasant it is attracted to, while those that it finds unpleasant it tries to avoid. The mind then suffers from not getting the pleasant things it wants, and from having to experience the unpleasant things it wants to avoid. It is always busy running after some pleasant situation or other that it really wants to enjoy 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 you perceive. They arise only in the mind.*

- If we ask ourselves, “Who am I?” then we will recall our name and maybe our nationality, racial type, gender, maybe our class or caste, and we think, “This is who I am.” We might think of where we were born and where we grew up. We might include our profession or our marital status. We are somebody’s child and perhaps someone else’s parent. Sometimes we are the boss but at other times we are the servant. We are playing many different roles (including male and female) which we think define who we are even though we are changing all the time, from the moment we were born. We see a small child and in a year’s time, we won’t recognise him; every single cell of his body will have changed. But still we think it is the same boy.

- Every cell in our body changes every seven to ten years, and our thoughts are changing moment to moment. New cells in our brain are coming into being while others are dying away. **When we say, “I am me.” We have a strong sense that there is a unique and autonomous “me” at the centre of ourselves that never changes, whether we are two months old or two, twenty, fifty, or a hundred years old. It is still “me.” My opinions, my ideas, my beliefs, my memories; this is who I am. This is the level of consciousness on which we live. And normally when we meditate, this is the level of consciousness with which we are dealing and trying to tame, to train, to transform.**

- **This concept of an autonomous “me” is a fundamental delusion. It is the big mistake that keeps us trapped in samsara. Samsara doesn’t exist except through the conceptual mind. All of this work that we have been going through, all these verses, are written from the point of view of a mind that from the very beginning is mistaking the rope for a snake.**

- When the Buddha said that there is no self, which we Buddhists call the truth of *anatman*, he wasn’t meaning that we don’t exist. Of course we exist. But fundamentally we do not exist in the way we conceive ourselves to exist. Consider a table made of wood. This table looks solid today, and when we look at it again tomorrow, it will still be a table, and it will still be solid. Nonetheless we know that from the point of view of quantum physics, for example, the table does not exist at all as it appears. In fact, it is energy/space, not really solid at all. If we analyse the “tableness” of the table, we can never find it.

- (Quantum physicists are intrigued by this question: when we keep reducing everything down, ultimately, what do we get? They still look for an ultimate. Waves or particles, energy or space, but then what is space? Ultimately there seems to be light and energy; matter is not really solid. We really don’t end up with a solid table, and yet it is definitely a table supporting the things we place on it, and it would give us a deep bruise if we ran into it.)

- **On the ultimate level the table is not as we perceive it with our sensory perceptions on this vibrational level where we experience the world. There are these two simultaneous aspects that exist all the time. When the Buddha said that ultimately we have “no self”, he didn’t mean that we don’t exist but that when we look for this “self” (this hardcore sense of “me” at the centre of our being) we can never find it. It is like peeling the layers of an onion layer after layer but never finding a core.**

- In meditation we can uncover layer after layer of the mind until we get down to the substratum consciousness. Here our consciousness becomes vast and spacious, and we feel one with everything. Although profound, that kind of feeling is not the ultimate. Through shamatha meditation we can reach that deep level, which is beyond conceptual thinking: the mind feels clear, vast, and blissful, so we can think that we are liberated.

- The Buddha’s second teacher taught him the formless concentrations leading to ultimate nothingness, vast and spacious consciousness, which then was regarded as liberation. Even today many people attain this level of meditative absorption and believe they are liberated since it is blissful and spacious. However, Buddha realised that since one has to come back down from that level, it is also impermanent just like everything else and therefore is not the ultimate.

- The levels of the mind can be subtle, but they’re still caught within this same cycle of samsara. When the Buddha said there is no ‘self’, perhaps what he was saying was that this thinking mind and all these levels of meditational absorptions are still caught up within the realm of impermanence of birth and death. They are not liberation because when we emerge from that blissful state, here we are again. So what to do?

- **All that appears is the workings of one’s own mind. We only perceive what is received through the sense doors. We believe that objects and people exist out there, more or less how we perceive them. Our senses (especially our eyes and our ears) receive information of what is happening out there, and the brain decodes it nicely so we then can decide how we feel about it. Everything must be just how it appears to be. Only it is not.**

- It is extremely hard for us to realise this. Intellectually it is fairly easy to comprehend, but to actually experience this way of being is difficult. We are already preprogrammed.

- An eminent neuroscientist in England has stated that what we actually see is a blurred image of something, which is instantly interpreted by the brain depending on prior associations. This gives us a picture that we think is a true representation of what we are perceiving. He said that **only about 15 percent is received through the sense doors, and something like 85 percent of what we think we perceive is actually made up by the brain.**

- As such, **all that appears is the work of one’s own mind. We see things, and we think that’s exactly how they are, but of course, it is only how mind interprets it. We only perceive what our limited senses receive, and like a computer the brain interprets the information rapidly, works it all out, and comes up with a picture for us. What is actually out there? We can never know since it all depends on the sense organs and brain mechanisms innate to human beings.**

- The rest is just our preconceptions, our judgments, and tastes; what we like and what we don’t like. Sometimes things that a while back were considered beautiful and aesthetically pleasing are now considered ridiculous. We look at old photos and exclaim, “Goodness, did I really wear that?!”

- The fact is that we don’t really know what’s out there. We only know what we perceive with the limited senses we have. If we had different kinds of senses, or extra senses or fewer senses, the picture would change. We can’t imagine what other kinds of senses might be like because we’ve never had them.

- Therefore, on one level, everything that we perceive is our own inner movie show. In fact, we don’t even know what’s going on in here, to say nothing of what’s going on out there. All of our perceptions are gathered and interpreted by the thinking mind, our conceptual mind. **But our conceptual mind is dualistic by its very nature. Dual means it naturally makes a division into subject and object.**

- When I went to get my first meditation instruction from an old yogi called Togden Choelek Rinpoche, he said to me, “This table, is it empty?”

*So I said, “Yes!”*

*And he said, “Do you see it as empty?”*

*I said, “Nooo...”*

*“The mind. Is it empty?” he asked.*

*“Yes!” I said, with a bit more confidence.*

*“Do you see it as empty?” he countered.*

*“No,” I said.*

*“Which do you think is easier, to see the table as empty or your mind as empty?” he challenged.*

*“Oh, the mind,” I replied.*

	Empty	See	Easier
Table	✓	✗	Scholastic
Mind	✓	✗	Yogic

*Then he said, "Okay, you belong to us. (Yogic approach)*

*So I asked, "And if I had said the table?"*

*He said, "Then I'd have sent you to Sera Monastery down the road!" (scholastic approach)*

- This conversation shows that **the scholastic approach is to analyse the emptiness of external phenomena, while the yogic tradition is to examine the emptiness of mind.**
  - **The mind is empty by nature. What does that mean? The classical description is that all phenomena are empty of inherent existence, which means that we cannot find anything existing independently and say that this is the thing itself, whether a table or the mind or anything else. We can never find the actual thing itself. Everything is made up of bits and pieces put together and labeled.**
    - Where is the tableness of a table? It cannot be found. After all, anything can be used as a table if it is slightly flat. We use another object as a table and say, "Now, this is a table." Yesterday maybe it was a box, but today it is a table.<sup>4</sup>
    - **We do label everything and then believe our labels instead of recognising that this is just a label, just a convenience.**
    - **The Buddha said, "I, too, use conceptual language, but I am not fooled by it.**
    - **We are fooled by it. We think that if we give something a name, it exists as a separate, independent entity.**
      - Here we are dealing specifically with the mind, not tables, and the point is, **what is the mind? Why is the mind empty? The mind is empty because our thoughts are flowing endlessly, like bubbles swept along in a stream. We cannot pick one up and say, "This is the mind" or even "This is a thought" because the moment we've thought to identify it, it is gone. Anyone who has tried looking at the mind can see that when we say, "thinking," we can never find the thought itself. It is like the frames of a movie moving across the projector so fast that they seem to project out this whole drama. Each individual frame is moving too fast to be identified. By the time we've noticed it, it is gone.**
      - **The mind's emptiness also connotes its spacious quality. The mind is empty but also luminous or cognisant. Mind is not something graspable; it is something vast and open, luminous, clear, and knowing. The nature of the mind is compared to the sky. If we look at our mind, we realise that there are two processes going on: There are the thoughts coming up and disappearing, moment to moment, just flowing past. Then there's awareness; the mindfulness that observes the thoughts. Now that observation is already a step forward. Stepping back and observing the thoughts, so there is a space between the observer and the thoughts.**
      - **However, that is still a dualistic situation, because there is the observer and the observed. This observing mind is called "mindfulness." We are now conscious of our mind and in being more conscious, we are no longer so completely enslaved. We can begin to see that all these feelings, these thoughts, these ideas, these beliefs, these memories, prejudices, judgments, and clinging are just thoughts. Merely thoughts.**
      - **So here we are, observing the mind. Watching the thoughts as they go past, recognising that thought moments come and go. In the beginning the stream of thoughts is like a waterfall cascading down. Then it becomes like a fast-flowing river, gradually moving more slowly as the mind quiets down. Still dual.**
      - This is the conventional mind. That mindfulness that watches is also the conventional mind. Think of the clouds in the sky during a rainstorm. The sky is completely covered by clouds; only clouds are visible. Likewise, the nature of the mind is covered by all our conceptual thinking and, therefore, when we look at the mind, all we see are the clouds of conceptual thought.
      - But those clouds could not exist if it were not for the sky. The clouds come from the sky, and they vanish back into the sky again. But we usually identify with the clouds. When the clouds

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<sup>4</sup> Michie's example of a tin of cat food made from Tuna. Did the tuna know it was cat food? Where is the cat food in the living tuna?

part, we see the sky. It is rather like flying in a plane through thick clouds until suddenly the plane ascends, and we are above the clouds and there's this vast blue expanse with the clouds below. Clouds float within this open spaciousness, which is empty. It is empty insofar as we cannot grasp it, it cannot be seen. Yet without space nothing would exist. Space is everywhere. Where is space not?

- If we are asked to describe a room, then we will refer to the furniture, decorations, and any people present. But what is really there is space. But we usually don't notice that. Yet without the space there could be no furnishings, there could be no people. Furnishings and people can only exist because there's space.

- Also the people and the furniture themselves are ultimately space. Every cell in our body is space. If the physical body is reduced infinitely there are perhaps just vibrations of light. We are all space. There is nowhere that space is not. It is all-encompassing.

- Therefore, the nature of the mind is compared to space and is likened to the sky. Mindfulness is a good step in advance of being completely engulfed in our thinking, yet even our mindfulness is based on the sense of my mindfulness. It has not transcended the subject and object duality. There's mindfulness and something to be mindful of. But the ultimate nature of the mind is like the sky because it cannot be divided. There's no centre, there's no end.

- When we talk about Buddha-nature it could sound like everybody's got a little Buddha sitting inside them. "This is my Buddha." "Keep your Buddha to yourself." "Actually, my Buddha is rather a special Buddha compared to an ordinary person's Buddha!" It is not like that. It is not like everybody has a little Buddha-nature sitting inside them. That would just be another ego projection.

- We cannot own air. Air is something shared by all the beings on this planet, not just human beings. Animals, too, and the trees and the plants are also breathing in and breathing out, helping us to live on this planet. Space has no centre, and it has no boundaries; it just is; vast empty space like the true nature of our mind. But, unlike the sky, which is just empty, the nature of the mind is also cognisant. It knows.

- The Tibetan word often used to describe one aspect of the true nature of the mind is *sal*, which is a hard word to translate into English. *Sal* means "clear" and also "bright," "luminous." It also has the connotation of being cognisant. **The mind is empty (meaning it is spacious, open, unimpeded, and ungraspable) and at the same time the mind is clear and luminous. The mind is naturally cognisant.**

- If it weren't, we could not know anything, we could not be aware; but we do know. The Tibetan term *rigpa* (or the Sanskrit term *vidya*) means "to know," but it is usually translated as "pure awareness" or "primordial awareness." It is the fact that we know and that knowing is unimpeded, spacious, clear, and luminous; and it is who we are.

- **But that knowing quality of the mind, which we all possess and is right here all the time, is beyond duality, meaning when we are in a state of *rigpa* there is no sense of "me" and "others." Such duality just does not exist. It is not that we are spaced out; it is more like we are waking up. The word *buddha* is from the root *buddh*, which means "to awaken." And it is just like that; we suddenly wake up.**

- **We are able to see and hear things because we have awareness. But when we see or hear something, we immediately superimpose on it our ideas and judgments, so that the underlying clarity is obscured. The luminous clarity is always present, but we cover it up with all our dualistic thinking. We don't allow our mind to remain in its naked awareness, which is its natural state before we clothe it in all our concepts.**

- **Without this underlying awareness we couldn't exist. But we are so busy thinking, comparing, conceiving, judging, and talking to ourselves that we don't recognise it.**

- **The aim is to recognise this fundamental quality of the mind. When meditating, "Once you recognise the nature of the mind, then you can start to meditate." Until then, we are just playing mind games.**

- **Once we experience the initial breakthrough, we understand what we are trying to do. Then building on that, we learn how to stabilise that realisation. Normally, even if we recognise the nature of the mind, then immediately the dualistic mind goes, *Hold on!***

**That's it! Finally I've got it; now I'm enlightened! The ego immediately grabs onto the experience and wants to reproduce it.**

- **Once we think, Wow, that's fantastic! Let's do that again!** then it doesn't come, because now the mind is grasping and wanting to replay that experience. **As soon as the mind has expectations and grasps at hopes and fears, the door will close. This is what can make this type of meditation difficult. The way to recognise the nature of the mind is to completely relax but at the same time remain focused.**

- Great masters, who even as children had received deep experiences and understanding, spent the rest of their lives practicing. **It is necessary not just to recognise the nature of the mind but then to rest within that awareness under all circumstances. Not just when we are in retreat, but in all situations, wherever we are and whatever we are doing.**

- When one can stay in a state of pure awareness at all times, including during sleep, then the practice is stable. Of course, many great practitioners of all traditions at the time of death go into a state that is called *thukdam*. This means that although their body and brain have ceased functioning, the subtle consciousness, the clear light nature, remains in the body at the heart centre. The body does not decay or collapse; it doesn't go into rigour mortis. Actually, it often becomes more beautiful. Practitioners stay in that state for hours, days, and sometimes weeks. This is really quite common. In fact, it is expected of people who have really done any kind of practice that at the time of death they will at least go into a state of *thukdam*.

- The clear light nature of the mind appears powerfully at the time of death, and experienced practitioners have united completely with that, because they are already familiar with this clear light through their prior practice. If we are not familiar with it, then when the clear light nature of death arises, we are startled, and then we have lost it.

- The point is that ultimately most of this text addresses how to deal with the mind on a relative level; how to handle our ordinary conceptual thoughts and responses and emotions under difficult circumstances.

- **"All that appears is the work of one's own mind." The idea that people are hostile to us, are friendly to us, are saying nasty things about us, or are not being grateful for how kind we've been to them is ultimately the work of our own mind. It is all about how we see it. Our ordinary conceptual thinking narrows everything, puts everything into boxes. But the nature of the mind is far beyond all that; it cannot be put into a box. The nature of the mind is primordially free from conceptual limitations.**

- **It is vital to recognise this nature, not just think about it. But, we can't really think about it because then we're still thinking conceptually. It is difficult to think about something that by its very nature is beyond thought.**

- We can talk and talk about how sweet and creamy chocolate tastes, but the description has nothing to do with how the chocolate tastes when we actually eat it.

- This is rather like the nature of mind. We can talk and talk about it, but we are only using conceptual language to talk about something that is beyond concepts. It is like the Zen saying about the finger pointing at the moon. People get fascinated with the finger, but it has nothing to do with the moon. Nonetheless, if we follow the direction the finger is pointing—there's the moon.

- So all Buddhist practice is trying to direct us back to the ultimate nature of the mind, which is uncontrived and inexpressible. Buddha hardly ever described Nirvana except to say what it wasn't; for example, to say it was a state without suffering. He didn't talk much about it because the experience is beyond words. If we start talking about something, the mind grasps onto it, and then it thinks it actually knows the thing because intellectually it can discuss it. But we can analyse chocolate (study all the chemical formulae and investigate how it is made) yet we can't really describe its actual taste. The only way to know it is to eat it.

- **Like the two wings of a bird, the wisdom aspect and the compassion/skilful means aspect work together. Once we realise the empty luminous nature of the mind we do not forget all the other training in compassion and patience. The two must go together. But in case we start grasping onto the idea that this conventional mind training is the only**

thing we have to do, there comes the reminder that ultimately it is all empty.

- As the *Prajnaparamita* says, although we vow to save countless sentient beings, actually there are no sentient beings to be saved. This is because, according to the view of emptiness, what constitutes the sentient being, the sense of self, and separation from others is an illusion. Even though there are no separate sentient beings to be saved, we work to save them, because while that illusion is in place, their suffering is real. We also must ask ourselves, Who are we to save them since we are not even sentient beings either? Our own sense of self and separation is an illusion. There is always this play between the two aspects, the ultimate and the relative, and neither side can be discarded. A bird can't fly with just one wing.

## 23. Recognising the Illusion

*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 text so far has been about dealing with anger and things/people that displease us. We now turn to coping with grasping and attachment to things/people we like so that we don't grasp them and become attached.

- One way to avoid grasping is to recognise the impermanence of all things. Here is what Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche says about this verse:

*The outer world and its living inhabitants are all impermanent. Your mind and body are together for the time being; but the mind is like a guest, and the body like a hotel in which that guest will only be making a short stay.<sup>5</sup> Once you truly understand that, the seeming reality of your ordinary ambitions will fall away, and you will realise that the really meaningful thing to do, for the present and the future, is to practice the Dharma.*

- There's nothing wrong with liking things that are beautiful. We see a rainbow and say, "That's so beautiful!" But we don't grasp it or try to own it. It is not my rainbow. And we know that in a few minutes it will be gone. We know that rainbows are made out of space, water moisture in the air, and the sun reflecting in a certain direction. When all these causes and conditions come together, a rainbow appears. We can never find it; we can see it is there, and we can photograph it, yet it is ephemeral. It will last for as long as the causes and conditions come together, and when they're finished, it will fade. We think it is beautiful, and we can appreciate it, as in many cultures the appearance of a rainbow at certain times is regarded as being auspicious. But we don't try to possess it to show to just a few friends. We can't take out a copyright. A rainbow is there for everybody, and part of its beauty is its ephemeral nature.

- We should try to view all pleasing objects as if they were like rainbows. They're not ultimately real. Although these objects may be beautiful and pleasing, we don't need to grasp or crave. We can just appreciate how beautiful they are; and that's enough. Otherwise, we do not own the objects; the objects own us.

- The kind of mind that just sees something with appreciation and joy is an innocent mind. However, when we get ideas of ownership and want to keep things for ourselves, thinking, "*This is mine*" that's when the problem starts. Even if it is something that we buy because it might be useful, we should recognise that its nature is impermanent, so we don't really own it.

- We may say, "This is mine," but ultimately what do we own? We don't even own ourselves, how can we own anything else? How can we possess anyone else? At the end of life we leave it all behind anyway. Then what does it matter? It is this grasping mind that is the problem. Not beauty or objects.

- Objects are innocent. Objects are just themselves. They haven't done anything; they are not

<sup>5</sup> And the hotel will be demolished at an unknown time in the future.



the problem. **It is the feelings that they arouse in our avaricious minds that are the problem. It is not that we cannot appreciate things. It is not that we cannot delight in things. But when we reach out and say, "I have to have it...now!" that's a problem.**

- **We know we should hold everything lightly. This doesn't mean we can't own anything; it means that we hold it all gently. We appreciate, but we don't grasp. It is the grasping mind that causes a lot of pain. Just as we have to deal skilfully with those things that cause us hurt and anger and upset, likewise we have to deal skilfully with those things that give us pleasure and delight and joy. The aim is to hold everything lightly and gently and just let it all be as it is, allowing things to flow.**

- This is why generosity is a beautiful quality. Usually we hold on tightly to objects that we like, but with generosity we can hand it on to another, let it go. Then everything becomes lighter; our whole life becomes much lighter. It is amazing how much we grasp at things. One minute it is just an object, the next minute we've bought it, so now it is *ours*, and our attitude has changed completely.

- For instance, if we are in an optician's shop and some glasses fall on the ground and break, then we feel indifferent. But when we discover it is our glasses that fell on the floor and broke, we get upset: "Oh no! How could somebody have broken my glasses?" As long as it is just glasses, it doesn't matter, but when they are my glasses, then it is a whole different matter. All because of that little word: *my*.

- **We should be more conscious. The first step is just to be aware. Be aware that everything is impermanent and like an illusion. We rarely experience anything directly. Everything we perceive or experience is filtered through our dualistic, deluded perception and worldview. If everything we experience is distorted and impermanent, why grasp onto it? Why be attached to it or averse to it? This is why mindfulness is helpful. Mindfulness makes us much more conscious of all this stupid thinking that goes on in our minds that we normally accept without examining and that causes us to grasp onto things that are impermanent and not what they seem. We become more conscious and discriminating.**

- **We carry our minds with us everywhere we go. This is the mind that we live with, we sleep with, we have chattering to us constantly. It is our most constant companion, staying with us the whole time. Therefore, doesn't it make sense to have a companion who is charming to live with? Would we want a friend who endlessly complains all the time or tells us how useless we are, that we can't do anything right, and are never going to achieve anything anyway? What kind of friend is that? From that point of view, it would be helpful to make friends with our mind. **Shantideva praises self-confidence as an indispensable aid for the bodhisattva path. Taming the mind is not only making the mind calm and focused but also friendly and amenable to being trained.****

- **Here we are in our minds, which we could think of like a room where the doors and the windows are usually kept closed. Many people live inwardly, with the curtains drawn or shades down and little light coming in from outside. This mental room is endlessly filling up with lots and lots of junk, becoming a garbage heap of other people's opinions that are constantly aired on television and shared on the internet and in newspapers, books, and magazines. It is rarely sifted through and sorted, and almost nothing is ever thrown out. The mind just becomes like a great junk heap, and we live in the middle of it. Never cleaning or dusting, never opening the door or the windows, never letting in fresh air... and then we decide we are going to invite the Dalai Lama home for tea!**

- We cannot invite him into a junk heap, so we have to start clearing out. We begin sifting through all this rubbish and deciding what is necessary and what is really not worth keeping. We start throwing out. Open the doors, open the windows, clean. Throw out some of this garbage. **Address it by thinking, *What am I doing with this rubbish in my mind? It's just useless. All these judgments, opinions, daydreams, memories; a waste of time. Why am I regurgitating all this drama again and again?***

- **Our minds are repetitious and quite boring actually, most of the time. The mind rarely**

thinks up something fresh and new and exciting. Mostly it is just the same stale material, repeated again and again. The same old grievances and memories (both happy and sad) opinions, ideas, plans, fantasies, and fears. If we start to observe our mind, we see how unoriginal it usually is. Our ordinary conceptual mind is not really very bright. There's a lot of junk in there that could just as well be thrown out; because His Holiness is coming.

- So we start to clean away some of the grime, and we begin to decorate with good thoughts, with beautiful thoughts, with original clear thinking. When our mental room is reasonably in order and looking more pleasant, then we can invite His Holiness in. This means we can invite wisdom into our hearts. We can invite wisdom and compassion to come and dwell within us. **Actually, His Holiness (the bodhisattva of compassion) doesn't live outside, he lives within us and is the nature of who we really are.**

- **We are not this junk, the aversion and attachment, we really are not, and we don't have to always live in a garbage pile. Because that is not our nature. As the Buddha said, "If it was not possible to do this, I would not ask you to do it. But because it is possible, I'm saying: 'do it.'"**

- But we can't just depend on an external authority to encourage us. Of course, **as with any skill we need guidance and teachers, but ultimately we ourselves must walk the path.** At the end of the guru yoga practice, after praying to the lama for blessings, we dissolve the lama into ourselves, recognising that their mind and our own mind are the same; like water poured into water or a snowflake landing on the still surface of a lake. The two become one. This shows us two things: the rainbow-like nature of ourselves and others and the unity of ourselves and the wisdom mind of the buddhas.

- We receive the outer formal direction in order to recognise that the true guide is always within us. The separation is illusory. We should not think that for the rest of our lives we need to always rely on external guidance. Take the word *lama*: *la* means superior and *ma* means mother, so a lama is a "superior mother," and that's the translation of the Sanskrit word *guru*.

- When we are little children, our mother takes care of us, trains us, teaches us, and brings us up. Without a mother it is hard for a child. But once we have matured as an adult, if we are still relying on Mommy to do everything for us and tell us what we should do, then Mommy was not a very good mother. The mother should be training the child to become autonomous and independent. Even though as an adult we still love our mother and are grateful to her, and if we have a lot of problems we may go to her for advice, we don't depend on her for everything. A good mother does not encourage her children to become so dependent on her that they are unable to make their own decisions.

- A superior mother is someone who trains her children to be good, responsible, intelligent, and independent adults.

- It is likewise on the spiritual path. Yes, we need guidance, we need instruction, because we are like children spiritually. But, at a certain point, as our understanding deepens, we begin to inwardly grow up, and we need to start trusting our own inner wisdom.

- Part of us knows that our world is not so solid, that it is impermanent. Usually, it is covered up by all our conceptual thinking. We are so busy talking to ourselves that we can't hear the voice of silence. It is important to come back to our original wisdom and trust our own innate knowledge.

- It is the same with gurus. While we are just children, spiritually speaking, we need their guidance, we need their help. The good gurus, the true lamas, train their students not to remain endlessly dependent on them but to learn how to rely on themselves, on their own inner wisdom. If we look at the histories of the great masters of the past, at some point they sent their disciples away. Else, does the disciple need the lama or does the lama need the disciple?

- At the beginning, physical teacher as guru. In the middle, the teachings (the texts, practices, and pithy instructions) as guru. Then, ultimately, the true nature as guru.

- **We should try to view all pleasing objects as if they were like rainbows. They're not permanent or lasting. They are impermanent and momentary. Although the things we are attached to may be beautiful and pleasing, we don't need to grasp or crave. We can just appreciate how beautiful they are. This is true of our relationships too, even our**

relationship with our teachers or gurus. The kind of mind that experiences everything without attachment is an innocent mind full of appreciation and joy.

## 24. Letting Go of the Illusion

*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 unfavourable circumstances,  
To view them as illusions is the practice of a bodhisattva.*

- With this verse Thogme Sangpo suggests that we are fabricating our own reality and that, because we believe it all so desperately, we suffer. If we could only see that it is just a projection like a movie. When we see a film, we laugh if it is a comedy, and we cry if it is a tragedy. But we remember it is just a show. At the end, when the heroine dies in the arms of the hero, however much our heart is hurting at the time, we don't go out wanting to commit suicide; it is just a movie.

- "The various forms of suffering are like the death of one's child in a dream" is Thogme Sangpo's way of telling us to understand that our experience is one of illusion, or rather a delusion of permanence and solidly existing things. If we dream of somebody we love dying, then in the dream we feel completely traumatised. We cry and on waking up, our pillow is soaked with tears. But then think, *Oh, but that was just a dream.*

- Because we think that everything is so real, not realising that on an ultimate level it is all really our projection, we suffer. This is a hard one for people. But really and truly this is all just a dream. We live in a dream, and we have to wake up. The whole of Buddhism is about waking up from the dream of our ignorance. We solidify everything and we make everything seem so real, so truly existent, but it isn't. It is like a rainbow. It is important that we recognise the illusory and impermanent nature of things. As Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche points out:

*If you have contemplated the empty nature of all phenomena in your meditation sessions, it is easy to see the dream-like nature of phenomena between sessions. At the same time, you will feel an effortless flow of compassion toward all those who suffer needlessly because they are unaware of the illusory nature of everything.*

- It is not that we become unfeeling and remote, but that we begin to see from a higher perspective. The wisdom side sees that it is all, ultimately, like an empty rainbow. It is always just a projection.<sup>6</sup> We have to bring our pure perception to our experiences and remind ourselves how things really are. Obviously when something really terrible happens, like losing somebody we love very much, naturally we are going to grieve. Nobody is saying don't grieve. But, at a certain point, too much grief dissolves into self-pity. We no longer just pity the one that died or got sick, we pity ourselves. This is also another boost to the ego and doesn't help anybody. It is counterproductive.

- The ego is happy to be miserable. The ego feeds on our unhappiness as much as our happiness because when something awful has happened, if we are in grief, if we are suffering, then we recall our grief over and over again, thinking only about ourselves. This self-absorption is all the ego wants: whether a happy me or miserable me, it doesn't matter; it is me.

- Healthy people don't think primarily about themselves; they are much more interested in the

<sup>6</sup> An example is given in HHDL who daily hears terrible stories from many people. He cries when he hears them; showing great compassion. But five minutes later His Holiness is laughing again. It is not because he doesn't care, but because he has the balance of wisdom and compassion so that he can absorb all this suffering, this sadness, and then transmute it so it doesn't sit heavily in his heart.

Because this universal suffering doesn't sit like a huge boulder in his heart, he is not in deep depression all the time or bitter and angry. Instead, all that suffering that he hears about nurtures his compassion and wisdom. Therefore, when people are with him, they feel comforted. They feel an inner joy and a sense that somehow it is all okay. That's part of his power. Somehow he's taken all the grief into himself and relieved them as though he has taken that burden from them and dissolved it back into primordial emptiness again. He's been doing this for more than fifty years.

welfare of others. That gives them a kind of peace and space. **Even when difficult situations come up in this world, we have the space to absorb and then to dissolve. There comes a release of such tight grasping.** Thogme says:

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

- **We need to be careful to not make these difficulties and tragedies the centre of our life and realise that within the extended ongoing movie that is our life, this is just one scene. We need to move on.**

- **It is important to bring wisdom and understanding into our lives.** We need to acclimatise our mind beforehand so that when something bad does happen, we have the prior knowledge and strength to deal with it. **Buddhist wisdom recognises that things are not as solid and unchanging as they seem to be, and we need to appreciate that how we see things is only how we see things.** This doesn't mean that is how things really are, because as we know at this point, we perceive everything through our deluded minds. **We do not see things as they really are; only a buddha or Arya bodhisattva sees things truly.**

- **Even if we can't see things as they are, at least we can try to remember that we are not seeing things as they really are.** Those with higher wisdom agree that our seeming reality is just a projection. Even if we don't see things that way, we should remember that more advanced teachers, who know much more than we do, are in accord that everything is just a projection. **We don't need to grasp onto what is pleasurable or what is painful.**

- **To lose your only child is a terrible thing, but the movie goes on. He's passed on, and we have to keep going too. To get stuck in that one scene and keep playing it over and over doesn't help anybody.** Therefore, **whatever awful things happen to us, we have to remember that people are dying all the time. Of course it is horrible, and we wish it hadn't happened, but it has happened, and we have to accept that. All these things that come to us can teach us something. What can we learn? It is important to take everything that occurs in our life and try to learn from it.**

- **Some people call this world the schoolhouse of life, and we have some lessons that are hard, but this is how we grow in understanding and experience. If everything was always easy and pleasant, we wouldn't learn that much. We need challenges and to learn from them. Otherwise we just have to keep repeating the same mistakes over and over again until finally we learn the lesson and we can graduate from that class and go on.**

- **The most potent way to avoid repeating the same mistakes over and over again is to remember that our perceptions of reality (and our own minds) are profoundly mistaken.**

This is the focus of the final verse of Langri Thangpa's *Eight Verses for Training the Mind*:

*May none of this ever be sullied  
By thoughts of the eight worldly concerns. (gain and loss, pleasure and pain, praise and blame, and fame and obscurity)  
May I see all things as illusions  
And, without attachment, gain freedom from bondage.*

- Most people want to gain and be praised, have pleasure, and enjoy a good reputation. We all want to avoid loss and pain, blame, a bad reputation. The point we need to take from this verse is that we should not be caught in these worldly aims. **Why are we practicing the Dharma? So that people will like us and say nice things about us, and we will be known for our piety? Or so that life will be nice and pleasant and everybody will help us? Those are not good reasons. Or, we may do something because we are afraid that if we don't do it, people will criticise us or create problems for us. That is also not a valid motivation. We shouldn't be caught up in gain and loss, pleasure and pain. That is not our motivation.**

- **We shouldn't practice in order to impress others, or because we think people will like us more or for any of these underlying motives of self-aggrandisement. Our intentions for practicing should be purely to be of benefit to others and ourselves, to awaken to the**

ultimate, and to cherish the well-being of others. That is all.

- It is not about inflating our ego. This is important. As human beings, we are all afflicted with self-cherishing thoughts and behaviours, but the point is that we should really dedicate our lives not only to benefiting ourselves but also to benefiting others. However, this doesn't mean that we only benefit others and ignore ourselves. There has to be a balance between the two.

- It is important that we take care of ourselves so that we are able to be strong in taking care of others. We need to recharge our batteries by doing things that help us to relax, that give us pleasure and make us laugh, because we don't want to take ourselves too seriously. **The point is in order to walk the path, we have to be balanced. This is why the Buddha said that we start by giving loving-kindness and compassion to ourselves first. This is important. If we don't give loving-kindness to ourselves, how are we going to give genuine loving-kindness to others? First, we fill ourselves with love.**

- **The Dharma is good at ego bashing. The texts are always going on about the dangers of the ego, of identifying with the self and the self-cherishing mind** and so forth. On the whole, in Buddhist countries, people do not suffer from a crisis of low self-esteem. They feel pretty good about themselves; therefore they can afford to take some ego knocks and at the same time be encouraged to put out more effort toward helping others. But for some strange reason in the West, despite the relative affluence and good education, people often have a low and fragile sense of self. But even two and a half millennia ago **The Buddha said, "We start with giving loving-kindness, compassion, and empathetic joy to ourselves."**

- Who are we giving loving-kindness to? To the ultimate reality of our Buddha-nature? But Buddha-nature already is loving-kindness. **To whom are we sending the love and who is doing the sending? Well, I am sending loving-kindness to me. Here we are dealing with conventional reality, the dualistic mind that creates the illusion of self and other. Even though ultimately the ego is an illusion, we need to have a confident sense of self in order to walk the path to the dissolution of the self. Merely saying, "I have no ego" does not help. Who is saying, "I have no ego"? It is the ego! Who is beating down our ego every time it tries to rear its head? Again, it is the ego. This is important to understand.**

- **The Buddha saw it clearly. He didn't exactly expound it this way, but if we look at his path, it starts with shamatha meditation, which is practiced to make the mind quiet, calm, and centred. The mind needs to be balanced and healthy in order to enter into the various levels of meditation absorption called the dhyanas.<sup>7</sup> Shamatha is for healing the mind, for getting all our psychological factors well-balanced so that with vipashyana, or insight, we are able to unpeel the consciousness like an onion, layer by layer.**

- If our sense of self is unhealthy and in pain, we cannot take off the layers. It would be actually psychologically destructive to do so. **We have to be strong with calmness and lucid awareness in order to direct that laser beam of insight into the nature of our empty, luminous mind.** It is important to take these texts in context. **The real message of lojong (working with short phrases 'slogans' in contemplative practice to train the mind) is that even difficulties can be helpful and useful. We gain inner strength from recognising that all challenges that we face are a means for us to progress spiritually and inwardly mature.**

- **If we are happy when things go right, and depressed and frustrated when things go wrong, or we are all loving and sweetness when people do things we like and get angry when people do things we don't like, then essentially we are still at the level of a two-**

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<sup>7</sup> In advanced shamatha practice, there are levels called the dhyanas, or mental absorptions. There are the four form absorptions and the four formless absorptions (which are not practiced in Tibetan buddhism).

The first dhyana is a meditative state of focus and discernment along with an arising of joy. In that state, our concentration is now tamed, flexible, workable, and malleable, so that whatever we want to do, the mind can cooperate. This is useful because then the mind is unified and able to remain steady.

After having tamed the mind through shamatha practice, it is calm, still, and clear. We are completely focused and at one with what we are doing. We can now use that clear and focused attention to investigate and gain insight into the mind itself. This is called vipashyana, or clear insight.

year-old. Still having temper tantrums. We might be taking deep breaths and not displaying our emotions but inwardly the same reaction is going on: happy when people do what we want, upset when they don't. Just like small children.

- **The Buddha always said on the Dharma path we have to mature, we have to grow up, we have to become adults.** All of these practices are for helping us transform our normal responses and attitude of when things go right, that's good, when things are difficult, that's bad. Maybe those things that we call difficult and bad are the best things that could have happened to us. As I say, this is not just some kind of feel-good New Age philosophy. This is basic Buddha Dharma. Only the ego is deciding whether something is good or not good, based on the pleasure/pain principle. But the ego is ignorant. Sometimes the worst things have actually turned out to be the best things.

- **"May I understand all things as illusions and without attachment gain freedom from bondage,"** Langri Thangpa writes. In the traditional texts, the world that we perceive as so real and as being separate from ourselves is compared to an illusion; it is like a dream, like a mirage, like a rainbow, and so forth. In other words, things may appear to be real and exactly as they are, but actually when examined closely, they have no self-existence. What we perceive are projections from our consciousness. Again, this doesn't mean we don't exist at all. Obviously we do, but we don't exist the way we think we exist.

- Recently, I (Tenzin Palmo) met with a neuroscientist who said that almost everything that appears in our consciousness as a reality isn't real. Nowadays, neuroscientists are finding that the percentage of what our brain mechanism adds to the bare input that comes through our sense doors is actually much greater than first thought. Our seeming reality is brilliantly fabricated by our mind in accordance with the kind of brain, sense organs, and karma that we have and share as human beings. If we had different sense organs and a different brain mechanism, we would see things differently. **The Buddha himself said that the universe is created by all the karma of the beings that inhabit it. In other words, everybody is spontaneously creating their own universe.**

- Neuroscience has confirmed wisdom known for thousands of years in India. What we perceive does not exist in and of itself. When we are dreaming, if that dream is vivid, then we really believe it and our body also believes it. **Our body may believe the dream that the mind is having, but when we wake up, we think, Oh, that was just a dream. Now this is real. But from the point of view of ultimate reality this is still just a dream. When we wake to our primordial nondual awareness, nirvanic consciousness, Buddha-nature, dharmakaya, whatever we want to call it, then the ordinary conceptual thinking consciousness that we normally identify with, dualistic by nature, is completely transcended.**

- From that point of real awakening onward, we see things how they really are rather than how they are presented to us through our conceptual thinking mind (which splits perception into subject and object). As we discussed in an earlier chapter, the word *buddha* means to awaken. Although we often translate *bodhi* as enlightenment, it really means to wake up.

- **What we are trying to do is wake up from the dream of ignorance, of our illusion, of our not seeing things as they really are.** All Buddhist schools are concerned with how to wake up in order to be free and, at the same time, how to open up the heart to embrace all beings with loving-kindness and compassion.

- **When we see things as they really are, there is no ego. The ego (and karma) is creating the movie that we believe is real and then get attached to. Once we realise the movie is just a movie, we are no longer attached. Whatever happens, whether we laugh or cry, it is all just our projection. It is not ultimately real, and we are not attached to the outcome. We enjoy the process, but we don't believe it.**

- **So Langri Thangpa says, "May I understand all things as illusions, and without attachment gain freedom from bondage." Bondage is the bondage of the ego. Once we have gone beyond the ego and recognised the ultimate nature of the mind, then we have no attachment, and we are free from the prison house of samsara.**

## 25. Practicing 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 next six verses describe the practice of the **six transcendent perfections**, or **paramitas**, which are generosity, discipline, patience, diligence, concentration, and wisdom. According to Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche,

*Each of these virtues or qualities is considered to be truly transcendent (a 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 fulfilment of all beings' aspirations.*
- (4) *It can bring others to the full maturity of their potential.*

- **The path of a bodhisattva as laid out in the six paramitas starts with generosity, because even if we are not very ethical, even if we have a bad temper, even if we're lazy and pretty dull-minded, and we hardly ever meditate, we can at least be generous. Generosity doesn't require any other particular qualities. It is the start. And generosity is important because as we give with our hands, if we give with the right motivation, it starts to open up our hearts.<sup>8</sup>**

- We were dealing earlier with the idea that grasping and clinging and attachment is the source of our problems. The direct counterbalance to that is to start giving and sharing, to cultivate the pleasure of making others happy through gifts; not just material gifts but also the gift of time. People have problems so we give them our time by listening to them and maybe trying to help. This is the gift of service. Many work their whole lives helping others or in service to the Dharma. This is all generosity.

- It is not necessary to always be thinking, *This is mine, I've got to keep it. If I give it away, what will I do? I will be deprived. Therefore, I have to keep everything for myself.* That is a sad state of mind. Whereas the mind that says, *Oh, this is lovely. I really like this, who can I give it to?* is an open, joyful mind, and everything flows beautifully. Usually people who are generous also find that things come to them, too. Nothing gets stuck; we don't have sticky fingers. Everything comes and then is shared with others.

- This is a beautiful way to live. Not only are our hands open, but our heart is open too. For all of us, this answers the question of how to transform our lives from the ordinary worldly idea of accumulating to the spiritual ideal of giving. This is one reason why generosity is the beginning of the bodhisattva path as laid down in the paramitas.

- As mentioned before, this is well understood in Asia, where the people's altruistic generosity is overwhelming. People often give more than they can afford and with so much joy. It lightens everything up. This quality of giving, of generosity of heart, is an important one for all of us at whatever level we can manage to incorporate it as our practice. The joy in giving joy to others is a beautiful thing. It really makes the heart sing.

- Many Jataka tales that retell past lifetimes of the Buddha recount how the bodhisattva took many animal forms and sacrificed his own life for the sake of others. The great merit that was created in this way was a primary cause for him finally becoming a buddha.

- Of course people sometimes think, "Look at me, I'm being so virtuous!" Certainly in Asia, people can start totting up the merit as though they were keeping a merit bank account. In addition to their monetary bank account, they have a merit one too. But the more we think of

<sup>8</sup> There's a story of the Buddha meeting with a wealthy man who was an entrenched miser. He would never give even a grain of rice to anyone, even though he was wealthy. The Buddha said, "All right, you take some fruit in your right hand, and you give it to your left hand. Then from your left hand back to your right hand." This demonstrates the idea of picking something up and letting it go. When we pick up a piece of fruit in one hand and pass it to the other, there is a moment between letting the fruit go with one hand and picking it up with the other that the fruit is not ours. This is practicing releasing and giving, which is so important.

the merit, the least meritorious it is. It is important to give without expectation of reward. Forget the merit; just give for the joy of giving. Just give because you want to make others happy or because others are in need. Sometimes it is also good to give something just because we really like it a lot, and we can see our attachment to it. Just watch what happens inside when we give it away.

- Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche explains this as follows:

*Never hope for anything in return for an act of generosity, and do not expect as a result that in your next life you will be treated well or be happy and prosperous. Generosity is complete in itself; there is no need for any other reward than having made others happy. If you give something motivated by self-interest, the joy you might have felt will be spoilt, and further unhappiness is certain to follow. But giving out of sheer devotion, love, or compassion will bring you a feeling of great joy, and your gift will create yet more happiness. The motivation behind the act of giving makes all the difference.*

- Generosity is a beautiful quality. It is a loving, soft, spacious quality, and it is something that all of us need to cultivate. Not just material gifts but also service, time and care for others. In many ways, just the openness of heart that delights in giving and sharing is already an important component on the spiritual path and also a worldly path. To be happy, we have to have a generous heart. We cannot be genuinely happy with a closed, tight heart that doesn't want to share anything with anybody.

- Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche's commentary:

*Generosity is the natural expression of a bodhisattva's altruistic mind, free from attachment. A Bodhisattva is clearly aware of the suffering that can be caused by amassing wealth, and by trying to protect and increase it. Should he [or she] ever have any wealth or possessions, his [or her] first thought is to give it all away, using it to make offerings to the Three Jewels [Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha] and to support those who are hungry or without food and shelter.*

## 26. Practicing 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.*

- If we want to cultivate a garden, the first thing we have to do is prepare the soil. We need to dig out a space, pull out the rocks, pull up the weeds, and add the fertiliser, making sure the soil is fertile. Then we need to plant good seeds.

- Likewise **with our spiritual life, when we are trying to cultivate generosity, patience, meditation, and wisdom, applying ourselves to study in order to understand and to cultivate a genuine Dharma life, we need to do the groundwork by first studying the ethical guidelines. Without those basic principles our practice will not benefit even ourselves, so how can we be of benefit to others?**

- **The basic five precepts (not killing, not stealing, not misusing sex, not engaging in false speech, and not destroying our minds through drugs and alcohol) show us the way to live in this world harmlessly.** They have nothing to do with what we eat or what we wear. They are not principles that were important in India 2,600 years ago but are no longer relevant or are only relevant in Asia but not in the West. They are eternal rules of conduct to uphold our spiritual life.

- **They are the discipline of the Dharma.** Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche teaches:

*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 Hinayana, Mahayana, and Vajrayana are supported by the backbone of discipline.*

- It is like a cup. If we want the elixir of the Dharma, we have to have something to contain it in. We have to have a cup, or a vessel, in which this elixir can be kept so that it doesn't just run all over everywhere and get wasted. This container is our basic ethical conduct, the way we live in this world. **When we maintain the basic precepts, any being who comes into our presence knows they have nothing to fear from us. We are not going to hurt or cheat or exploit**



**them. They are safe with us. We are also safe with ourselves because we know that if we maintain the precepts we will not create negative karma; we have promised ourselves and the buddhas to live ethically, simply, and with benevolent purpose.**

- There are levels of ethical conduct, both lay and monastic, but all of them include these basic **five precepts of right living**. It doesn't even matter what religion we hold or do not hold as long as we live harmlessly, not only with our body and speech but especially in our mind.

- It may happen that at first our mind is running wild with anger or lust, and we are inwardly involved in all sorts of negative scenarios. But **if outwardly we appear peaceful and restrained, then we must work to gradually quiet down the mind. If our outward behaviour is impeccable, we can more easily sit and meditate because we don't feel guilty about our outer conduct. The precepts always benefit us. And certainly they benefit the world.** Without them, it is laughable to say we are practitioners.

- **Maybe we are not yet bodhisattvas, but we are trying. This is our practice. Practice makes perfect, as they say. If we want to be perfect, we have to practice. One of the most important points is to start from where we are now.** We are happy to bring our lives into line with where we are aspiring to go. If we are aiming in one direction, but our conduct goes another way because all our friends are going out and partying or because it is the norm in the kind of society we live in, our efforts are counterproductive.

- **Because we are Dharma practitioners, we are not following the norm. Buddha, 2,600 years ago, said that anyone who practices the Dharma is like a fish swimming upstream, when all the rest of the fish are going downstream.** That was in India, in his day. Imagine what he'd say now.

- **Each one of us is responsible for our own life, our own actions, our own speech, and our own mind. No one can do it for us. The five precepts really are a big help to us and act as a reminder of the direction we are trying to go in.**

- **If we lack discipline, we cannot even help ourselves, we cannot even accomplish our own good, because all these actions, like killing, stealing, sexual indulgence, and so forth, hurt us as well as others and create bad karma leading to an unhappy, undisciplined life.** We can't talk about benefiting other beings at the same time that we are killing or stealing or lying to them. Therefore, we observe discipline without samsaric motives. We do not do this just so we can gain merit or so that everybody will look at us and say what a good person we are and think, Wow, how disciplined and what an exemplary Buddhist.

- We are not doing this to show off to others or expect others to think well of us or approve of us - even gurus or fellow practitioners.

- If we sincerely aspire to travel the path, the absolutely necessary thing is an ethical life; whether people know about it or not, approve of it or disapprove, because we know in our heart it is right and in tune with what is true. We uphold the precepts without making a fuss.

- Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche's commentary:

*Without discipline there is no way to achieve either the temporary happiness of liberation from suffering or the ultimate bliss of enlightenment.... Guard your own discipline, therefore, as carefully as you protect your own eyes. For discipline, if you can keep it, is the source of bliss; but if you transgress it, it becomes a source of suffering.*

## 27. Practicing 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.*

- This is really what this text has been about. There's no need to go into great detail here because the previous verses have covered it well.

- If we genuinely wish to transform the heart, we welcome people and circumstances that challenge us, create problems for us, and typically would arouse resentment, anger, humiliation, and negative states of mind.

- Normally, when we meet with situations and people that create these negative feelings in us,

we see them as obstacles, but when we bring them onto our path, we welcome them with patience because they provide us with a chance to practice. Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche notes:

*To practice the paramita of patience is essential, so that you can never be overcome by anger, hatred and despair. Once you have entered the path of the bodhisattvas, you should in any case have kindness in your heart for all beings, seeing them as your former parents.*

***When people are against you and do you harm, you should have even more love, dedicating all your merit to them and taking all their suffering upon yourself.***

- We don't need to go out looking for obnoxious people or problems and difficulties. We only need to stay where we are, and they will come. We welcome them as opportunities to see how far we have gotten on our bodhisattva journey.
- Whatever happens to us, how we respond is an indication of how much we have really understood. If we do get upset and angry, then the point is not becoming angry and upset with ourselves because we're angry and upset. We just remind ourselves, *Okay, now I can see this is where I've got some work to do. I'm really grateful because now I understand. Yes, that situation lit up the area that needs to be worked on.*
- How are we going to cultivate patience and tolerance and forbearance if we do not have people and situations on which to practice? Tolerance is a quality essential for Buddhahood.

## 28. Practicing 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.*

- **Shravakas** are those who are striving for liberation, for Nirvana. **Pratyekabuddhas** are those who attain Buddhahood by their own means and without sharing what they have understood with others. Both are striving for spiritual liberation without arousing bodhichitta. Even to attain that level of liberation just for themselves they make tremendous effort to diligently stay on the path, like someone whose "hair is on fire."
- The Buddha used this analogy to signify urgency. Consider how we would immediately rush to the source of water to pour on our hair, which is in flames. We wouldn't care what delicious fruit there was on the way, what beautiful people there were about, what fascinating programs were on television. Our only aim would be to put out the fire on our head.
- If our hair were on fire, we couldn't care less about anything else. Nothing else has greater importance than extinguishing the fire. We must practice with that one-pointed focus. Nothing else matters.
- With that kind of motivation, for just one person, how much more motivated should those of us who have aroused bodhichitta, the aspiration for enlightenment in order to be of benefit and rescue all other beings! Such an incredibly vast vision, clearly requires us to make an even greater effort. It is intimidating.
- "When people ask, "What is the main obstacle on the path?" I usually say, "Laziness."
- Laziness comes in many forms. There is **gross laziness**, for instance when we don't want to get up in the morning to meditate, or we'd rather watch a movie than go to a Dharma talk.
- Then there is the **laziness of undermining ourselves**, telling ourselves that although other people can practice we can't. We say to ourselves, *I tried to meditate, but my mind was so wild; obviously, I'm not meant to be a meditator. I try to study, it is easy to find something else to do. Obviously, I'm not meant to study. Other people are kind and selfless, but not me, I've always had a hard time thinking of anybody outside of myself. I can't do this bodhisattva thing.*
- We constantly undermine and demean ourselves. We cut away at our confidence in our own potential. This is just an excuse not to make an effort. If I tell myself I can't do it, then I feel all right about not trying. This might look like humility or lack of confidence. It is just a subtle form of laziness.
- Shantideva said that there is a difference between pride or arrogance (a mental defilement), and self-confidence. Without self-confidence, we will never be able to follow the path. It is important to listen to what we are telling ourselves. As soon as we try to quiet the mind down, we become conscious of an endless inner dialogue carrying on inside. What is that dialogue

telling us? What are we telling ourselves over and over? Are we encouraging ourselves, inspiring ourselves, thinking, *Well, yes, I have this problem and I have these faults, but never mind. This is what the Dharma is for. The Dharma is for helping us to overcome and transform our faults. If we were perfect, we wouldn't need the Dharma.*

- Or is our mind telling us how we have always been stupid; how we have always failed at everything we've tried; how basically we're not capable of anything; how, if we try practicing Dharma we are not going to succeed, so why bother to even try? Many people's minds are their own worst enemies. To endlessly tell ourselves how hopeless we are is not humility.
- The Sanskrit word for a *bodhisattva* (which means "an enlightened being" or "a spiritual being,") was translated into Tibetan as *changchub sempah*. The word for *bodhi* in Tibetan is *changchub*, but the translation of *sempah* is interesting. *Sems* means the "heart-mind." But *sattva*, meaning "a being," was translated as *pawo*, which is a hero or a warrior. *Bodhisattva* was translated in Tibetan to mean "an enlightened warrior" or "a spiritual hero." There is something heroic about that word in Tibetan.
- We have to be heroic. We have to be brave. We have to be courageous. We are vowing to attain enlightenment in order to benefit all beings. We can't sit here and say, "Oh, I don't know. I can't meditate. It is very difficult." We have to believe in ourselves. Of course Buddhism is about getting rid of the self, but in the meantime, while we still imagine we have a self, we must cultivate a heroic sense of our potential. We have to use the ego in the service of finally transcending the ego. A weak, sad little ego that is always telling itself how hard life is, and how it can never accomplish anything, is just another form of inverted pride.
- We all have buddha potential. The nature of the mind is completely fine. It may be a little obscured, but when we have good impulses, we know that our true nature is coming out. The negative impulses that we have do not come from our true inborn nature. We just have to uncover who we really are. We can't tell ourselves that we can't do it and use that as an excuse not to try. Anybody can do it if they try hard enough and keep trying.
- It is the same with any other skill. Perhaps we are not going to become Rubenstein, but we can learn to play the piano. If we keep practicing, however many times we need to play the scales over and over, hitting the wrong notes, eventually the music will begin to come. But if we give up after the second lesson, then what? We tell ourselves we are not musical when the reality is we have not been diligent, we have been lazy.
- The analogy of having one's hair on fire may seem somewhat extreme. But nonetheless, as this text has been saying, we should take our life and everything that happens to us and make it our practice. This means that we don't just think of our practice as sitting on our cushion or going to a Dharma course or reading a Dharma book, and the rest of the time is just so much worldly activity where our minds can go in all directions. Everything we do, if we do it with mindfulness and awareness, can be transformed into a practice.
- The **third kind of laziness** is being involved in too many activities, even virtuous ones, as a way to **avoid** getting down to more focused practice to transform the heart-mind. Those who run Dharma centres or social projects should be conscious of the potential to get so busy in doing what looks like virtuous activities that they forget what they are really trying to do, which is to cultivate and transform the heart-mind. Even if we are working in a Dharma centre very devotedly, we still need to make it our practice.
- Our hard work can be just another form of avoidance. Avoidance of what is really important, which is the cultivation, the taming, the training, and the transcending of our conceptual mind.
- Without effort we accomplish nothing. Without effort nothing comes to us. Wishing for it to arrive does not work. If we don't make any effort, we are never going to get anywhere.
- This whole text has been about how to skilfully transform our lives into an ongoing Dharma practice so that nothing is wasted, everything is taken on the path. Whatever we are doing can be an expression of our inner practice; to transform everyday events and encounters into our Dharma practice, our path on the way to Buddhahood. On the outside these texts look simple, but they contain precious instructions and their meaning is important and profound.
- Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche:

*To awaken and to develop all the paramitas, diligence is vital. Diligence is the joyous effort and active determination to carry out positive actions, without any expectations or self-satisfaction.*

## 29. Practicing 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.*

• The basic formula of Buddhist meditation has two parts: **shamatha** and **vipashyana**. Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche outlines the following in his commentary:

*Examine body, speech, and mind, and you will find that mind is the most important of the three. If your mind is thoroughly trained in sustained calm and profound insight (shamatha and vipashyana), your body and your speech will naturally follow your mind along the path of liberation.*

• The first is **shamatha**, or “**calm abiding**,” which is the practice of getting our minds calm and relaxed but fully attentive. All the turbulence inside begins to abate and slow down. At the same time, we hone and sharpen our concentration to become single-pointed. We aim here to have our attention so focused that wherever we want to place it, there it rests.

• We cannot really understand the mind until the surface chatter has quieted down. Normally, when we start to meditate the mind is busy and doesn’t want to concentrate on where we place it. When we want to pay attention to the breath, we think of everything but the breath. We bring back the attention to the breath, and a few seconds later we have to bring it back again. This is normal when initially we try to practice. We just need patience and perseverance. As the mind calms down and becomes centred, it becomes more supple and workable.

• When we try to concentrate using our ordinary mind, it is like pouring water on wax paper. It just runs off. But once the mind has quieted down, it is like pouring water onto blotting paper. It soaks right in. Then, whatever practice we engage in we become one with immediately and results come quickly.

• The Buddha always recommended that we start with shamatha practice first, before doing anything else.

• In advanced **shamatha** practice, there are levels called the **dhyanas**, or mental absorptions. There are the four form absorptions and the four formless absorptions. Siddhartha practiced all of them before he became a buddha and then explained that these rarefied “formless” mind states (such as realisation of the infinity of space and the infinity of consciousness) are not in and of themselves liberation, because these states are impermanent and still within the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth.

• Therefore, in the Tibetan tradition these rarefied states are not emphasised, although to attain the first dhyana is useful because then the mind is unified and able to remain steady.

• The first dhyana is a meditative state of focus and discernment along with an arising of joy. In that state, our concentration is now tamed, flexible, workable, and malleable, so that whatever we want to do, the mind can cooperate. This is useful because then the mind is unified and able to remain steady.

• After having tamed the mind through shamatha practice, it is calm, still, and clear. We are completely focused and at one with what we are doing. We can now use that clear and focused attention to investigate and gain insight into the mind itself. This is called **vipashyana, or clear insight**.

• Some people don’t like to do this because with shamatha after a while there are few or even no thoughts. It is calm, and the mind feels spacious and clear. We feel we could just sit there blissfully absorbed forever. When people are told that now they have to start thinking and investigating, they fear that this is a step backward. But actually it is not.

• We have cleaned and sharpened the mind like a scalpel, so now it is razor sharp. Now we have to start dissecting by directly looking at the mind. What is a thought? Where do thoughts come from? Where do they go? Who is thinking?

• All these many different questions we start asking ourselves inwardly with a great big

question mark. We look. If there are no thoughts, we bring some thoughts up to look at them. Then we question them to death. It is an interrogation: Where do you come from? What do you really look like? Where are you going? Where do you normally live? Okay, what's your name? Don't tell me that! C'mon, try again...

- We look and we look. Then we look at who is looking. In this way, we begin to understand how we live. Whatever stimuli we seem to receive from the outside and whatever we are thinking about on the inside is all thought.
- Everything is based on thoughts: our beliefs, our memories, our identity, our judgments, everything. This is important because people even go to war and kill others and themselves for what they think and believe. It is all based on thoughts.
- What is thought? We never look. We are so busy looking outside, we forget to look within at who is thinking. Through this method we can finally transcend all of this duality to come back to the nature of the mind itself.
- The nature of the mind itself transcends thought, and at the same time it includes and permeates all our mental activities. So it is compared to space, which is out there and also in here and everywhere; where is space not?
- The nature of the mind, our pure awareness, is vibrant. It is not something static, because it is the knowing aspect of our mind. Whatever happens, that knowing quality, that essential awareness, is there.
- Because our primordial awareness is so covered over with all the clouds of our thinking and emotions, we don't actually experience the awareness in itself.
- We are not conscious of being conscious, because we are too busy thinking.
- Once we recognise our true nature, then everything becomes obvious.
- To sustain this realisation is difficult. It is like waking up for one moment from a dream (*Aha, that was just a dream*) then we fall asleep again. But next time we have kind of an inkling that this is just a dream now. We still have that memory, even though it is not very clear, that there was another level of consciousness called "awake." This is why Tibetan Buddhism has an emphasis on dream yoga & lucid dreaming to help us to recognise dreams while we're asleep.
- Basically, all our life is just a dream from which we are trying to wake up.
- To be satisfied with tranquility and going into the dhyanas, or even with just investigating the conceptual mind, is not enough to liberate us. We need to recognise our primordial awareness and then learn how to dwell within that state of nondual presence continually, day and night, waking or sleeping. That is the path.
- The nature of primordial awareness is emptiness and lucid cognisance. We know because we are aware. But what is that awareness? What is it? That is what we have to discover.

## 30. Practicing Wisdom

*In the absence of wisdom, perfect enlightenment cannot be attained*

*Through the other five perfections alone.*

*Therefore, to cultivate wisdom combined with skilful means*

*And free from the three concepts is the practice of a bodhisattva.*

- What we mean by the word **wisdom** is an experiential understanding of the empty nature of all things.
- The main thing we are considering here is why Thogme Sangpo is suggesting that without wisdom, enlightenment cannot be attained by having the other five paramitas.<sup>9</sup>
- In the context of the other five paramitas, merely acquiring generosity, morality, patience, effort, and concentration/meditation, based on the concept that it is "I" who am doing this and therefore not understanding emptiness and "no self", will not result in enlightenment. It will result in making lots of merit but those five paramitas alone will not give us the breakthrough.
- Therefore it is specified that to attain enlightenment we need to cultivate wisdom along with skilful means (the other five paramitas). And all of these need to be free from what are called the **"three concepts."**
- Now to explain the three concepts, here's an example: I give a packet of chocolates to a

<sup>9</sup> **Paramitas**, (perfections) which are generosity, discipline, patience, diligence, concentration, and wisdom.

friend because my friend likes them and I want her to be happy, or maybe even because I am especially attached to chocolates myself and I want to work on my sense of renunciation. Whatever the reason, I give it to her with *good motivation*. That act of generosity will make merit, or positive karma, and then what I do with the merit is up to me.

- This action is caught by the three false concepts:
  - (1) there is a subject (the person who is giving),
  - (2) there is an act being performed (giving), and
  - (3) there is a recipient (the friend).
- There is also the additional belief that all these actually exist just as I think they do. *Specifically, the idea of subject, action, and object and the belief in their absolute existence as we conceive it with our conceptual mind bind and capture us.*
- Therefore, that action in itself will still bind us to samsara. Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche points this out when he says the following:

*A thorough, experiential understanding of emptiness is the only antidote to the belief in an “I,” in a truly existing ‘self’. Once you recognise emptiness, all your attachment to such a ‘self’ will vanish without trace. Realisation will blaze forth, like a brilliant sun rising in the sky, transforming darkness into light.*

- **The actions of generosity, patience, diligence, discipline, and concentration themselves are good, but in order to become an actual means of opening up to ultimate reality, they must be joined with wisdom. Without wisdom to overcome the underlying delusion we cannot be free. It doesn't liberate us because it is still an ego-centred action: ‘I’ am virtuous, ‘I’ am generous, ‘I’ am patient. There's always an ‘I’ there, and so those meritorious actions alone cannot liberate; they need to be joined with *right view*. This means understanding from the beginning that there has ultimately *been no one to give, nothing to be given, and no one to receive.***
- Through this genuine realisation of emptiness and the nature of the mind, we will spontaneously perform all these actions without them being joined to the idea of a personal, immutable, solid *me* at the centre of everything. We will experience an open spaciousness instead of being trapped in our usual tight, conceptual thinking. This is liberation of the mind and why wisdom is the crown jewel of Buddhism. Without wisdom free from the three concepts of grasping at subject or self, object or other, and action, the five paramitas by themselves will not take us to enlightenment. It could also be said that the other paramitas are the legs and wisdom is the eyes. If we are trying to reach the goal, either we've got the legs to travel, but we can't see where we are going, or we have eyes but no legs, so we are not going to get very far. We need both eyes and legs to travel the path to enlightenment.

## 31. Examining Oneself

*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.*

- We have to look at our own actions and our own mind. When there are faults, when there are problems, when there are difficulties, we have to acknowledge them. It doesn't mean that we beat ourselves over the head. It doesn't mean we think we are bad people. Rather, it means that we need to get to work on these problems, we need to take our proverbial scrawny legs to the gym and start running on the treadmill!
- The point is that we need to see (and acknowledge) the problem in order to set about remedying it. It is the same as needing to realise that we are sick before we can take the treatment. It is not that we feel guilty or punish ourselves because we have some illness.
- Once we acknowledge that there is some problem, we then seek to find how to make ourselves spiritually healthy again. Our true nature is health, our true nature is Buddha, but our thoughts and our emotional defilements obscure that truth. We have to heal and remove these obscurations, but not in the sense of getting out the whip and flagellating ourselves.
- We acknowledge that there are problems, and as it says in the text, we can deal with these problems because there is always a skilful way. That's the work, that's the path. It is nothing to

get depressed about. In fact, it is something to get energised about. This is our problem so let's get to work on it now.

- Otherwise we can pretend to ourselves, fool ourselves. This is sometimes a problem with people who practice the Dharma. We read all the texts on how perfect bodhisattvas act: they never get upset, they never get angry, and when people cheat them and abuse them, they say, "Oh thank you, my spiritual friend." People read all these texts and think, That's how a bodhisattva has to act, so I am going to be a bodhisattva and act just like that. Then we pretend. We play the role of a person who never gets upset and never gets depressed or angry, because bodhisattvas would not do those things. We pretend to ourselves and especially to others that there's no problem and that we are sincere Dharma practitioners; all the while we are suppressing and ignoring all these problems that are growing in the darkness. Many things are growing in the darkness. We need to open up, to expose them to the light. Then they begin to shrivel, and we can see what's going on in there.

- It is not virtuous to pretend to be who we are not. While it is skilful to aspire to overcome our problems, it is not wise to pretend that there are no problems to overcome. This is especially true in Dharma centres where everyone is trying so hard to be perfect. None of us is perfect. Of course, we try to do the best we can, but we still have to acknowledge to ourselves when problems arise. If someone upsets us, we have to admit that they upset us. Then we can think about how to deal with the upset in a suitable Dharma way, and we try to do so. But to pretend that we are not upset because bodhisattvas never get upset is just denial. It is psychologically unhealthy behaviour, because if we cannot acknowledge the shadow, it grows.

- So if we want to come into our true nature, we have to look at our faults and then work to give them up or transform them. We ask ourselves, *What is the best way for me to deal with this problem that I have?* We search in the texts, ask the teachers, think about it, and finally decide what works for us. Then we do it.

- Once more, we will turn to Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche's commentary on the subject:

- *Ordinarily, whatever you do, say or think is an expression of your belief in the true existence both of yourself as an individual and of phenomena as a whole. Your actions, as long as they are based on that false premise, can only be deluded, and permeated by negative emotions. As you follow a teacher, however, you can learn how to keep everything you do with body, speech, and mind in accordance with the Dharma.*

- *Intellectually, you can probably recognise right from wrong, and truth from delusion. But unless you apply that knowledge in practice all the time, there can be no liberation. You have to bring your own wild mind under control by yourself—no one else can do it for you. No one else but you can know when you have fallen into delusion, and when you are free from it. The only way to do that is to keep looking into your own mind, as if you were using a mirror. Just as a mirror enables you to check if your face is dirty, and to see where the dirt is, so, too, being constantly present in every situation and looking within at your own mind allows you to see whether or not your thoughts, words, and deeds are in accordance with the Dharma.*

## 32. Abandoning Criticising Others

*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.*

- To gossip about others and to denigrate others is definitely a non-virtuous action.
- It creates disharmony, and often talking about others' faults is a way of avoiding one's own shortcomings. We should always listen carefully to what we are saying; actually hear ourselves speak. We should not say anything about someone else that we would not be happy to say in their presence.

- Because all beings have Buddha-nature, disparaging any of them is inappropriate. Instead, we should all respect one another.

- That being said, when we know of someone who is abusing their position, who is acting in ways that are unethical and unacceptable, then, as His Holiness the Dalai Lama recommends, we should speak out, if only to protect others. We don't need to make a major issue out of it,

but we should speak up, for their sake as well as everyone else's sake. If we stay silent (or cover it up) it is a disservice to the person who is abusing their position and everyone else.

- If we don't speak up, they might continue in their corrupt conduct, which is ethically unwholesome and just creating bad karma. Remaining silent or engaging in cover-ups is also a disservice to anyone else who comes under their influence or is harmed by them. It can create an atmosphere of deceit and harm with everyone afraid to speak out honestly. Therefore, sometimes we have to speak out with compassion for both the victims and the perpetrator and to maintain the integrity of the precious path.

- Be very sure of your facts and your interpretation before you do so.

### 33. Not Profiting from Dharma

*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.*

- People who have a large circle of admirers who wish to show their respect and make many offerings. If we are in that position of having lots of fuss made over us, it could promote our sense of arrogance and a love of comfort. Obviously, that is to be avoided. To make offerings and to show respect are positive acts from the side of the donor. We should always honour and respect lamas and teachers. But if the recipient begins to expect such attention and enjoys being the centre of everybody's adoration, then they are in trouble.

- Thogme Sangpo was an important lama in his day, and here he is warning his fellow lamas to watch out because some lamas spend all their time going out to perform household pujas and raking in the offerings. Then they are so busy that they forget what they are really supposed to be doing, which is studying, contemplating, and meditating. This is especially true if they are newly set out on the path, as that is when they should be spending their time studying and practicing. If they get drawn into going on the usual lama circuit then it can happen that their practice declines, and they start to expect people's respect and adoration, which is even worse.

- This is really a big danger, especially in this present day when there are many young incarnate lamas; the rebirths of great lamas who had already set up so many Dharma centres all around the world in the past. These incarnations of great lamas are recognised within a very short time, and if they are not careful, they are sent around the globe because the Dharma centres need to make money and keep the students motivated and interested. These young teenage boys are sent out, and of course everyone adores them because they look so fresh and pretty. They are often cute, but they haven't done much cultivation in this lifetime. These former great lamas from Tibet not only had studied since the age of six but they often spent twenty to thirty years in retreat during their lifetime before they started to teach.

- Nowadays everybody is in such a hurry, and the Dharma centres are not well established in the way that the monasteries were back in Tibet when they didn't really need the lama to be there physically. Then the head lama might only emerge from retreat once or twice a year for important rituals or to give blessings. But nowadays these monasteries in exile rely on outside funding because they don't own the vast quantities of land and villages the way they used to. As a result, they send these young incarnate lamas all around the world before they are ready, when they are still not fully cooked; in fact, they are half baked. It is hard for them, too, since they know they are not ready. They haven't finished all their studies, and they haven't practiced much. Yet there they are, set up on a high throne like they are the Buddha himself. This is very dangerous not only for the students but also for the lamas because they have a huge responsibility, and they haven't even finished their training yet.

- This verse, although it was written six hundred years ago, is actually even more relevant today when we have this whole new batch of "recycled" lamas coming out in this new fashionable edition. Many of them are brilliant, but because they are not properly trained and have not done nearly enough practice, all of the unquestioning adulation they receive could go to their head. There is a notion that is circulated that whatever a lama says must be true, even if it is nonsense. This is the antithesis of Dharma, which places a strong emphasis on critical intellect and analysis. It is dangerous to fall into this kind of belief and behaviour, for the students but also for the so-called lama.



## 34. Giving 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.*

- We like people to speak kind words to us. We don't like them to speak hurtful, harmful, harsh words to us. Since we don't like it, and other people don't like it, we just don't do it.

- Because we have language, we are responsible for our speech. People can be more hurt by words than by physical brutality. In fact, verbal abuse can cause much more lasting harm. We incorrectly say, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never harm me." Tibetans say, "Sticks and stones only break our bones, but harsh words can tear our heart to pieces." It is true, so we should put a guard on our tongue and be careful of what we say; and not just the words but the tone as well. Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche says:

*Most of the wars that devastate the world are started by harsh words. Quarrels, rancorous resentment, and endlessly perpetuated feuds all arise because tolerance and patience are lacking.*

- Parents especially should be careful of what they say to their children because if they speak harshly to them, the children may carry that rebuke all their life. A lot of low self-esteem comes from early childhood, from something that the child heard from their parents who loved them but maybe were irritated at the time and spoke harshly. Many children are damaged from hearing abusive talk directed from parents toward themselves or from their parents to each other.

- We should be careful with our speech. It should be truthful so people can trust that we are not cheating them, we are not telling anything that is not true, but at the same time our words should be kind and helpful, if possible.

- Sometimes we have to say things that seem unkind, but nonetheless, if they are intended to help, then we have to say them. But first we should check on our genuine motivation.

- Also we should not engage too much in a lot of garrulous chatter. Some people just babble away, saying aloud whatever is going through their head. This is just distraction. Who needs it? We should be conscious of our speech and the effect it has on others. Sometimes the best speech is simply noble silence.

## 35. Cutting 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.*

- It is important to cultivate precise and clear mindfulness and the vigilance that oversees what we are doing and checks up on our state of mind. Here 'mindfulness' means being clearly present and knowing what we are doing and thinking and feeling while we are doing it. Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche notes the following in his commentary on this verse:

*When your mind is distracted, you can be bitten by a mosquito without your even noticing it. But when your mind is quiet, you will feel a mosquito bite straight away. In the same way, the mind needs to be relaxed and quiet if it is to become aware of its empty nature. The practice of **shamatha** (calm abiding) is done for this reason, and through such practice even a person with strong emotions will gradually acquire self-control and inner calm. When the mind comes to a stable state of relaxed concentration, your habitual tendencies fade away by themselves, while altruism and compassion naturally develop and expand. Eventually, you will come to a state of ease in the unceasing flow of the absolute nature.*

- This vigilance doesn't need to remain all the time; it just looks in and checks. Is our mind distracted, is it sinking, is it full of negative thoughts? What's going on there? When it checks, if everything is running smoothly, then it recedes back and comes back later to check again. It ensures that the mind is doing what it should be doing.

- The more precise our sense of presence is, the more conscious we are of what is happening

in the moment, the more clear and vivid that becomes. Then we are able to catch these **negative emotions like attachment and anger, jealousy and pride**, and all the other negative emotions. If we can catch the *afflictive emotion* in the moment it arises and see it nakedly, it will dissolve and transform into sharp wisdom energy. This comes with habitual practice.

- Usually if we are used to being angry when something upsets us, or we are used to being greedy every time we see something we like, or we get jealous every time somebody has something that we want, then we just get used to reacting like that. It becomes our neural pathway. Unless we are alert, it is difficult to apply the antidote once we are way down the road to expressing our habitual afflictive emotions of anger, greed, pride or jealousy.

- We need to develop mindfulness, a clarity of mind that rests in the moment and is conscious of these habitual negative emotions as soon as they arise, so we can zap them before they carry on gathering momentum and explode into their usual unskillful responses.

- The Buddha said that **mindfulness is the path to liberation**. **Mindfulness means the quality of being present, of being aware, of knowing, which we need to cultivate in our daily life.**

- The Buddha started by saying **first of all to be conscious of our physical movements. When standing know that you are standing. When sitting know that you are sitting and so forth. Then bring that awareness to the feelings and sensations of pleasure, displeasure, and neutrality. Then bring that awareness to the mind; what is mind doing at this moment? And then also to the interaction between external phenomena and our mental input. The path of practice is the path of becoming more conscious, and the more conscious we become, the quicker we can deal with the negative emotions as they arise.**

## 36. Being Mindful

*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.*

- We have to *know* what is going on in our mind while it is going on and not just get engulfed and swept away by the flood of our thoughts and feelings. It is important to be continually mindful and alert, asking, *What is the state of my mind?* At the same time, we also need to accomplish good for others. Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche instructs us to do the following:

*Every day, check to what extent you are applying the teachings, how often you are managing to control your mind, and how many times you are falling under the power of negative emotions. Examining your own progress in this way will help you to decrease your clinging to the ordinary concerns of this life, and to increase your confidence in the teachings.*

The matching verse from Langri Thangpa's *Eight Verses for Training the Mind*:

*In all my actions may I watch my mind,*

*And as soon as disturbing emotions arise,*

*May I forcefully stop them at once,*

*Since they will hurt both me and others.*

- When we are sitting in our meditation, if we are observing the mind, which is an excellent thing to do, we are just watching the thoughts streaming by, like the traditional example of someone sitting on the banks of the river just watching the water going by. We are not plunging into the river and being swept along, as we normally would be. Now we are sitting back on the banks. Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche described it as sitting in a train and watching all the scenery go by. We just observe. We don't jump off the train to explore everything that is passing by. We are sitting in a train just observing what is passing by.

- During our formal meditation, when we are sitting in our posture, we do not judge our thoughts. We do not discriminate between thoughts, labelling some good and some bad. All thoughts and feelings are just thoughts and feelings. They are just empty energy. They are not "me," they are not "mine."

- We recognise the totally impermanent nature of all our conceptual thinking.

- At the same time, we develop the quality of being mindful, of being aware and conscious of what is going on in the mind. How to be present. During the day, in post-meditation, outside our

formal meditation when we are just letting things go by (as we go about all our activities) we should still be aware of our mind. We should observe the mind at all times or as often as we can remember to.

- Tenzin Palmo suggests making a commitment to observe the mind three times in every hour. Each hour on three occasions simply look at what the mind is doing at that moment: what am I thinking, what am I feeling at this moment? Then gradually as we begin to do that, as that ability to be mindful grows, we become more conscious, more awake, and more present, and ready during the day “as soon as disturbing emotions arise.” Disturbing emotions are the *kleshas*, which are attachment, [anger, ignorance, pride or conceit, and doubt](#). As soon as a negative emotion arises, any negative emotion that disturbs the mind, then we should immediately recognise and face it.

- We recognise the underlying feeling of the thought as anger or aversion, irritation, annoyance, or self-righteousness. Or there is greed or grasping, attachment and so forth, or whatever negative emotion is underpinning the thoughts.

- These feelings and thoughts create a lot of problems for us and for everybody else, so it is important that in all activities, we examine our mind.

- Before doing anything, we should examine the underlying motivation, because as the Buddha said, “**Karma is intention.**” It is not so much what we do but why we do it.<sup>10</sup>

- The karmic results are different when the intention is different. This is why, when we are undertaking any action, it is important for us to see as honestly as possible the underlying intention behind us performing this action of body or speech.

- It isn’t just the action performed or words that we speak, but how it is said or done and with what intention. That is what counts.

- We should be careful of what is going on in our mind during the day because our thoughts will lead our speech and our actions. If we want our speech and actions to be pure and beneficial, then we should be careful that the underlying motivation is likewise pure and beneficial.

- If we see that there is negativity in the mind, we should recognise it because it is from this negativity, the disturbing emotions, and if we act then it will be unskillfully and cause a lot of problems for ourselves and for others and make bad karma.

- In general, when we are not mindful, we mess up. We need to be conscious of what’s going on in our mind. If our mind is genuinely harmless and benign, it is unlikely that we will act unskillfully to harm either ourselves or others.

- We cannot blame others for our troubles, because the problem really lies within.

- “[May I firmly face them and avert them](#)” means to recognise negative emotions and then mitigate them. First we have to look at our thoughts and emotions. When afflictive emotions of any kind arise, such as anger, greed, pride, jealousy, or fear, at that moment if we face them honestly, without reacting, we can recognise that emotion for what it is. In this way we can decide how to deal with it. Throughout all Buddhist schools there is an emphasis on how to deal with the five afflictive emotions at all levels. We can uproot, transform, or transcend these powerful forces that underlie so much of egoic existence. Therefore, first we have to recognise a negative emotion that has arisen. We have to face it. We can’t pretend that it is not really a negative emotion. It is a negative emotion. Then, depending on our practice and the level of our skill, we deal with it.

- For example, if we suddenly find ourselves feeling angry, then we could try replacing anger with forbearance and patient endurance or arouse compassion and loving-kindness. Or we could face that anger and transform it into its essential energetic nature called mirrorlike wisdom. Or, as Shantideva says, if we are really angry and we can’t at that point change the anger into a more positive emotion, then we should act like a piece of wood and just not react.

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<sup>10</sup> To take an extreme example, consider a murderer who takes up a sharp knife or scalpel and plunges it in somebody’s heart, and they die. The underlying motivation is hatred or jealousy, which caused him to want to kill this person. On the other hand, we have a highly skilled surgeon, who likewise takes up the scalpel and inserts it into the chest in order to carry out a heart operation. Unfortunately, it fails and the patient dies, but the motivation of the surgeon was very different from the murderer. The intention of the surgeon was to help and to cure the person, not to harm them and kill them. Essentially, although the action was the same, and the result was the same—the person died—the karmic results would be different because the intention was different.

Breathing in, breathing out, and counting to ten. Later, we can read a book on how to deal with anger.

- The point is that everybody has negative emotions. If we didn't have any negative emotions at all, that would mean that we were totally egoless. In which case we would be arhats, which is wonderful. But most people are not quite there yet. We all have faults. We all have problems. If it is not one thing, it is another.
- Having negative emotions is not the problem. After all, if we didn't have them, we wouldn't need a path. But the point is to recognise our negative emotions and then apply the antidotes. As long as we are in denial that we have any problems and we delude ourselves into thinking that it is everybody else that is the problem, then nothing will change. We will become more and more habituated to our negative emotions and reactions.
- Once we recognise what the real problem is, we can get to work. Whatever our problem is, there is always a remedy for it. It is similar to when we are sick. If we are in denial that we are sick, then we just get worse. But if we discover what the actual cause of our problem is, then there is probably a good cure, provided that we take the medicine. This is why it is important to observe the mind throughout the day as much as possible in all our actions and recognise what the underlying habitual thoughts and feelings are. If they are negative, we need to recognise that and change them. If they are positive or neutral, then there is no problem.
- We have to become more aware, more centred, more conscious, and more present and at the same time open our heart to the happiness and benefit of others. That should keep us going. People always complain that they have no time to practice. Well as long as we are breathing, we can practice.
- Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche beautifully describes the essence of the practice of a bodhisattva when he says the following:

*• The essence of the practice of a bodhisattva is to transcend self-clinging and dedicate yourself completely to serving others. It is a practice based on your mind, rather than on how your actions might appear externally. True generosity, therefore, is to have no clinging; true discipline to have no desire; and true patience to be without hatred. Bodhisattvas can even give away their kingdom, their life, or their spouse and children because they do not have the slightest inner feeling of poverty or need and are ready to fulfil others' needs unconditionally. It does not matter how your actions might seem to anyone else; no particular "compassionate" appearance is necessary. What you do need is a pure mind. For instance, sweet and pleasing words spoken without any intention of helping others are meaningless. Even birds can sing beautiful songs. Wild animals such as tigers behave in a loving way to their cubs, but theirs is a partial love mixed with attachment. It does not extend to all beings. A bodhisattva possesses impartial love for all beings.*

## 37. Dedicating on Behalf of Others

*Dedicating to enlightenment*

*Through wisdom purified of the three concepts*

*All merit achieved by such endeavour,*

*To remove the suffering of numberless beings, is the practice of a bodhisattva.*

- The first two lines of this final verse mean that we dedicate the virtue without grasping at the notion that there is anyone who has dedicated the virtue, that there's anyone to dedicate it to, or there is any dedication going on. The second two lines indicate why we dedicate this merit; so that all sentient beings will be free of suffering. Amen.
- Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche explains how to dedicate merit in the following passage:  
*To dedicate merit in the best possible way (a way entirely free from the three concepts of a subject, an object, and an action) is possible only for someone who has fully realised emptiness. How, then, should we ordinary beings dedicate the merit, incapable as we are of such perfect dedication? We can do it by following in the footsteps of those who have that realisation. The bodhisattva Samantabhadra mastered the ocean-like infinitude of a bodhisattva's aspirations, while Manjushri and Avalokiteshvara mastered the ocean-like infinitude of a bodhisattva's activity to benefit beings. When you dedicate merit, do it with the idea of emulating the way these great bodhisattvas dedicated merit, and use the*

*perfect verses spoken by the Buddha or his followers who realised the ultimate, empty nature of everything. It gives your prayers much more power and efficacy.*

## Conclusion

- *The Thirty-Seven Verses on the Practice of a Bodhisattva* by Thogme Sangpo concludes:

*Following the teachings of the holy beings,  
I have arranged the points taught in the sutras, tantra, 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.*

*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.*

*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.*

*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.*

Quote from Ngawang Tenzin Norbu (1867–1940), a Nyingma master known for his own influential commentary of the Thirty-Seven Verses:

*In this realm of samsara, all of the suffering there is, without exception, arises from self-cherishing due to wishing for one's own happiness. Whatever mundane or transcendent happiness and benefit there is—such as the ultimate happiness on the level of a perfect Buddha—all of it is born from the intention to benefit and cherish others.*

## Bodhisattva Vows - Ethical Code

### The Eighteen Root Bodhisattva Precepts

(Note. When a precept has more than one aspect, doing just one aspect constitutes a transgression of the precept.)

1. a) Praising yourself, or b) belittling others because of attachment to receiving material offerings, praise and respect.
2. Not giving material aid, or b) not teaching the Dharma to those who are suffering and without a protector, because of miserliness.
3. Not listening although another declares his/her offence or b) with anger blaming him/her and retaliating.
4. Abandoning the Mahayana by saying that Mahayana texts are not the words of Buddha, or b) teaching what appears to be the Dharma but is not.
5. Taking things belonging to a) Buddha, b) Dharma, or c) Sangha.
6. Abandoning the holy Dharma by saying that texts that teach the three vehicles are not the Buddha's word.
7. With anger a) depriving ordained ones of their robes, beating and imprisoning them, or b) causing them to lose their ordination even if they have impure ethical conduct, for example, by saying that being ordained is useless.
8. Committing any of the five extremely destructive actions: a) killing your mother, b) killing your father, c) killing an arhat, d) intentionally drawing blood from a Buddha, or e) causing schism in the sangha community by supporting and spreading sectarian views.
9. Holding wrong views (contrary to the teachings of Buddha, such as denying the existence of the Three Jewels or the law of cause and effect, etc.)
10. Destroying a a) town, b) village, c) city, or d) large area by means such as fire, bombs, pollution, or black magic.
11. Teaching emptiness to those whose minds are unprepared.
12. Causing those who have entered the Mahayana to turn away from working for the full awakening of Buddhahood and encouraging them to work merely for their own liberation from suffering.
13. Causing others to abandon completely their precepts of self-liberation and embrace the Mahayana.
14. Holding and causing others to hold the view that the Fundamental Vehicle does not abandon attachment and other delusions.
15. Falsely saying that you have realised profound emptiness and that if others meditate as you have, they will realise emptiness and become as great and as highly realised as you.
16. Taking gifts from others who were encouraged to give you things originally intended as offerings to the Three Jewels. Not giving things to the Three Jewels that others have given you to give to them, or accepting property stolen from the Three Jewels.
17. a) Causing those engaged in serenity meditation to give it up by giving their belongings to those who are merely reciting texts or b) making bad disciplinary rules that cause a spiritual community not to be harmonious.
18. Abandoning the two bodhicitta (aspiring and engaging).

Four binding factors must be present to completely transgress sixteen of the root precepts. The transgression of two precepts, numbers 9 and 18, requires only the act itself. These four are:

1. Not regarding your action as destructive, or not caring that it is even though you recognise that the action is transgressing a precept.
2. Not abandoning the thought to do the action again.
3. Being happy and rejoicing in the action.
4. Not having a sense of integrity or consideration for others regarding what you have done.

To keep yourself from experiencing the results of transgressing the precepts, purify by means of the four opponent powers. Prostrations to the thirty-five Buddhas and the Vajrasattva meditation are excellent methods to purify transgressions. If your bodhisattva ordination has been damaged by completely breaking a root precept, purify and then retake the precepts before a spiritual mentor or before the objects of refuge—the Buddhas and bodhisattvas—that you have visualised.

## The Forty-six Auxiliary Bodhisattva Precepts

To eliminate obstacles to the far-reaching practice of generosity and obstacles to the ethical conduct of gathering virtuous actions, abandon:

1. Not making offerings to the Three Jewels every day with your body, speech and mind.
2. Acting out selfish thoughts of desire to gain material possessions or reputation.
3. Not respecting your elders (those who have taken the bodhisattva precepts before you have or who have more experience than you do).
4. Not answering sincerely asked questions that you are capable of answering.
5. Not accepting invitations from others out of anger, pride, or other negative thoughts.
6. Not accepting gifts of money, gold, or other precious substances that others offer to you.
7. Not giving the Dharma to those who desire it.

To eliminate obstacles to the far-reaching practice of ethical conduct, abandon:

8. Forsaking those who have broken their ethical conduct: not giving them advice or not relieving their guilt.
9. Not acting in accord with your pratimoksa precepts.
10. Doing only limited actions to benefit sentient beings, such as strictly keeping the vinaya rules in situations when not doing so would be of greater benefit to others.
11. Not doing non-virtuous actions of body and speech with loving compassion when circumstances deem it necessary in order to benefit others.
12. Willingly accepting things that either you or others have obtained by any of the wrong livelihoods of hypocrisy, hinting, flattery, coercion, or bribery.
13. Being distracted by and having a strong attachment to amusement, or without any beneficial purpose leading others to join in distracting activities.
14. Believing and saying that followers of the Mahayana should remain in cyclic existence and not try to attain liberation from afflictions.
15. Not abandoning destructive actions that cause you to have a bad reputation.
16. Not correcting your own afflictive actions or not helping others to correct theirs.

To eliminate obstacles to the far-reaching practice of fortitude, abandon:

17. Returning insults, anger, beating, or criticism with insults and the like.
18. Neglecting those who are angry with you by not trying to pacify their anger.
19. Refusing to accept the apologies of others.
20. Acting out thoughts of anger.

To eliminate obstacles to the far-reaching practice of joyous effort, abandon:

21. Gathering a circle of friends or disciples because of your desire for respect or profit.
22. Not dispelling the three types of laziness (sloth, attraction to distracting activities and self-pity and discouragement).
23. With attachment, spending time idly talking and joking.

To eliminate obstacles to the far-reaching practice of meditative stabilisation, abandon:

24. Not seeking the means to develop concentration, such as proper instructions and the right conditions necessary to do so. Not practicing the instructions once you have received them.
25. Not abandoning the five hindrances to meditative stabilisation: sensual desire, malice, dullness and drowsiness, restlessness and regret and doubt.
26. Seeing the good qualities of the taste of meditative stabilisation and becoming attached to it.

To eliminate obstacles to the far-reaching practice of wisdom, abandon:

27. Abandoning the scriptures or paths of the Fundamental Vehicle as unnecessary for one following the Mahayana.
28. Exerting effort principally in another system of practice while neglecting the one you already have, the Mahayana.
29. Without a good reason, exerting effort to learn or practice the treatises of non-Buddhists which are not proper objects of your endeavour.
30. Beginning to favour and take delight in the treatises of non-Buddhists although studying them for a good reason.
31. Abandoning any part of the Mahayana by thinking it is uninteresting or unpleasant.
32. Praising yourself or belittling others because of pride, anger and so on.
33. Not going to Dharma gatherings or teachings.
34. Despising your spiritual mentor or the meaning of the teachings and relying instead on their mere words; that is, if a teacher does not express him/herself well, not trying to understand the meaning of what he/she says, but criticising.

To eliminate obstacles to the ethical conduct of benefiting others, abandon:

35. Not helping those who are in need.
36. Avoiding taking care of the sick.
37. Not alleviating the sufferings of others.
38. Not explaining what is proper conduct to those who are reckless.
39. Not benefiting in return those who have benefited you.
40. Not relieving the sorrow of others.
41. Not giving material possessions to those in need.
42. Not working for the welfare of your circle of friends, disciples, servants, etc.
43. Not acting in accordance with the wishes of others if doing so does not bring harm to yourself or others.
44. Not praising those with good qualities.
45. Not acting with whatever means are necessary according to the circumstances to stop someone from doing harmful actions.
46. Not using miraculous powers, if you possess them, to stop others from doing destructive actions.

See also [Bodhisattva Vows pdf](#)

## Root Text

Although he sees that all phenomena are free of coming and going,  
He strives only for the benefit of beings.  
To the protector Avalokiteshvara and the supreme guru  
I continually pay homage with my three gates. (A)

The sources of benefit and happiness, the perfect buddhas,  
Come from accomplishing the genuine dharma.  
Since this depends on understanding their practices,  
I will explain the practices of the bodhisattvas. (B)

Now we have this great vessel of freedoms and resources, so difficult to obtain.  
So that we may liberate ourselves and others from the ocean of samsara,  
Day and night, without distraction,  
To listen, contemplate, and meditate is the practice of a bodhisattva. (1)

Attachment toward our close ones stirs us up like water.  
Aggression toward our enemies burns us like fire.  
Dark with ignorance, we forget what to adopt or reject.  
To abandon one's homeland is the practice of a bodhisattva. (2)

When we abandon negative places, the afflictions gradually diminish.  
In the absence of any distraction, virtuous activity naturally increases.  
Through clear awareness, certainty in the dharma arises.  
To keep to solitary places is the practice of a bodhisattva. (3)

We will part from every loved one we have long associated with.  
We will leave behind the wealth we have so diligently amassed.  
Our consciousness, the guest, will cast away this body, the guesthouse.  
To let go of this life is the practice of a bodhisattva. (4)

If you spend time with this one, the three poisons will proliferate;  
The deeds of hearing, contemplating, and meditating will diminish;  
And loving-kindness and compassion will become extinct.  
To abandon negative friends is the practice of a bodhisattva. (5)

If you rely on this one, your faults will become exhausted  
And your qualities will expand like the waxing moon.  
To cherish a genuine spiritual friend  
Even more than one's own body is the practice of a bodhisattva. (6)

Themselves also bound in the prison of samsara,  
Whom do the worldly gods have the power to protect?  
Therefore, when seeking a refuge, to go for refuge  
In the three jewels that will not deceive you is the practice of a bodhisattva. (7)



The Sage taught that the sufferings of the lower realms,  
Which are extremely difficult to bear, are the results of negative actions.  
Therefore, even at the risk of one's own life,  
To never commit negative actions is the practice of a bodhisattva. (8)

The pleasures of the three realms, like dewdrops on a blade of grass,  
Are objects that perish in an instant.  
To strive for the supreme state of liberation  
That is never changing is the practice of a bodhisattva. (9)

From beginningless time, my mothers have loved me.  
If they suffer, how can I worry about my own happiness?  
Therefore, in order to liberate sentient beings, which are boundless,  
To engender bodhichitta is the practice of a bodhisattva. (10)

All suffering, without exception, arises from the desire for one's own happiness.  
Perfect buddhas are born from benefiting others.  
Therefore, to perfectly exchange one's own happiness  
For others' suffering is the practice of a bodhisattva. (11)

Even if someone, out of intense desire, steals all my wealth  
Or makes another do so,  
To dedicate my body, possessions, and all virtue of the three times  
To them is the practice of a bodhisattva. (12)

Should someone sever my head  
Even though I did not do the slightest wrong,  
Through the power of compassion, to take on  
Their negativity for myself is the practice of a bodhisattva. (13)

Even if some should proclaim unpleasant things  
About me throughout the three-thousand-fold universe,  
With a mind of loving-kindness, to speak of their good qualities  
In return is the practice of a bodhisattva. (14)

Even if several people in the midst of a crowd  
Should reveal my hidden faults and speak harsh words,  
To hold them to be my spiritual friends  
And bow to them with respect is the practice of a bodhisattva. (15)

Even if someone I cared for like my child Should act as though  
I were their enemy,  
Like a mother toward her child stricken with illness  
To love them even more is the practice of a bodhisattva. (16)

Even if someone my equal or lower  
Should insult me influenced by pride,  
To place them with respect, as if they were a guru,  
At the crown of my head is the practice of a bodhisattva. (17)

Even when I am made destitute, people constantly berate me,  
And grave illness and evil spirits strike me,  
To take on still the suffering and misdeeds of all beings for myself  
Without losing heart is the practice of a bodhisattva. (18)

Even if I become renowned and everyone pays me respect,  
Or should I obtain wealth like that of Vaishravana,  
To see the wealth of samsara as having no essence  
And not have pride is the practice of a bodhisattva. (19)

If I do not tame the enemy of my own anger,  
I may subdue external enemies, but they will still increase.  
Therefore, with the army of loving-kindness and compassion,

To tame one's own mind stream is the practice of a bodhisattva. (20)

The sense pleasures are like saltwater:  
However much you partake, that much your craving will increase.  
Whatever objects of attachment arise,  
To immediately abandon them is the practice of a bodhisattva. (21)

Whatever appears is one's own mind.  
Mind is primordially free from extremes of elaboration.  
Knowing this is so, to not mentally engage  
The signs of perceiver and perceived is the practice of a bodhisattva. (22)

Encountering pleasurable objects  
Is like seeing a rainbow in the summertime.  
Although they appear beautiful and real, to see them as not being real  
And relinquish attachment is the practice of a bodhisattva. (23)

The different kinds of suffering are like your child dying in a dream.  
Taking confused appearances as real, how tiring!  
Therefore, when meeting with adverse conditions,  
To see them as confusion is the practice of a bodhisattva. (24)

Since, if you wish for enlightenment, you must give even your body away,  
What is there to be said about giving material objects to others?  
Therefore, to have generosity without hope of  
Being paid in return is the practice of a bodhisattva. (25)

If, lacking discipline, you do not accomplish your own benefit,  
Wishing to accomplish others' benefit is laughable!  
Therefore, to engage in discipline  
Without samsaric craving is the practice of a bodhisattva. (26)

For bodhisattvas who desire a wealth of virtue,  
All harmful actions done to them are like a precious treasure.  
Therefore, to practice patience that is  
Without any malice toward anyone is the practice of a bodhisattva. (27)

Though the hearers and solitary realizers practice only for their own benefit,  
They exert themselves like their hair is on fire.  
Seeing this, to practice diligence, the source of qualities,  
For the sake of all beings is the practice of a bodhisattva. (28)

Knowing that through superior insight endowed with thorough calm abiding  
The mental afflictions are completely subdued,  
To meditate with the concentration that perfectly goes beyond  
The four formless states is the practice of a bodhisattva. (29)

Without prajna, the five paramitas  
Cannot accomplish perfect enlightenment.  
Therefore, to meditate on the prajna that is endowed with means  
And does not conceive the three spheres is the practice of a bodhisattva. (30)

If you do not examine your own confusion,  
You may, under the guise of dharma, do non-dharmic things.  
Therefore, through continual examination,  
To abandon one's confusion is the practice of a bodhisattva. (31)

If, under the power of the afflictive emotions,  
I speak of the faults of another bodhisattva, I diminish myself.  
Therefore, to not point out the faults of those who have  
Entered the Mahayana is the practice of a bodhisattva. (32)

Due to honour and gain, we fight with each other  
And the activities of hearing, contemplating, and meditating diminish.

Therefore, to abandon attachment to the homes of  
Benefactors and loved ones is the practice of a bodhisattva. (33)

Harsh words disturb the minds of others  
And cause bodhisattva activity to diminish.  
Therefore, to abandon harsh words that  
Are unpleasant to others is the practice of a bodhisattva. (34)

When the afflictions are habitual, they are hard to cast away with antidotes.  
Therefore, with mindfulness and attentiveness, wielding the weapon of the antidote,  
To crush the mental afflictions, such as attachment,  
When they first arise is the practice of a bodhisattva. (35)

In short, in whatever you are doing,  
To always, with mindfulness and attentiveness,  
Ask yourself, "What is the state of my mind?"  
And accomplish the benefit of others is the practice of a bodhisattva. (36)

As to these virtues, accomplished through diligence:  
To dedicate them to enlightenment with the wisdom free of the three spheres  
In order to clear away the suffering  
Of limitless beings is the practice of a bodhisattva. (37)

Following after the speech of the noble ones  
And the meaning of what is said in the sutras, tantras, and treatises,  
I have put forth these thirty-seven practices of a bodhisattva  
For those who wish to practice the bodhisattva path. C

Because I am of inferior intellect and little training,  
I do not have any poetic verse to please the learned ones.  
Yet, because I have relied upon the sutras and the noble masters' speech,  
I believe these practices of a bodhisattva to be without error. (D)

Nevertheless, because it is difficult for someone like me with an inferior mind  
To fathom the vastness of bodhisattva conduct,  
I pray the holy ones will forgive  
All faults, such as contradictions and irrelevancies. (E)

By the virtue of that, may all beings  
Through the supreme bodhichitta, both ultimate and relative,  
Become like the protector Avalokiteshvara,  
Who does not abide in the extremes of samsara or nirvana. (F)

# Appendix Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche - The Heart of Compassion - The 37 Practices of a Bodhisattva

## Part One: The Preparation

This section explains how to enter the path, while part 2 contains the instructions on how to actually follow the path according to one's capacities, whether inferior, middling, or superior.

The preparation is covered in seven topics.

### 1. 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.*

At the moment, you are fortunate enough *not* to have taken birth in one of the eight states in which there is no freedom to practice the Dharma, and moreover to be endowed with the ten advantages conducive to 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) born as a tortured spirit, or *preta*, (3) born as an animal, (4) born among barbarians, (5) born as a long-lived god, (6) hold erroneous views, (7) born in a dark *kalpa* in which no buddha has appeared, and (8) born with impaired sense faculties.

**Of the ten advantages conducive to Dharma practice, five pertain to the individual. These are (1) to be born as a human being, (2) born in a central place where the Dharma flourishes, (3) 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 remaining five advantages depend upon circumstances outside yourself. 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, and (10) you have been accepted by a spiritual teacher.**

Longchen Rabjam also details eight intrusive circumstances that cause you to drift away from Dharma, and eight incompatible propensities that limit your natural potential to attain freedom.

The eight intrusive circumstances that cause you to drift away from Dharma are (1) to be greatly disturbed by the five poisonous emotions;<sup>11</sup> (2) to be extremely stupid, and thus easily led astray by unsuitable friends; (3) to fall prey to the devil of a mistaken path; (4) to be distracted by laziness even though you have some interest in Dharma; (5) to lead a wrong way of life, and be afflicted by negative karma; (6) to be enslaved or controlled by others; (7) to practice for mundane reasons; just to be protected from danger or out of fear that you might lack food or other basic necessities; and (8) practice a hypocritical semblance of Dharma in the hope of wealth or fame.

The eight incompatible propensities that limit your natural potential to attain freedom are (1) to be fettered by your family, wealth, and occupations so that you do not have the leisure to practice the Dharma; (2) to have a very corrupt nature that drives you to depraved behaviour, so that even when you meet a spiritual teacher it is very hard to turn your mind to Dharma; (3) to have no fear of samsara's sufferings, and therefore no feeling of disillusionment with samsara, or determination to be free from it; (4) to lack the jewel of faith and therefore have no inclination whatsoever to meet a teacher and undertake the teachings; (5) to delight in negative actions and have no compunction about committing them, thereby turning your back on the Dharma; (6) to have no more interest in Dharma than a dog in eating grass, being therefore unable to develop any positive qualities; (7) to have spoiled your *pratimoksha* vows and Mahayana precepts, and thus to have nowhere else to go but the lower realms of existence, where there is no leisure to practice the Dharma; and (8) having entered the extraordinary path of the Vajrayana, to break *samaya* with your teacher and vajra brothers and sisters, and thus be parted from your natural potential.

If you possess the freedoms and favourable conditions, and can avoid these sixteen additional

<sup>11</sup> **five poisons:** greed, aggression, pride, jealousy, and envy

conditions, you will be free of any hindrances to your practice, and will be able to reach enlightenment. Having this precious human life is like having a well-rigged ship on which to sail across the ocean to an island of treasures. As Shantideva says in *The Way of the Bodhisattva*:

*Cross the sea of emotions  
On the boat of human existence.*

You have not obtained this precious human existence just by chance. It is the result of having heard the 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. To neglect such an opportunity would therefore be very foolish. Do not waste it. Practice day and night.

The very first of the ten advantages is to have taken birth as a human being. Consider the number of beings throughout samsara. To give some simple comparative numerical images, if the number of beings in the hell realms was like the number of particles of dust on the face of the earth, the number of pretas would be like the number of grains of sand in the Ganges, the number of animals like the number of millet grains in a barrel of *chang*, and the number of demigods like the number of snowflakes in a blizzard. But the number of both human and celestial beings would be like no more than the number of dust particles on a fingernail. And there are far fewer human beings than celestial beings; human beings are like the stars at daybreak.

Improbable though the chances were that you have been born as a human being, you can easily see how much more against all odds it is that not only have you been born in a place where the Dharma exists, but also that you take an interest in Dharma; and even more so that you actually put it into practice. That is extremely rare. Look at the small number of individuals interested in practicing the Dharma. Look at how many countries there are in the world, and at those where the Dharma is a living tradition. Even in one such country, how many beings are inspired to practice, and among them how many will actually bring their practice to fruition? Most beings fritter their lives away in meaningless, selfish, trivial activities.

Nevertheless, you might think, "I'll continue my ordinary activities until I'm fifty years old, but then I will dedicate myself to the Dharma." Such ideas show an alarming lack of discernment and ignore the fact that death comes without warning. As it is said,

*The time of death is uncertain;  
The cause of death is unpredictable.*

How many of those alive in the world tonight will be dead by dawn? To have a human existence is like possessing great riches; it should be put to use right away. Right now is the time to practice Dharma. As Gyalse Thogme himself said:

*He who in autumn does not provide for the coming winter  
Is considered a fool.  
The Dharma alone will help us when we die, and we know that death is certain—  
So not to practice it now is utterly foolish.*

Every day, remind yourself that if you do not study and reflect upon the teachings, meditate, and recite prayers and mantras, at the moment of death you will be helpless. Death is certain. If you wait for the moment of death to begin your practice, it will be too late.

Think about why you are engaging in practice. Wishing to obtain a long life free from illness, or hoping to increase your wealth and influence are petty aims. **Practice to free yourself and all others from the suffering that is samsara.**

To thoroughly appreciate the necessity of practicing the Dharma, it is important to be aware of the extent of suffering throughout samsara. From the bottom to the top of samsara, there is nothing but suffering. Samsara is said to be pervaded by three kinds of suffering: 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 mental darkness, stupidity, and fear 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. In fruitless self-centred attempts to achieve happiness, most human beings commit predominantly negative actions. Unfortunately, all that is generated is more suffering and confusion. The demigods, or *asuras*, suffer from constant fighting and jealousy. The higher gods suffer from the change they endure when their long celestial life of bliss and enjoyment ends, and they fall again into the lower realms.

The formless realms are characterised by the latent, “all-pervasive suffering of the composite.” Beings remain in states of deep, blissful contemplation, but once the good karma that caused and therefore underlies this peaceful condition is exhausted, they will again have to experience the anguish of samsara. They have not dispelled ignorance and have therefore not eradicated the five poisons.

**When buddhas look at samsara with the eyes of their omniscience, they do not see it as an enjoyable place. They are acutely aware of the sufferings of beings, and they see how senseless are the pointless, temporary goals that beings try so hard to attain. It is important to become more and more clearly convinced that the only thing worth achieving is supreme enlightenment. Contemplating the sufferings of samsara, you will naturally develop a strong wish to be liberated from it. Rather than meaninglessly wasting your energy, you will concentrate on practicing the Dharma.**

Even to hear the teachings is something very rare, which only happens once in aeons. That you have met the Dharma now is not just coincidence. It results from your past positive actions. Such an opportunity should not be wasted. **If your mind is in accord with Dharma, you will not experience any problems with the things of this life; while if you are constantly preoccupied with your ordinary pursuits, your problems will increase, and nothing will be accomplished.** As Longchen Rabjam said:

*Our activities are like children's games.*

*If we're doing them they won't end; they'll end if we stop.*

**Determination to be free from samsara, based on disillusionment, is the foundation of all Dharma practice. Unless you have made a clear decision to turn your back on samsara, then however many prayers you recite, however much you meditate, however many years you remain in retreat, it will all be in vain.** You may have a long life, but it will be without essence. You may accumulate great wealth, but it will be meaningless. **The only thing that is really worth doing is to get steadily closer to enlightenment and farther away from samsara.** Think about it carefully.

**Contemplate death and the sufferings of samsara, and you will not want to waste a single moment in pointless distractions and activities,** such as trying to get rich, defeating your enemies, or **spending your life protecting and furthering the interests of those to whom you are attached. You will only want to practice the Dharma.**

A bedridden patient only thinks about getting well again. He or she has no wish to remain sick forever. Likewise, **a practitioner who yearns to leave the miseries of samsara behind will make use of all the ways in which that can be done, such as taking refuge, generating the mind set on attaining enlightenment for the sake of others, undertaking positive actions, and so on, with a firm determination to get out of samsara constantly in mind.**

It is not enough to wish from time to time that you could be free of samsara. That idea must pervade your stream of thinking day and night. A prisoner locked in jail thinks all the time about different ways of getting free; how he might climb over the walls, ask powerful people to intervene, raise money to bribe someone. **Seeing the suffering and imperfection of samsara, never stop thinking about how to gain liberation, with a deep feeling of renunciation.**

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.

**When the Buddha first turned the wheel of Dharma, he taught the Four Noble Truths. The**

**First Noble Truth is that there is suffering, and it should be recognised. The Second Noble Truth is that suffering has a cause, which therefore needs to be given up. That cause is the *kleshas*, the negative emotions or afflicting mental factors. Although there are many such obscured states of mind, the five principal obscurations are desire, aggression, ignorance,<sup>12</sup> pride, and jealousy. The Third Noble Truth is that there is a path that leads beings away from suffering; this path therefore needs to be followed. The Fourth Noble Truth is that suffering can thus be brought to cessation. Through the Four Noble Truths, the Buddha urged us to renounce worldly concerns and strive for liberation from samsara.**

**In our search for the means to be free from samsara, the first step is to listen to the teachings, which explain the different methods of so doing.** In addition to the precious knowledge that is thus acquired, simply hearing the sound of the Dharma being taught (even the sound of the conches and gongs that call the community to gather for teachings) has inconceivable blessings and benefits, the Buddha said, and can liberate beings from rebirth in the lower realms. Through listening to the teachings, even those who lack the faculties to understand their meaning thoroughly will at least gain some notion of the Dharma's qualities. Even a general idea of how to practice the Dharma is already precious.

**The second step is to reflect on what you have heard and try to find the essential meaning in it. Examine your own mind to see whether it is really as the teachings describe or not, and whether you can keep it focused on an object of meditation.**

**Third, once you have a clear idea of the essential meaning of the Dharma, you must try to realise that meaning through your inner experience, and assimilate it into your being. This is called meditation.**

As you progress through these three steps, spiritual qualities will naturally arise, and you will see the truth of the teachings. Those qualities will bloom spontaneously because the buddha nature within you is being revealed. The buddha nature, or *tathagatagarbha*, is present in all beings, but is hidden by obscurations, in the same way that buried gold is hidden by the earth under which it lies. As you listen to, reflect, and meditate on the Dharma, all the inherent qualities of your buddha nature will be actualised. When a field has been carefully prepared and planted with seeds, and all favourable conditions are present, such as temperature, moisture, and warmth, the seeds will germinate and grow into crops.

The scriptures and texts of the Dharma include many profound and detailed teachings. They cover a wide variety of subjects, such as the five traditional sciences.<sup>13</sup> Many people, however, will not be able to hear, reflect, and meditate in detail on all of those texts. In the present text, however, the very essence of all the teachings is laid bare and conveyed in the form of instructions on how a bodhisattva should practice.

Using these instructions, devote yourself entirely to practice. Reflect on their meaning again and again, and try your best to apply them. Eventually, you may wish to go to a solitary mountain retreat to meditate deeply upon them.

It is said that there is nothing, however difficult, that cannot become easy through familiarisation. If you persevere in the practice of these instructions, you will achieve results.

## **2. Abandon 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.*

Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche put it this way:

<sup>12</sup> **Ignorance** includes (a) basic ignorance, the non-recognition of primordial awareness and of the empty nature of phenomena; (b) a dense mental state, chiefly a lack of discernment regarding what should be accomplished and what should be discarded in order to gain freedom from samsara; (c) doubt regarding the truth of karma (the law of cause and effect), the existence of past and future lives, and so on; and (d) obscured view, the belief that the aggregates (*skandhas*) form an individual self, and that phenomena have a real, inherent, and autonomous existence, and so on.

<sup>13</sup> The five traditional sciences: medicine, logic, languages, crafts, and metaphysics.

*The meaning of leaving behind your native land is to leave behind the emotions of attachment, hatred, and the obscuring ignorance that permeates both. These three poisons, generally speaking, are most active in the relationships you establish with family and friends in your own homeland.*

There, it is all too easy for your main preoccupation to become the protection of those to whom you are attached, and the increasing of their wealth and happiness. If you feel any hesitation in this constant pursuit of ordinary goals, it is just about how best to achieve them; should you continue whatever you are currently doing, or turn your efforts in some new and more profitable direction? You end up engaging in meaningless activities without end, frittering away what is left of your precious life. In the same way, conflict arises much more easily in such circumstances. Hatred is often engendered by arguments, feuds, and distorted beliefs that can be perpetuated through a family or district for generations. In truth, even if you live to be seventy or more, you can never hope to overcome all your adversaries and totally gratify your close ones.

Getting the better of competitors and looking after your own interests and friends are what many people would consider a useful and intelligent way to spend your life. But acting with those ends in mind could only make sense if you were completely unaware of the consequences that are bound to follow. Not to see how pointless it would be to waste your life with such goals is simply ignorance.

So, rather than stay near the people and things that are liable to arouse your attachment and resentment, go to a completely unknown place where there is nothing that will engender negative emotions. Your mind will not be disturbed, and you will be able to devote your time and energy to the practice of Dharma. As it is said:

*Go hundreds of miles away  
From places of dispute;  
Don't stay for an instant  
Where disturbing emotions prevail.*

And, as Longchen Rabjam said:

*Ordinary worldly activities  
Are like a swamp that engulfs an elephant seeking cool.  
Affectionate relatives and friends  
Are like jailers detaining you in samsara.  
The pleasures of this life  
Are like a bone being gnawed by a toothless old dog.  
Entanglement in desire or aversion toward sensual experiences  
Is like honey into which an insect falls.  
Seized by fear, throw them all away!*

Once you have left home, country, family, friends, and worldly work behind, you will have nothing to cling to. You will feel as free as the birds and wild animals. **If, however, in your new and initially unfamiliar surroundings, you begin to forge new attachments, you will soon find once again that you are unable to practice the Dharma.**<sup>14</sup> Like the moon, which is always on the move, do not remain in one place too long. **As time goes on, it will become obvious through your practice of the Dharma that hatred toward anyone is a mistake. You will have nothing but good thoughts and intentions toward all beings. So, too, the pointlessness of becoming attached to anyone and anything will also become obvious,** and you will see that all objects of attachment are like things perceived in dreams, like phantasmagoric illusions.

### **3. Living in solitary places, the source of all good qualities**

*When unfavourable 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.*

When you live in a solitary place, your negative emotions gradually diminish, and your self-control and moderation increase. Gyalse Thogme himself said:

<sup>14</sup> You will be working to make others happy and not using your precious life to escape samsara.



*In a solitary place,  
There are no enemies to defeat,  
No relatives to protect,  
No superiors to look up to,  
No servants to be looked after.  
So, apart from taming your mind,  
What else will you have to do there, Mani-reciters?<sup>15</sup>*

Undisturbed by friends and relatives, undistracted by the need to earn a living through business or cultivating the land, you will be able to concentrate one-pointedly on deep spiritual practice and thus make spiritual progress with your body, speech, and mind. Your mind will become self-controlled, serene, clear, and filled with certainty about the truth of the teachings. This is why all the sages of the past lived in the wilderness, in solitary, mountainous places conducive to spiritual practice. As Shantideva said:

*And so, revolted by our lust and wanting,  
Let us now rejoice in solitude,  
In places where all strife and conflict cease,  
The peace and stillness of the greenwood.*

And it is also said:

*Unattached to gain, be like the wind, like a bird.  
Dwelling in the wilderness, be like a shy animal.  
Acting rightly, you will remain unperturbed.*

If you wish to concentrate entirely on the Dharma instead of being constantly tossed hither and thither by waves of attachment and aversion, give them up and go to a solitary place. Turn your mind inward, identify your defects, rid yourself of them, and develop all your inherent good qualities. Be content with just enough food for sustenance, just enough clothing to protect yourself, and your practice will progress from day to day, month to month, and year to year.

Once you are free from all distracting conditions, your practice will bring you progress along the path. That is why all the *yogins* of the past wandered like beggars from one solitary place to another. Even a single month in a quiet and lonely place will be enough **for your animosity to be replaced by a wish to benefit others, and your attachment to friends by a strong feeling of impermanence and impending death.**

As 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.”

And Drom Tönpa said: “This decadent age is not a time for ordinary beings to help others externally, but rather a time to live in solitary places and train their own minds in the love and compassion of bodhichitta.”

Such is the strength of delusion and habitual tendencies that **practicing Dharma might initially seem very hard; but these difficulties will gradually subside. Once you have understood the essential point of the teachings, you will experience no hardship or difficulty with the practice. Your efforts will bring you joy. It is like developing any skill; as you master the important points, it becomes progressively easier, you gain increasing confidence, and your capacity and endeavour keep on growing.**

Whatever meditation or reflection you have done, it will never be wasted. The benefit it brings will be present in your mindstream at the time of your death, and will help you be reborn in a place where the Dharma flourishes, near an authentic spiritual teacher. Life after life, you will evolve from a mediocre into an average practitioner, and from an average practitioner into an excellent one. **The essence of learning is reflection. The essence of reflection is meditation.** As you go deeper and deeper into the meaning of the teachings, the wondrous qualities of the Dharma will become ever clearer, like the sun appearing ever brighter the higher you fly.

**The sign that you have fully assimilated your learning of the Dharma is that you become peaceful by nature. The sign that you have assimilated your meditation is that you are free**

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<sup>15</sup> Mani-reciter (*mani pa*): someone who recites the *mani*, the mantra of Avalokiteshvara, the Buddha of Compassion. Here “Mani-reciters” is used as an affectionate term for Dharma practitioners.

of obscuring emotions. As learning leads to reflection and reflection transforms into meditation, your eagerness for the deluded activities of this life will relax, and you will yearn for the Dharma instead.

Anything you do that is in accord with the Dharma, however small or trivial it may seem, will be beneficial. As the *Sutra of the Wise and the Foolish* says:

*Do not take lightly small good deeds,  
Believing they can hardly help;  
For drops of water one by one  
In time can fill a giant pot.*

Similarly, even if you practice only for an hour a day with faith and inspiration, good qualities will steadily increase. Regular practice makes it easy to transform your mind. From seeing only relative truth, you will eventually reach a profound certainty in the meaning of absolute truth.

**The main hindrance to the growth of such qualities is distraction.** Distraction can occur in every single moment. If you let time flow pointlessly by, at the time of death you will regret that you have not practiced the Dharma. But by then it will be too late, and your regret will not help at all. Now is the time to go to a secluded place and put the instructions you have received from your teacher into practice. Each instant of your life will then become precious and meaningful, leading you farther away from samsara and closer to liberation.

#### 4. Giving up 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.*

Ordinary, worldly concerns bring only suffering and disappointment in this life and the next. The appearances of samsara are highly unstable, ever changing, and impermanent, like lightning as it flashes across the night sky. To reflect on the impermanence of all phenomena helps turn your mind toward the Dharma. As it is said:

*Whatever is born will die,  
Whatever is gathered will disperse,  
Whatever is accumulated will come to exhaustion,  
Whatever is high will fall.*

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

The impermanence of composite phenomena is apparent throughout the universe. Look, for example, how the seasons change here on earth. In summer, luscious green foliage abounds everywhere and the landscape looks like paradise. By autumn, the grass has dried and yellowed, flowers have turned to fruit, and the trees begin to lose their leaves. In winter, the land can be white with snow, which later melts as the warmth of spring arrives. The sky may be covered with clouds in the morning, and clear in the afternoon; rivers may run dry or overflow; the apparently solid earth may shake and tremble; and the land may slip and slide. **Not a single stable phenomenon can be found anywhere in the world** outside.

The same is true of people. We change with every passing moment. We change minute by minute, from youth to old age, and from old age to death. Our opinions, ideas, and plans are constantly changing and evolving. It is never certain that a project once begun will ever be completed, nor is it certain to unfold in the way we intended. As Longchen Rabjam says:

*We would like to stay forever with those we love,  
But we will surely part from them.  
We would like to stay in a pleasant place forever,  
But we will surely have to go.  
We would like to enjoy comforts and pleasure forever,  
But we will surely lose them.*

Look at the number of people you have known since you were very young; how many are still alive? For the moment, you may still be with parents, friends, a partner, and so on. But you cannot escape the fact that at death you will be taken away from them like a hair removed from butter; not a bit of butter remains attached to the hair.

The timing of your death is uncertain, and the circumstances that will bring it about are unpredictable. Like a frog in the mouth of a snake, you are already in Death's mouth. Death may strike at any moment, without warning, and result from all sorts of causes and circumstances. Some people die young, some old, some from sickness, some in war, or because of a sudden violent accident such as falling off a cliff. Some die in their sleep, some while walking, some while eating. Some die serene, some wracked by attachment for their relatives and possessions. We all have to die, no matter how. Jigme Lingpa said:

*People who have sweltered in the summer's heat  
Rejoice at the clear, cool light of the autumn moon—  
But are not frightened at the thought  
That a hundred days of their lives have passed, and gone.*

Life is as evanescent as dew on the tip of a blade of grass. Nothing can stop death, just as no one can stop the lengthening shadows cast by the setting sun. You might be extremely beautiful, but you cannot seduce death. You might be very powerful, but you cannot hope to influence death. Not even the most fabulous wealth will buy you a few more minutes of life. **Death is as certain for you as for someone stabbed through the heart with a knife.**

At present you find it hard to bear the minor discomfort of a prickly thorn or the heat of the sun. But what about the anguish you will have to face at the time of death? Dying is not like a fire going out, or like water soaking away into the earth. Consciousness continues; when you die, your consciousness has to abandon your body, accompanied only by the karmic impressions left by your previous positive and negative actions. It is then forced to wander in the different pathways of the *bardo*, the transitory state between death and a new existence. The bardo is a frightening, unknown place, sometimes incredibly dark and opaque, without an instant of peace. During your time in the bardo, you will sometimes hear terrifying noises or see horrific things. Like a criminal taken to the execution ground, you may be pushed and pulled by messengers of Yama, the Lord of Death, shouting, "Kill him!" and "Bring him here!" It is not a place of comfort and ease.

The terrible sufferings of the bardo are followed by the sufferings of the next life, whatever that may be. The suffering you will have to undergo is the unfailing result of negative actions committed in the past. Neglecting the Dharma, you have indulged in negativity over countless lifetimes. As the Buddha pointed out in the *Sutra of the Sublime Dharma of Clear Recollection*,<sup>16</sup> if you were to heap up all the limbs from the innumerable lifetimes you have lived, even just those in which you were reborn as an ant, the pile would be higher than the highest mountain on earth. If you were to collect all the tears you have shed in past lives when your aims were not realised, they would form an ocean bigger than all the oceans of the earth put together.

Once a Khampa came to see Drubthop Chöyung, one of Lord Gampopa's foremost disciples, and, offering him a length of cloth, requested teachings. Several times, despite his insistent pleas, Drubthop Chöyung put him off. But again the Khampa insisted, and finally the master took the man's hands in his, and said, three times, **"I will die, you will die." And then he added, "That's all my guru taught me; that's all I practice. Just meditate on that. I promise there is nothing greater."**

Gyalwa Götsangpa said:

*Meditate on death and impermanence  
And you will sever ties to your homeland,  
Entangling attachments to your relatives,  
And craving for food and wealth.*

<sup>16</sup> A sutra that explains how we should identify which actions, words, and deeds are suitable and which unsuitable, and how we should then keep our sustained attention focused upon them.

The thought of death turns your mind toward the Dharma; it inspires your endeavour; and finally, it helps you to recognise the radiant clarity of the dharmakaya. It should always remain a major subject of your meditations.

**When you think about samsara, if you feel as if you were aboard a sinking ship, as if you had fallen into a pit of deadly snakes, or as if you were a criminal about to be handed over to the executioner, these are sure signs that you have discarded the belief in the permanence of things. It is the authentic understanding of impermanence dawning in your mind.<sup>17</sup> As a result, you will no longer get entangled in discrimination between friends and enemies. You will be able to cut through the dense weave of meaningless distractions. Your endeavour will be strong, and everything you do will be oriented toward the Dharma. Your good qualities will bloom as never before.**

The body is the servant of the mind; it can act positively or negatively. You can use this body as an instrument to achieve liberation, or as something that will plunge you deeper into samsara. Do not waste your time. Take advantage of the opportunity you now have to meet spiritual teachers and practice the Dharma. In the past, practitioners achieved enlightenment by listening to the teachings on impermanence and death, by remembering them and reflecting on them, and by integrating them into their being through meditation. As it is said:

*We ought to fear death now,  
And thus become fearless at the time of death;  
But instead we are careless now,  
And when death arrives we will beat our breast in anguish.*

Lord Atisha said:

*Leave everything behind and go.  
Do nothing,  
Crave nothing.*

**Do not be overly concerned with the ordinary affairs of life. Concentrate on the Dharma. Start the day by arousing the wish for enlightenment. In the evening, examine everything you have done during the day, confess whatever was negative, and dedicate whatever was positive to the benefit of all beings. Make a promise to do better the next day.**

The Brahman Upagupta set aside a black pebble each time he had a negative thought, and a white pebble each time he had a virtuous thought. To start with, he mostly accumulated black pebbles. But gradually, by maintaining mindfulness and vigilance, he soon found himself collecting only white pebbles.

## **5 Avoiding unsuitable friends, whose company creates conditions unfavourable 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.*

<sup>17</sup> **Meditation on impermanence** has three roots, nine considerations, and leads to three definite conclusions:

- (1) death is certain,
  - no one in the past has ever escaped death,
  - the body is compounded and bound to disintegrate,
  - life runs out second by second.
- (2) there is no certainty what will cause it,
  - life is incredibly fragile,
  - the body is without any enduring essence,
  - numerous circumstances can cause death, while few circumstances prolong or support life.
- (3) anything other than Dharma is totally useless at the moment of death.
  - relatives and friends will be of no use at the moment of death,
  - wealth and food will be of no use,
  - my own body will be of no use.

The three definite conclusions:

- (1) we should practice the Dharma, since it will definitely help us at death;
- (2) we must practice it right now, since we do not know when we will die;
- (3) we should devote our time exclusively to practicing the Dharma, since nothing else is of any use.

A crystal, when placed on a piece of cloth, takes on the colour of that cloth, whether white, yellow, red, or black. **The friends with whom you keep company the most often, whether suitable or unsuitable, will greatly influence the direction your life and practice take.**

Bad company, in this context, refers to two different kinds of relationship: with false spiritual teachers and with unsuitable friends.

**If the teacher in whom you place your confidence is someone whose views and conduct are erroneous, you will ruin this life and future ones, completely missing the path to liberation.** When a faithful disciple starts a relationship with such an impostor, **failing to recognise him as such, all the merit he has accumulated, as well as his entire life, will be wasted.** As the great Guru Padmasambhava said, “Not to examine the teacher before committing yourself is like drinking poison.”

As for “**unsuitable friends,**” what is meant here is **those who have the effect on you of increasing your three negative emotions (hatred, attachment, and stupidity) and who encourage you to commit negative actions.** When you are **with certain people, you may find that your defects and emotions only increase, and this shows that those people might not be true friends.** There is a saying that “When you are with a turbulent person, you will be carried away by distractions; when you are with a greedy person, you will lose everything you have; when you are with a comfort-craving person, you will be preoccupied with petty things; when you are with an overactive person, your concentration will be scattered.”

**An unsuitable friend is one who is fond of distractions, totally immersed in ordinary worldly activities, and who does not care in the least about achieving liberation; a friend who has no interest or faith in the Three Jewels.** The more time you spend with such a person, the more the three poisons will permeate your mind. Even if you do not initially agree with their ideas and actions, if you spend a lot of time with unsuitable friends, you will eventually be **influenced by their bad habits. Your resolve to act positively will decline, and you will waste your life. Such people will prevent you from spending any time studying, reflecting, and meditating; which are the roots of liberation. And they will make you lose whatever qualities you may have developed, especially compassion and love; which are the very essence of the teachings of the Great Vehicle.** An unsuitable friend is like a bad captain who steers his ship onto the rocks. **Such people are your worst enemy. You owe it to yourself to stay away from them.**

In contrast, being with people who embody or aspire to gentleness, compassion, and love will encourage you to develop those qualities so essential to the path. Inspired by their example, you will become filled with love for all beings, and come to see the inherent **negativity of attachment and hatred.** Authentic spiritual friends are those who have received teachings from the same teacher as yourself and, detached from worldly concerns, are devoting themselves to practice in secluded places. In the company of such friends, you will naturally be influenced by their good qualities, just as birds flying around a golden mountain are bathed in its golden radiance.

## **6. Relying on a spiritual teacher, whose presence creates conditions favourable 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.*

To achieve liberation from samsara and attain the omniscience of enlightenment would be impossible without following an authentic, qualified spiritual teacher. Such a teacher always acts, speaks, and thinks in perfect accord with the Dharma. He shows you what you have to do to progress successfully on the path, and what obstacles you will have to avoid. He encourages you to concentrate on practicing the Dharma above all, and to do only what is virtuous and beneficial. He helps you give up all unsuitable conduct without hypocrisy, and he reminds you to be aware of impermanence, and to stop clinging to samsara.

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.** It is said, “The merit of offering a drop of oil to a single pore of the teacher’s body surpasses the merit derived from making countless offerings to all the buddhas.”

When Lord Buddha was a bodhisattva, his spiritual master put to the test his determination to receive just four lines of the precious teaching. Since his master had told him to do so, the bodhisattva without any hesitation pierced a thousand holes in his body, inserted a thousand wicks, and set them alight.

All accomplished practitioners of the past attained enlightenment by following a spiritual teacher. They would start their search by listening to accounts of the doings of different masters. When the stories they heard about a teacher were particularly inspiring, they would examine his qualities from a distance before committing themselves. Once they had complete confidence in him, they would go into his presence, serve him, and one-pointedly put whatever instructions he gave them into practice.

You will not be able to attain enlightenment by relying only on your own ideas and being totally independent. It is true that *pratyekabuddhas*<sup>18</sup> are said to be able to achieve liberation by themselves, but the fact that they have no spiritual teacher in their present life does not mean they did not have one in the past. Pratyekabuddhas, indeed, attend spiritual teachers and receive their teachings over countless lives. For each and every practice of sutra and tantra, an explanation from a qualified teacher is necessary.

If you now long to meet an authentic teacher, it is because of your inclination toward the Dharma from the past. Jetsun Milarepa, having heard no more than Marpa’s name, could not rest until he actually met him. **The teacher stands at the juncture of the path, the point where you could either go up or down. You should receive teachings from him, and allow his instructions to mature through direct experience.**

There are three main ways to fulfil the wishes of the teacher. The best way is to put his instruction into practice, and spend your whole life experiencing the essence of the teachings and attaining realisation. The second-best way is to serve him with devoted body, speech, and mind. As you serve your teacher, your being will be transformed by his readily apparent qualities, just as a piece of ordinary wood in a sandalwood grove will gradually be permeated by the scent of the surrounding trees. The third way to please the teacher is to make material offerings to him.

Someone who cannot help harbouring many doubts, or whose character is not very refined, may find himself developing erroneous views of the teacher if he stays in close proximity to him. If this is the case, it is better to receive the teacher’s instruction and go to practice elsewhere. **Staying near an enlightened teacher is said to be like staying near a fire. If you have enough faith and confidence in him, he will burn away your ignorance and obscurations. But if your faith and confidence are inadequate, you will be burned yourself.**

Carefully applying your teacher’s instructions, you will be able to progress on the path without hindrances, like a blind person who finds a perfect guide to lead him past a dangerous precipice. But without the advice of an authentic teacher, trying to practice in a solitary place will not help you; there will be little to distinguish you from the wild birds and animals.

Even a few words of instruction from the guru can bring you to enlightenment. **Pay attention, and assign great value to each and every word of his teachings. Reflect on their meaning, and meditate upon them. Always check to see whether or not the way you have understood the teachings and put them into practice works as an antidote to your inner confusion. Keep your devotion constant and unwavering; the teacher is the jewel that fulfils all wishes.**

Once someone said, “Atisha, give me your teachings!” Atisha replied:

*Ha! Ha!*

*That sounds so nice!*

*But to give you the pith instructions*

*I need one thing from you:*

*Faith! Faith!*

<sup>18</sup> **Pratyekabuddhas:** “those who attain buddhahood by themselves.” With the shravakas they constitute the sangha of the Basic Vehicle.

Faith is the major prerequisite for the path. If you have no faith, even following the Buddha himself will not help you. Progress on the Mahayana path depends on the teacher, so until you reach the ultimate goal, never separate from him. He is the one who will enable you to realise the truth of unborn emptiness.

If you have faith in the teacher, you will receive the blessing of his enlightened body, speech, and mind. Never tire of gazing at the teacher, as a true master is rare in this world, and it is rarer still to be able to see one. Constantly visualise him on the crown of your head, and pray to him with yearning devotion. This is the most profound and essential practice in the sutras and tantras. To follow a teacher is the root of all accomplishment. **If you see your teacher as the real buddha, enlightenment is not far off.**

**To cherish the teacher more than yourself, and more than anyone else, is the practice of a bodhisattva.**

## 7 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 previous six verses have explained the preliminaries for developing bodhichitta. You are aware of the importance and the rarity of the human life you now have, and you realise the stark immediacy of death. You feel a great disillusionment with this world, and have decided to rid yourself of distracting conditions and misleading influences, and to try to tame your mind according to the instructions of an authentic teacher. Now, you are ready to cross the threshold of the Dharma and take refuge in the Three Jewels.**

**People naturally search for refuge, for someone or something to protect them from sorrow and torment.** Some people turn to the powerful with the hope of achieving wealth, pleasure, and influence. Others seek protection through natural forces, such as the stars or mountains. Some seek aid through the power of spirits. But **none of these mistaken objects of refuge are free from ignorance and samsara, and they therefore cannot provide ultimate refuge.** Their compassion, if they have any, is partial and limited.

True refuge can only be provided by something that is itself totally free; free from the bonds of samsara 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, Dharma, and Sangha) with their absolute wisdom, unbiased compassion, and unimpeded ability.

The first of the Three Jewels is the Buddha. The qualities that characterise the Buddha can be seen in terms of three aspects, or dimensions, called *kayas* (“bodies”) in Sanskrit; the dharmakaya, the absolute body; the sambhogakaya, the body of perfect endowment; and the nirmanakaya, the manifestation body. These three are all aspects of one essence.

The *dharmakaya* is the absolute, inconceivable, empty expanse of wisdom. The enlightened wisdom mind of the Buddha is imbued with awareness, compassion, and ability. Beyond all conceptual elaboration, its expression is the five primordial wisdoms. The *sambhogakaya* is the natural display of these five primordial wisdoms, arising as the five certainties; the perfect teacher, perfect teachings, perfect time, perfect place, and perfect retinue. The sambhogakaya remains by nature unchanging and unceasing throughout past, present, and future, beyond both growth and decline. Buddhas manifest as the *nirmanakaya* according to the different needs and capacities of beings, and so the nirmanakaya appears in countless different forms.

For a bodhisattva on one of the ten *bhumis*, or levels, the buddhas manifest in the sambhogakaya aspect. For ordinary beings of great merit and fortune, buddhas manifest as supreme nirmanakayas, such as the Buddha Shakyamuni. For beings of lesser merit, buddhas appear in human form as spiritual friends. For those without faith in the Three Jewels, they appear in countless helpful forms, such as animals, wheels, bridges, boats, fresh breezes, medicinal plants, and so on. They manifest constantly to benefit beings through their limitless activity.

These three aspects of the buddhas’ nature are not three separate entities. It is not as if they were three different persons. Of these three aspects, **it is only the dharmakaya buddha that is the ultimate refuge.** But to actualise the dharmakaya refuge, we have to rely on the teachings

given by the nirmanakaya buddha.

In our present age, the supreme nirmanakaya aspect is Buddha Shakyamuni. He is the fourth of the 1,002 buddhas who will appear during this kalpa, or aeon. On the eve of their enlightenment all of these buddhas made vast aspirations to benefit beings. The Buddha Shakyamuni made five hundred great prayers that he would be able to help beings in this decadent and difficult age, and all the other buddhas praised him as being like a white lotus; a lotus grows and flourishes in the mud but remains unstained by it.

Without ever actually moving from the dharmakaya, Buddha Shakyamuni appeared as a prince in India. He displayed the twelve deeds of a buddha, and achieved enlightenment under the bodhi tree at Bodhgaya. On the sambhogakaya level, he manifests as Mahavairochana to an infinite retinue of bodhisattvas.

The buddhas are aware of your faith and devotion, and know the very moment you take refuge. Do not think that the buddhas are far away in distant, absolute realms where your prayers and aspirations go unheard and unheeded. Buddhas are as ever present as the sky.

The second of the Three Jewels is the Dharma, the teachings the Buddha gave on how the enlightenment he had realised can be attained through practice. In this world, the Buddha Shakyamuni taught three categories of teachings, called the *Tripitaka*, or Three Baskets: the *vinaya*, or discipline; the *sutras*, or condensed instructions; and the *abhidharma*, or cosmology and metaphysics. He gave these teachings from different points of view at different times and places, known as the Three Turnings of the Wheel of Dharma. In the first turning, he taught relative truth; in the second, a blend of relative and absolute truth; and in the third, the ultimate, irrevocable truth.

The third of the Three Jewels, the Sangha, is the community of the Buddha's followers. It includes the eight great bodhisattvas, the sixteen arhats, the seven patriarchs that succeeded the Buddha, and all those who teach the Buddha's teachings, along with those who practice them.

**The Buddha is the one who shows you the path to enlightenment. Without him you would have no choice but to remain in the darkness of ignorance. You should therefore see the Buddha as the teacher. The Dharma is the path, the unmistakable way that leads directly to enlightenment. The Sangha is composed of the companions who accompany you along this extraordinary path. It is always good to have traveling companions who can help you avoid dangers and pitfalls and ensure that you arrive safely when you are in distant and unfamiliar lands.**

According to the Mantrayana, the Three Jewels have inner aspects. These are the Three Roots, which are the Teacher, the meditation deity or Yidam, and the feminine wisdom principle or *Dakini*. Roots are the basis of all growth: if the root is strong and of good quality, the tree will grow, and fruit will ripen easily. The Teacher is the root of all blessings, the Yidam is the root of all accomplishments, and the *Dakinis* together with the Dharma-protectors are the root of all activities. The Three Roots correspond to the Three Jewels. The Teacher is the Buddha, the Yidam is the Dharma, and the Dakinis and Dharma-protectors are the Sangha.

The Teacher can also be considered the very embodiment of all Three Jewels. His mind is the Buddha, his speech the Dharma, and his body the Sangha. He is therefore the source of all blessings that dispel obstacles and enable us to progress on the path.

On the ultimate level the dharmakaya is the Buddha, the sambhogakaya is the Dharma, and the nirmanakaya is the Sangha. All are one in the Teacher, the Buddha in actuality.

The motive for taking refuge can be of three different levels, according to an individual's capacity. These different levels of motive define the three vehicles. Those with a limited attitude, as in the Hinayana, or Basic Vehicle, seek refuge from fear of the suffering that pervades the three realms of samsara. Those with a vaster attitude, the bodhisattvas of the Mahayana, go for refuge from fear of selfish attitudes, with the vast motivation of helping all beings as well as themselves to be free from samsara. Practitioners of Vajrayana go for refuge from fear of delusion, in order to free all other beings and themselves from the delusion of samsara and the chains of entangling emotions; they go for refuge in order to recognise their innate buddha nature.

Similarly, there are differences in the duration of refuge. Hinayana practitioners take refuge for the duration of their present life. In the Mahayana, this is seen as inadequate, and bodhisattvas take refuge until they and all beings have attained the enlightenment of perfect buddhahood.



A king whose predominant concern was the welfare of his subjects would be considered a noble king, while a king who looked after his own welfare and comfort at the expense of his subjects would be judged shameless. Likewise, you should not take refuge with a narrow-minded concern to attain enlightenment for yourself alone. Throughout your past lives you have been connected with all beings, at some time or other all of them must have been your loving parents (and you theirs). You should take refuge for their benefit. When you take refuge, consider that all these beings are taking refuge along with you, even those who do not know of the Three Jewels.

Taking refuge is the gateway to all of the Buddha's teachings; to the practice of all the vehicles. Just as you have to step through the door to enter a house, every practice in the Sutrayana, the Mantrayana, or the ultimate vehicle of the Great Perfection, has refuge as its threshold. If you visualise deities and recite mantras without full confidence in the Three Jewels, you will not attain any accomplishments. In the teachings of the Great Perfection, recognising the true nature of all phenomena is the ultimate refuge, through which you will actualise the three kayas.

Faith is the prerequisite for refuge, and its very essence. Taking refuge does not just mean reciting a refuge prayer. It must come from the depth of your heart, from the marrow of your bones. If you have that complete confidence in the Three Jewels, their blessings will always be present in you, like the sun and moon being instantly reflected in clear, still water. Without being concentrated by a magnifying glass, dry grass cannot be set alight by the rays of the sun, even though they bathe the whole earth evenly in their warmth. In the same way, it is only when focused through the magnifying glass of your faith and devotion that the all-pervading warm rays of the buddhas' compassion can make blessings blaze up in your being, like dry grass on fire.

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

When thinking of the great masters fills you with a deep longing to know more about them, to receive teachings from them, and to develop spiritual qualities, this is the second kind of faith, eager faith.

As you reflect on the teachings, practice, and assimilate them, you develop complete confidence in their truth, and in the Buddha's boundless perfection. You come to realise that even though the Buddha displayed the parinirvana, he did not die like an ordinary person, but rather is always present in the absolute expanse of the dharmakaya. You clearly understand the law of cause and effect, and the need to act in accord with it. At this stage, you are free from doubt. This is the third kind of faith, confident faith.

When your confidence is so well established that it can never waver, even at the cost of your life, this is the fourth kind of faith, irreversible faith.

To take refuge in a genuine way, you should have these four kinds of faith, especially irreversible faith. Faith and devotion make you a perfect container for the nectar of blessings that pour from the teacher, so that your good qualities steadily grow like the waxing moon. Devotion is as precious as having a skilled hand that can accomplish all crafts. It is like a great treasure that fulfils all needs, the panacea that cures all illness. Entrust your heart and mind to the Three Jewels like throwing a stone into deep water.

Without faith, taking refuge would be pointless. It would be like planting a burned seed, which will never sprout no matter how long it remains in perfect conditions in the ground. Without faith, you will never be able to develop any positive qualities. Even if the Buddha were to appear in person right in front of you, without faith you would fail to recognise his qualities, and you may even conceive erroneous views about him; as some heretic teachers did in his time. You would then miss the opportunity of being benefited by him.

After having taken refuge, you must observe its precepts carefully. There are three things to be avoided, and three things to be done.

The **three things to be avoided** are: (1) Having taken refuge in the Buddha, you should not take refuge in worldly gods and powerful people of this world. (2) Having taken refuge in the Dharma, you should give up all forms of violence, whether in thought, word, or deed. (3) Having taken refuge in the Sangha, you should not willingly share the lifestyle of those who live in a totally wrong way, nor distrust the karmic law of cause and effect.

The **three things to be done** are: (1) Having taken refuge in the Buddha, you should respect any representation of the Buddha, including paintings and statues, even those in disrepair, and keep them in elevated places. (2) Having taken refuge in the Dharma, you should respect all the scriptures; this even extends down to a single letter of the alphabet, since letters are the support of the Dharma. Never step over books; the Buddha himself said that in this decadent age he would manifest in the form of scriptures. (3) Having taken refuge in the Sangha, you should respect members of the monastic community and all fellow Dharma practitioners.

To obtain the Dharma, bodhisattvas have endured countless hardships. In many of his former lives as a bodhisattva, the Buddha took birth as a king in remote countries where there were few teachers. He would search the whole countryside for someone who knew even four lines of authentic teaching. To test the bodhisattva king's determination, buddhas would manifest as wandering hermits. In order to receive from them even four lines of teaching, such as:

*Abandon evil-doing.*

*Practice virtue well.*

*Master your own mind.*

*This is the Buddhas' teaching,*

the king would readily give up his queen, his heirs, and the whole of his kingdom, and, putting these four lines into practice, attain realisation.

Sacrifices on such a scale are not always easy to make, but you can certainly remember the Three Jewels in all your activities throughout the day, no matter whether you are happy or sad. If you see a beautiful landscape, flowers, or anything wonderful and inspiring, offer it mentally to the Three Jewels. When good circumstances or events arise, see them as the blessing and kindness of the Three Jewels. Regard all sicknesses and obstacles, without complaint, as blessings in disguise that will enable you to purify your past negative karma. When confronted with great danger, or with terrifying situations, call upon the Three Jewels for assistance. At that moment, the blessings of the Three Jewels will grant you protection. When you practice taking refuge in this manner, refuge will become an inherent part of your stream of consciousness.

Take refuge from the core of your heart, for the sake of all beings, from now until they all attain enlightenment. This is the true way of a bodhisattva.

## **Part Two: The Main Teachings, Illuminating the Path**

*After the seven topics of the preparation comes the second section, the main teachings, which explain the paths for beings of lesser, medium, and superior capacity.*

*First, the path for beings of lesser capacity*

*This consists of rejecting negative actions out of fear of the suffering that permeates the three lower realms of existence.*

### **8 Valuing Virtue**

*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.*

**Once you have taken refuge in the Three Jewels, it is important to behave in accordance with their teachings. Whatever happens, keep trying to do more and more positive, beneficial actions, and always avoid doing anything negative. Actively engage in the ten**

virtues; and abstain from the ten non-virtues.<sup>19</sup> This means not only, for instance, to abstain from killing, but also to protect life, to ransom the lives of animals about to be butchered, to set captive fish free, and so on.

There are **four black dharmas to avoid, and four white dharmas to keep to**. The **four black dharmas** are (1) to deceive those worthy of respect, (2) to cause sadness by bringing doubt into someone's mind about the value of his virtuous actions, (3) to criticise and denigrate holy beings, and (4) to be dishonest about your faults and qualities and to cheat others.

The **four white dharmas** are (1) not to tell a lie, even at the risk of your life; (2) to respect and praise the bodhisattvas; (3) to be free of deceit, and benevolent toward all beings; and (4) to lead all beings on the path to enlightenment.

Confess every negative action you commit, even in a dream. Do not be confused about how to act in everyday situations. Try to keep your actions in accordance with the instructions given by your teachers. Lord Atisha never let a day go by without confessing whatever negative actions he may have committed. Once confessed, a negative action is relatively easy to purify.

Someone who has done many negative actions, even if rich and powerful, will inevitably sink into the lower realms of samsara. Someone who has done many positive actions, even the humblest of beggars, will be led by all the buddhas from the bardo to the Western Buddhafield of Bliss, or be reborn in the higher realms. As it is said:

*Good and evil actions*

*Bring their results without fail.*

*What happens at death*

*Accords with what you have done.*

*If your actions have been wholesome and virtuous,*

*There will be happiness and birth in higher realms.*

*If your actions have been unwholesome and negative,*

*There will be suffering and birth in lower realms.*

*Right now, while you can choose*

*To be happy or to suffer, **Do not indulge yourself in negative actions***

***But strive as best you can***

***To do good and virtuous deeds, both great and small.***

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 you either experience its inevitable result or counteract it with a positive antidote.<sup>20</sup> While, on the one hand, even offering a single flower to the Three Jewels, or reciting a single Mani mantra, brings inconceivable merit, so too, on the other hand, **even the most seemingly insignificant negative action has a negative result; and should thus be purified straight away.**

All the teachings of the Buddha say that **every action has a result. This is the infallible law of karmic cause and result.**

Some people hold the opinion that actions bring no karmic result, even for a murderer who has killed thousands of people. The hell realms cannot really exist, they would argue, because no one

<sup>19</sup> **Ten Virtues:**

**1. Generosity** (Giving and sharing with others); **2. Morality** (Adhering to ethical conduct and refraining from harmful actions); **3. Renunciation** (Letting go of attachments and desires); **4. Wisdom** (Developing insight and understanding the true nature of reality); **5. Energy** (Making a persistent effort to improve oneself); **6. Patience** (Practicing tolerance and endurance in the face of difficulties); **7. Truthfulness** (Being honest and truthful in words and actions); **8. Determination** (Resolutely pursuing goals with a firm mind); **9. Loving-kindness** (Showing unconditional love and goodwill to all beings); **10. Equanimity** (Maintaining a balanced and even mind, free from attachment and aversion).

**Ten Non-virtues:**

**1. Killing** (Taking the life of any sentient being); **2. Stealing** (Taking what is not given); **3. Sexual Misconduct** (Engaging in harmful sexual behaviours); **4. Lying** (Deliberately deceiving others); **5. Slander** (Speaking in a way that causes division or harm); **6. Harsh Speech** (Using words that cause pain or harm); **7. Idle Gossip** (Engaging in meaningless and frivolous talk); **8. Covetousness** (Having a strong desire for others' possessions); **9. Ill Will** (Harbouring feelings of hatred and wishing harm on others.); **10. Wrong Views** (Holding incorrect beliefs that go against the teachings of Buddhism, such as denying the law of karma)

<sup>20</sup> There are four things to remember regarding the karmic law of cause and result: (1) a karmic result is certain, (2) the result of an action tends to increase, (3) you will never experience anything that is not the result of an action of your own in the past, and (4) karmic seeds sown by your actions are never wasted and never disappear on their own.

has ever returned from there to tell us about it. They dismiss the infallibility of the cause and effect of actions as just an invention, and deny that there can be any such thing as past and future lives. But they are simply wrong. For the moment, surely, instead of believing in your own limited perceptions, why not rely on the Buddha's wisdom? The Buddha sees the past, present, and future lives of all beings. You can have confidence in the Buddha's words. For example, the buddhas have praised the benefits of reciting a single Mani mantra; but if you nevertheless feel doubt about those benefits, or think that the results will take aeons to appear, you are only making your own realisation that much more distant.

Doubt and hesitation are the main obstacles to achieving the common and supreme accomplishments. If you doubt the teacher, you will not be able to receive his blessings. If you doubt the teachings, no matter how much time you spend studying and meditating, your efforts will remain mostly sterile.

**Always try to accomplish even the smallest beneficial action without any reservation or hesitation, and avoid even the most insignificant negative actions.** As the great master Padmasambhava said:

*Although my view is higher than the sky,  
My attention to actions and their effects is finer than flour*

**When your realisation of emptiness becomes as vast as the sky, you will gain an even greater conviction about the law of cause and effect, and you will see just how important your conduct really is.** Relative truth functions inexorably within absolute truth. **A thorough realisation 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. Phenomena adorn emptiness, but never corrupt it. **If you have a thorough understanding of the way phenomena appear through dependent arising, it will not be difficult for you to understand the view of emptiness while remaining in meditation.** On arising from such a meditation and entering the path of action, you will recognise clearly the direct relationship between actions and their results. This will enable you to discriminate easily between positive and negative actions.

Your view can, and should be, as high as possible; there is no danger in this, since enlightenment is the total realisation of the absolute view. But at the same time **your behaviour should be as grounded as possible in an awareness of cause and effect.** If you lose this basic attitude regarding actions, if you forget all common sense and use the loftiness of the view as an excuse for putting into action whatever comes into your mind, you are engaging in mundane activities contrary to the Dharma, just like ordinary worldly people. And if you let your emotions lead your practice astray in that way, you are likely to sink in the swamp of samsara.

A spacious view and a thorough, careful attitude regarding your activities are never contradictory. The more careful you are in whatever you do, the easier it is to realise emptiness; the more profound your view, the clearer your understanding will be of the relationship between cause and effect.

Never confusing what should be done with what should be avoided is the practice of a bodhisattva.

*Second, the path for beings of medium capacity*

*This involves detaching yourself from samsaric pleasures, and redirecting your efforts toward liberation.*

## 9 Recognising the Truth of Things

*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.*

**Once you have understood the union of emptiness and the dependent arising of phenomena, you will see clearly how deluded and deceiving the ways of the world really are, and, like an old man forced to play children's games, you will find them very tiresome.**

**Once you have realised the utter foolishness of spending your life attached to friends and scheming to subdue your enemies and competitors, you will find it tedious. Once you have been struck by the pointlessness of letting yourself be forever influenced and conditioned by your habitual tendencies, you will become sick of it. Once you know that it is sheer delusion to be preoccupied by thoughts of the future, and to lose your mindfulness and vigilance in the present moment, you will weary of it.**

All those illusory goals and ambitions; even if you could ever manage to follow them through and bring them to some kind of conclusion, would that lead to a lasting result? You will recognise that there is nothing permanent in any of them. You might be the heir to a throne, but it is obvious that no king has ever maintained his power indefinitely; if nothing else, death will snatch it away. You might be the most formidable general, but you will never subdue all of your country's enemies, no matter how many wars you wage. You might have tremendous power, influence, fame, and wealth, but it is all meaningless and hollow.

Worldly enjoyments are pleasurable in the beginning, but as time goes on they become an increasing source of torment. If you wrap a strip of wet leather around your wrist, it is fine at first, but as the leather dries and shrinks, it tightens painfully. What a relief to cut it away with a knife!

**If you turn your mind to Dharma, and practice genuinely, even for as little as an hour a day, through life after life you will gradually purify your defilements and free yourself from samsara. This is meaningful.** As Guru Padmasambhava said:

*However industrious you may be,  
There is no end to worldly activities;  
But if you practice the Dharma  
You will swiftly conclude everything.  
However nice they may seem,  
**Samsaric affairs always end in disaster;  
But the fruits of practicing the Dharma  
Will never deteriorate.**  
**Since beginningless time you have collected and encouraged  
Karma, negative emotions, and habitual tendencies,  
Which force you to wander in samsara.**  
*If you continue like that, when will liberation arrive?  
If you only see all this at the moment of death,  
It's rather too late—  
When the head's already been severed,  
What use is any medicine?  
Recognising the suffering of samsara,  
Turn toward the peace of nirvana.**

If you recognise delusion for what it is, you will see that there is nothing worthwhile in this ordinary world, nothing in the whole of samsara.<sup>21</sup> Even the highest gods of this world, such as Brahma and Indra, whose bodies emanate light that can illuminate the whole sky, who possess priceless jewels and ornaments, and who enjoy matchless power and prosperity, have no choice but to fall back into the lower states of samsara when the karma that brought them to their exalted position becomes exhausted.

**Realised beings see the higher realms of existence as no better than the hell realms.**

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<sup>21</sup> There are **six basic miseries in samsara**: (1) friends and enemies are changeable, (2) we never seem to have enough, (3) we die again and again, (4) we are reborn again and again, (5) we go up and down in samsara again and again, and (6) we are essentially alone.

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 everything throughout samsara is unsatisfactory and ends in suffering. They see samsara as like a big house on fire, within which there is nowhere to stay.

Recognising the nature of samsara, you will feel weary of it, and such weariness will inspire you to strive toward liberation; and by striving for it, you will attain it. Samsara will never just disappear on its own. You have to want to get rid of it actively yourself.

If you acknowledge the suffering of samsara, you will recognise that the source of suffering lies in your obscuring emotions and the negative actions they engender, and that the source of your obscuring emotions lies in your clinging to the idea of self. **If you can rid yourself of that clinging, suffering will cease.** Liberation means freeing yourself from the ties of your emotions and negative actions. The way to free yourself from them is to practice the Dharma; to train in discipline; in concentration; and in *prajña*, the wisdom that allows you to realise the nonexistence of the individual self and phenomena. Discipline is the basis of concentration; concentration is the basis of wisdom. If you practice the Dharma properly, even for as little as an hour a day, the results of countless lifetimes and kalpas of negative actions can be purified.

As you practice the Dharma steadily, even in quite a modest way, you will gradually be able to progress farther and farther on the path to liberation. Eventually, you will attain a true bliss that can never diminish.

As Gyalse Thogme said:

*You won't accomplish  
Both the Dharma and the aims of this ordinary life—  
If that's your wish,  
No doubt you're deceiving yourself.*

And he also said:

***There is no greater obstacle to Dharma practice  
Than to be obsessed by the achievements of this life.***

Realising this, great practitioners of the past like Milarepa left home, went to live in solitary places, and meditated in caves with hardly any clothes to wear or food to sustain themselves. Yet Milarepa and others attained total realisation of the skyline dharmakaya, the absolute nature, ultimate enlightenment. That realisation was their only possession. This is why Jetsun Milarepa, who spent his time sitting on a rock wearing nothing more than a simple cotton cloth, is respected throughout the world as a prime example of an authentic spiritual practitioner, even by nonreligious people. When Jetsun Milarepa was leaving for his homeland, his teacher, Marpa, said, **“Son, if you don't give up concern for this life, and try to mix Dharma with the affairs of this life, your Dharma is gone. That's all. Son, think about the suffering of samsara.”**

Milarepa himself once gave this advice in the form of a song about the attributes of the “devil”:

*Relatives' demonstrations of affection  
Are the devil's entreaties to keep postponing your practice:  
Don't trust them—sever all ties!  
Food and wealth are the devil's spies:  
If you become addicted to them, everything will go wrong—  
Give up all such inclinations!  
Sense pleasures are the devil's noose:  
There's no doubt they'll ensnare you—  
Cast all craving far away!  
Young companions are the devil's daughters:  
They're sure to bewitch and beguile you—  
Beware of them!  
Your native land is the devil's prison:  
It is hard to escape from—  
Run away, now!  
In the end, you will have to go, and leave everything behind—*

*So leave it now! It makes more sense to do so!  
Son, if you listen to my words, and put them into practice,  
You will enjoy the fortune of the sublime Dharma.*

To give up all concern for the ordinary things of this life is a very deep teaching. If I tell someone whose mind is unprepared for it that everything is empty by nature, he won't be able to accept it. He will think, "The old man is crazy!" Ordinary people find the teachings on emptiness unfathomable. In the same way, if I tell people these days, whether religious or lay, to give up worldly affairs, they will think, "The old man is delirious!" The real meaning of what I am saying will not penetrate their minds. Yet it is true that if you keep strong ties to pleasure, acquiring things, fame, and praise, then however much you may study, meditate, try to integrate high teachings, or even become a teacher yourself, it will be of no help to you at all.

Those who savour the sheer joy of Dharma practice through having given up all concern for this life are extremely rare. If I start teaching about turning away from relatives, possessions, house, land, and other enjoyments of this life, people start to look like donkeys that have been hit on the head with a stick. Their faces darken, they feel uncomfortable and uneasy, and would rather not listen at all.

Tsangpa Gyare said that **in order to renounce the world, you need to keep eleven pledges:**

- 1. Not to conform to the attitudes of ordinary people, but to stay alone.**
- 2. To leave your native land far behind.**
- 3. To feel that you have had enough of sensual pleasures.**
- 4. To maintain the humblest possible condition, thereby being free from caring what others think.**
- 5. To keep a spy posted in your mind; the meditation on ridding your mind of attachment to loved ones.**
- 6. Not to pay attention to what people say; whatever they may say, simply leave it be and let them say what they will.**
- 7. Not to feel distress, even if the winds carry away all that is dear to you.**
- 8. To have nothing to regret in this life, as though you were a dying beggar.**
- 9. To continually recite the mantra "I need nothing!"**
- 10. To keep the reins of your destiny firmly in your own hands.**
- 11. To remain enveloped by the cloud of authentic practice.**

When people come into contact with those who have renounced this world, wear religious robes, and spend their lives in study and contemplation, they respect them as authentic members of the sangha, and offer them as much help as they can.

This natural respect is a clear manifestation of the goodness inherent in the Dharma.

*Third, the path for beings of superior capacity*

*This consists of meditating on emptiness and compassion in order to attain liberation beyond both samsara and nirvana. This section has three parts:*

1. The bodhichitta of intention, which is the evocation of supreme bodhichitta
2. The bodhichitta of application, which is the meditation and practice of the two aspects of bodhichitta
3. The precepts for training in those practices.

## **1. The bodhichitta of intention**

### **10. Valuing Others**

*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.*

The absolute nature of everything is primordially pure, free of all conditions, and beyond any concepts of existence and nonexistence. But within relative truth, self and others, suffering and happiness, manifest in infinite ways. These appearances are devoid of any true existence, yet beings believe them to be true and thus wander, deluded, in samsara.

**The bodhichitta of intention, of aspiration, has two aspects: compassion, which is**

**directed toward beings; and wisdom, which is directed toward enlightenment. Neither aspect by itself, neither the mere wish to benefit beings nor the mere wish to attain enlightenment, expresses bodhichitta. On the one hand, if you do not aim at attaining ultimate enlightenment, then however strong your wish to benefit beings may be, you will never go beyond ordinary kindness and compassion. On the other hand, if you wish to attain enlightenment for your own sake alone, you will never go beyond the limited nirvana of Hinayana practitioners. Both aspects are indispensable.** This is expressed in the *Ornament of True Realisation*:

*Bodhichitta is to aspire to enlightenment  
For the benefit of others.*

The infinite number of beings who, in your successive lives since time without beginning, have been your parents have loved you and cared for you to the point of being ready to give up their own lives for your sake. It would be heartless of you to forget their indescribable kindness and to ignore their suffering; and it would thus be heartless, too, to practice the Dharma for your own liberation, ignoring the bondage of others.

Are you really going to abandon all these beings immersed in so much suffering? A son who is prosperous and happy, and lives comfortably and eats good food while his parents go about in rags, destitute, hungry, and with no roof over their heads would be seen by everyone as a figure of shame and contempt. But is that any different from failing to care for all beings of the six realms, who have all been your loving parents at one time or another? If you harbour such self-centred attitudes and do not strive for the happiness of others, you will be a figure of shame for all great beings, and will have strayed from the path of the Mahayana. As Gyalse Thogme himself said:

*If you don't take the suffering of all beings squarely on your shoulders,  
What's the use of receiving the supreme Mahayana teachings?*

Just as all the buddhas and bodhisattvas of the past aroused the bodhichitta, making the wish to bring all beings to enlightenment, so now you in your turn should generate great compassion and arouse the bodhichitta. The essence of the Dharma is the Mahayana teachings, and the essence of the Mahayana is the bodhichitta. Once the bodhichitta takes birth in your being, you are a true child of the buddhas, and the buddhas will always look on you with great happiness. In all your lives to come you will meet Mahayana teachers and benefit others. Your activity will join the ocean-like activity of all the bodhisattvas, who are full of compassion and appear in infinite forms, even as birds and wild animals, to benefit beings in infinite ways. Such an enlightened attitude benefits the whole country around you.

A bodhisattva benefits all beings equally, without discriminating between enemies and friends. Giving food, clothes, and the like to others can only bring them temporary and limited relief; it does not help them at the moment they die, nor after their death. But if you can establish all beings in the Dharma, you will help them in a way that is both immediately beneficial and beneficial for their future lives. Practicing the Dharma enables them to free themselves from samsara and achieve enlightenment; so that is the way to truly repay your parents' kindness. Any other way is not enough.

Do not hoard for your own benefit all your learning, possessions, and whatever else you may have accomplished. Instead, dedicate everything to all beings, and make the wish that they may all be able to listen, reflect, and meditate on the Dharma. Simply to express such a prayer is highly beneficial. Anything done with pure intention, even the wish to relieve beings from their headaches, has great merit. So the merit is all the more if you pray to free all beings from samsara. Since the number of beings is infinite, the merit of such a prayer is infinite, too.

Whether you are practicing the generation or perfection phase, Mahamudra, or Ati Yoga, as long as your practice is permeated with bodhichitta, it is naturally a Mahayana practice. But without the bodhichitta, your practice can only stagnate.

To have a thorough understanding of absolute wisdom is very difficult for ordinary people. That is why it is necessary to progress stage by stage along the path. To advance in the right direction, your practice should always observe what are called the three supreme points: (1) start with an attitude based on the bodhichitta, in other words with the wish to undertake the practice to attain enlightenment for the sake of all beings; (2) while you are engaged in the main part of whatever



practice you are doing, be free of concepts and distractions; and (3) at the end, conclude the practice with a dedication. Practicing like this will turn even the modest practice of some small positive action into a cause for enlightenment, and the dedication will protect the merit you have gained through that practice from being destroyed as a result of your anger and other negative emotions.

1. Starting with the wish to benefit others is a perfect preparation for any practice you are about to undertake, and a skilful way to ensure that your practice will reach fruition and not be swept away by a torrent of unfavourable circumstances and obstacles.
2. For the main part of the practice, being concentrated and free of concepts and distractions has several different levels to it. Basically, it means being free of all forms of attachment—and especially of pride. No matter how learned, disciplined, or generous you might be, as long as you feel conceited and proud about such things and at the same time contemptuous of other people, nothing positive can come of your practice. The twofold accumulation of merit and wisdom is indeed the way to buddhahood, but if it is adulterated with clinging, arrogance, and condescension, it cannot bear fruit.

More particularly, being free of attachments and concepts also means being free of any clinging to whatever practice you may be doing as having some intrinsic reality. Consider the example of making offerings to the bodhisattvas. Bodhisattvas appear in the form of spiritual friends for those who have faith, or as blessings, sacred scriptures, statues, and so on; but these manifestations are like dreams, or magical illusions, devoid of any intrinsic existence. So indeed is everything else in the phenomenal world, so that not only the object of your offerings but also the offerings you are making are all illusory. Any result of the offering is also an illusion—which does not mean that there is no result, but rather that the result is not a solid, concrete entity. What sense does it make to be full of attachment and pride regarding the results of your illusory actions? When a bodhisattva performs a beneficial action, he is totally free from clinging to the concepts of a subject who acts, an object who benefits from the action, and the action itself. That total absence of clinging makes the merit infinite.

3. Dedicate all the merit and positive actions you have done or will do throughout the past, present, and future, so that all beings, especially your enemies, may achieve enlightenment. Try to dedicate the merit in the same way that the great bodhisattvas do. Any merit they dedicate within the infinite expanse of their wisdom is inexhaustible. Dedication is like putting a drop of water in the ocean. The ocean is so vast that a drop once dissolved into it can never dry up.

Not a single prayer vanishes. Dedicating the merit of every positive action you do with a pure mind will continuously bear positive fruit until you attain enlightenment. As *The King of Aspirations for Excellent Conduct* says:

*Until all beings are free from negative emotions,  
May my prayers never come to exhaustion.*

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 your mind is vast, the power of your prayers is unlimited, too. If your mind is narrow and rigid, your accumulation of merit and the purification of your obscurations will also be very limited.

Do not let yourself be discouraged by such thoughts as that it is not worth dedicating what you see as your miserable accumulation of merit because it could hardly benefit anyone; or by the idea that for you helping others is just talk since you will never really be able to benefit them. If you keep your mind open and vast, the effectiveness of your bodhichitta will increase, and so too will the benefit and merit of all your words and deeds.

In your daily life and practice you must keep developing the excellent mind of enlightenment. You will find inspiration in the quintessential, profound prayers of the bodhisattvas found in the ocean-like collection of Mahayana scriptures, such as:

*May the bodhichitta, precious and sublime,  
Arise where it has not yet come to be;  
And where it has arisen may it never fail  
But grow and flourish ever more and more.*

And,

*May all beings find happiness;  
May all the lower realms be emptied forever;  
May all the bodhisattvas' prayers  
Be perfectly accomplished.*

And,

*Wherever the sky ends,  
There ends the number of beings.  
Wherever beings' destinies and emotions end,  
Only there end my prayers.*

The three supreme points include the whole practice and attitude of the Mahayana. That is why Mahayana teachers expound them over and over again. But just hearing them explained is not enough. You must assimilate and integrate them into your being. Day after day, check whether you are really acting in accord with them. If not, feel regret, and try to correct yourself. Do not allow your mind to become distracted and merely follow its inclinations.

If you become aware that you have succeeded to some extent in blending your mind with the Dharma, dedicate the merit to all beings, and aspire to do so more and more. If you constantly check your defects, eradicate those you already have, and prevent new ones from taking root; and at the same time try constantly to increase your positive qualities by allowing new ones to arise, and increasing those you already have, you will gradually progress along the five paths and levels that lead to buddhahood: the path of accumulating, the path of joining, the path of seeing, the path of meditation, and the path beyond learning.

Until you realise emptiness, you must never part from the enlightened attitude of bodhichitta. When you realise emptiness perfectly, no effort will be needed for unconditional compassion to manifest, since compassion is the expression of emptiness.

Just as you yourself wish to be happy, so, too, you should wish the same for others. Just as you yourself wish to be free from suffering, so, too, you should wish the same for all beings. "May all beings be happy, free from suffering, and the cause of suffering. May they reach perfect happiness, remain in it, and live in equanimity. May they maintain love for all others without discrimination." This wish is called the bodhichitta.

The bodhichitta will grow effortlessly if you have this pure attitude of mind. A good mind has a natural, intrinsic power to benefit others. Whatever merit arises from this vast attitude, instead of feeling that you own it, dedicate it to all beings, as infinite as space is vast. Stay free from any grasping at the reality of subject, object, and action, and the day will come when your body and speech become the servants of your mind and everything you do and say will spontaneously benefit others.

At present, like a blade of grass that bends whichever way the wind blows, you are vulnerable to many gross and subtle emotions. Trying to help others under those circumstances is unlikely to be of much benefit for them, but is quite likely to be a cause of distraction for you.

*To hope for a harvest without sowing seeds is to ask for famine;  
To hope to benefit others prematurely is to ask for trouble.*

If you continue to gain stability in your practice, if you continue to work on your attitude and develop unconditional altruism, the bodhichitta will grow. Gradually, you will become able to put your love and compassion into action in a way that truly does benefit others.

The bodhichitta has such tremendous power that the moment it arises, you enter the noble family of bodhisattvas. If you have bodhichitta, you are immune to negative forces, and when they manifest, they have no way to cause harm or to create obstacles.

This is illustrated by a story from the life of Jigme Gyalwai Nyugu, the root teacher of Patrul Rinpoche. Once, a vindictive spirit decided to take Jigme Gyalwai Nyugu's life. Full of harmful thoughts, the spirit arrived at the entrance to Gyalwai Nyugu's cave. He saw a serene old man sitting with his eyes closed, entirely peaceful, full of love and compassion, his head encircled with white hair. The sight was enough for the spirit's bad thoughts to disappear in an instant. He was awestruck as he contemplated the old man. The bodhichitta was born within him, and he made the promise never to take another's life again. After this, whenever an opportunity to harm someone arose, the image of the serene white-haired old man would instantaneously appear in his mind. The spirit lost all his power to harm.

When Lord Atisha was at Bodhgaya in India, paying his respects 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." The young woman was Arya Tara, and the elder one Chandamaharoshana, the Great Frowning One.

If bodhichitta has not yet arisen in you, pray that it will arise. And if it has arisen, pray that it will increase. If the merit of arousing bodhichitta were to take physical form, not even the whole of space would be vast enough to contain it.

## 2. The bodhichitta of application

Bodhichitta has two aspects, relative and absolute. Absolute bodhichitta is the realisation of emptiness attained by bodhisattvas on one of the supreme levels, or bhumis. Until that realisation dawns, the emphasis should be placed on relative bodhichitta, which, in essence, is the altruistic mind, the profound wish to benefit others and to be free of all selfish aims. If relative bodhichitta is practiced correctly, absolute bodhichitta will be naturally present mixed in with it, and will eventually be fully realised.

### I. Relative bodhichitta

Relative bodhichitta itself has two stages, the aspiration to benefit others, and the putting of that aspiration into action. The difference between the two is like the difference between wishing to go somewhere and actually setting out on the journey. The practice of relative bodhichitta consists of (A) the meditation practice of exchanging oneself and others, and (B) the post-meditation practice of using unfavourable circumstances on the path.

### A. The meditation practice of exchanging oneself and others

#### 11 Practicing Kindness and Compassion

*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.*

At present, when you feel happy yourself, you are probably quite satisfied.

Other people may not be feeling happy, but you do not really consider that to be your problem. And when you yourself feel unhappy, you are too preoccupied with being rid of whatever it is that is upsetting you to care, or even remember, that others might be feeling unhappy, too. All this is completely deluded.

There is a way to train yourself to see things from a wider perspective. It is a practice called exchanging oneself and others, and consists of trying to put others in your place, and put yourself in theirs. The idea is, on the one hand, to imagine that you are giving away to all beings whatever good things may happen to you, however small they may be; even a spoonful of good food; and on the other hand, to remember the unbearable sufferings that others are going through, and make up your mind to take all those sufferings upon yourself with the same readiness a mother feels when she takes upon herself the suffering of her child. Indeed, when you reflect that all beings must have actually been your kind parents at one time or another, and that surely you therefore owe it to them to do as much for them as you possibly can, you will be able to bear happily whatever hardships you may have to endure to help others. When you can actually take other people's suffering upon yourself, rejoice that you have fulfilled your aims; never think they did not deserve so much help or that you have now done quite enough for them.

By sincerely training in the meditation practice of exchanging suffering with happiness, you will eventually become capable of actually taking on others' illness and curing them, and of giving them your happiness in reality. Moreover, those with harmful intentions, even evil spirits who try to steal people's life force, will be powerless to harm either you or anyone else if you exchange their suffering and hatred with your happiness and peace.

There are some extraordinary pith instructions that explain in more detail how to make this practice more effective. First, it is important to start by arousing a deeply felt warmth, sensitivity, and compassion for all beings. To do so, begin by thinking about someone who has been very

kind and loving to you; in most cases, this could be your own mother. Remember and reflect on her kindness—how she gave you life, how she suffered the discomforts of pregnancy and the pain of childbirth, how she looked after you as you grew up, sparing no effort. She was ready to make any sacrifice for you and to put your welfare before her own.

When you feel strong love and compassion, imagine, step by step, that she is undergoing the sufferings of the six realms. In the hell realm, she is repeatedly and brutally killed and revived; she is tossed into a boiling cauldron of molten bronze; she suffers in agony before your very eyes. Then imagine that she has been reborn as a starving spirit, just skin and bones, and has not even so much as caught sight of food for twelve years. She stretches her hands out to you, imploring you, “My child, do you have anything you can give me to eat?” Imagine her reborn as an animal, a terrified doe being chased by hunters and their dogs. In panic, she leaps off a high cliff to escape them but falls with unbearable pain, shattering all her bones; still alive, but unable to move, she is finished off by the hunters’ knives.

Continue to imagine her undergoing, in quick succession, situation after situation of suffering. An intense feeling of compassion will irresistibly well up in your mind. At that moment, turn that intense compassion to all beings, realising that each one of them must surely have been your mother many times, and deserves the same love and compassion as your mother of this present life. It is important to include all those whom you now consider enemies or troublemakers.

Reflect deeply about everything that all these beings are going through as they wander endlessly in samsara’s vicious cycle of suffering. Think about old, infirm people unable to care for themselves, about all those who are sick and in pain, people who are desperate and impoverished, lacking even the most basic necessities, about people suffering famine and starvation, the pangs of hunger and thirst, those who are physically blind—and about those who are spiritually destitute, starved of the nourishment of Dharma, and blind to any authentic vision of truth. Think about all those who suffer as slaves to their own minds, constantly maddened by desire and aggression, and about those who harm one another without respite. Visualise all these sentient beings as a crowd in front of you, and let all the different forms that their suffering takes arise vividly in your mind.

### **Tonglen**

- a. With an intense feeling of compassion, begin the practice of sending and receiving. Start by focusing on your most hated enemy, or someone who has caused much trouble and difficulty for you. Consider that as your breath goes out, all your happiness (all your vitality, merit, good fortune, health, and enjoyment) is carried out to him on your breath in the form of cool, soothing, luminous white nectar. Make the following prayer: “May this truly go to my enemy and be entirely given to him!” Visualise that he absorbs this white nectar, which provides him with everything that he needs. If his life was to be short, imagine that now it is prolonged. If he needs money, imagine that now he is wealthy; if he is sick, that now he is cured; and if he is unhappy, now imagine him so full of joy that he feels like singing and dancing.
- b. As you breathe in, consider that you take into yourself, in the form of a dark mass, all the sickness, obscurations, and mental poisons your enemy may have had, and that he is thereby completely relieved of all his afflictions. Think that his sufferings come to you as easily as mountain mist wafted away by the wind. As you take his suffering into you, you feel great joy and bliss, mingled with the experience of emptiness.
- c. Do the same for the infinity of beings you are visualising before you. Send them all of your happiness and take on their suffering. Repeat this, again and again, until it becomes second nature to you.
- d. You can use this precious, vital practice at any time and in all circumstances, even while engaged in the activities of ordinary life, whether you are sick or well. It can be practiced both in and out of meditation sessions. By constantly practicing the exchange of self and others, you will reach the very core of the practice of compassion and the bodhichitta.
- e. Sometimes, visualise that your heart is a brilliant ball of light. As you breathe out, it radiates rays of white light in all directions, carrying your happiness to all beings. As you breathe in, their suffering, negativity, and afflictions come toward you in the form of dense, black light, which is absorbed into your heart and disappears in its brilliant white light without a trace,

- relieving all beings of their pain and sorrow.
- f. Sometimes, visualise yourself transformed into a wish-fulfilling jewel, radiant and blue like a sapphire, a little larger than your own body, on top of a victory banner. The jewel effortlessly fulfils the needs and aspirations of whoever addresses a prayer to it.
  - g. Sometimes, visualise that your body multiplies into infinite forms of yourself, which go to the hells and throughout the six realms of samsara, immediately taking on all the sufferings of each and every being they encounter, and giving away all your happiness to them.
  - h. Sometimes, visualise that your body transforms into clothes for all those who are cold and need clothing, into food for all those who are hungry, and into shelter for all who are homeless.
  - i. Sometimes, visualise that you are calling all the spirits who harm beings in various ways. You give them your flesh to eat, your blood to drink, your bones to gnaw at, and your skin to wear. With compassion, consider that bodhichitta takes birth in their minds as they happily revel in all of these offerings.

As Shantideva says in *The Way of the Bodhisattva*,

*May I be a guard for those who are protector-less,  
A guide for those who journey on the road.  
For those who wish to go across the water,  
May I be a boat, a raft, a bridge.  
May I be an isle for those who yearn for landfall,  
And a lamp for those who long for light;  
For those who need a resting place, a bed;  
For all who need a servant, may I be their slave.  
May I be the wishing jewel, the vase of plenty,  
A word of power, and the supreme healing;  
May I be the tree of miracles,  
And for every being the abundant cow.  
Like the earth and the pervading elements,  
Enduring as the sky itself endures,  
For boundless multitudes of living beings,  
May I be their ground and sustenance.*

The exchange of self and others can also be used as a way of dealing with your negative emotions. If you allow the negative emotions to express themselves in the ordinary way, you cannot hope to progress on the path. If you do not skilfully deal with them, either by getting rid of them or pacifying them, they will lead to the boundless suffering of the lower realms. Overcoming them will allow you to progress on the path to buddhahood. In the sutras there are many instructions on how to deal with the emotions by rejecting them. Here, we consider how to work with them through compassion. Take desire as an example.

**Desire is the compulsive attraction and attachment we feel toward a person or an object. Start by considering that if you tame your own desire, you will be able to reach enlightenment in order to best help beings and to establish them all in buddhahood. Then think about someone you do not like. Arousing great compassion for that person, add all his desires to your own, and think that as you take them, he becomes free of them. Progressively take all beings' desires, whether manifest or latent, upon yourself, and as you do so, think that all beings become free from desire and achieve enlightenment. This is the way to meditate on taking negative emotions according to relative truth.**

**To meditate according to absolute truth, arouse in yourself an overwhelming feeling of desire. Fuel it by adding the desires of all beings, to make a great mountain of desire. Then look right into it. You will see that desire is nothing but thoughts; it appears in your mind but does not itself have even the tiniest particle of independent existence. And when you turn the mind inward to look at itself, you become aware that the mind, too, is without any inherent existence in either past, present, or future. The nature of the mind is as insubstantial as the sky.**

**Using these same methods, you can meditate on anger, pride, jealousy, and ignorance,**

**as well as on anything else that obscures the mind.**

**As you practice this core practice of the bodhisattva path, you should try to see very vividly all your happiness going to others, and all their sufferings coming to you. Think that it is actually happening. Of all the practices of the bodhisattvas, this is the most essential. There is no obstacle that can disrupt it. Not only will it help others, but it will bring you to enlightenment, too.**

There was a true bodhisattva called Langri Thangpa, who constantly meditated on this practice of exchanging self and others. He prayed many times to be reborn in hell when he died in order to help all the beings there who were undergoing such intense suffering. But his prayer was not fulfilled, for as his life came to an end, visions of Dewachen, Amitabha's Buddhafield of Bliss, arose in his mind and he knew that he was going to be reborn there, instead. He immediately prayed to be able to take as many beings with him as possible. So strong was his wish that a vast number of beings poured after him into the buddhafiield.

The main disciple of the great pandita Atisha, Drom Tönpa, was a dedicated practitioner of bodhichitta. When Atisha was afflicted by a very powerful illness in his hand, he said to Drom Tönpa, "You have a good heart. Put your hand on mine; the power of your compassion will help to remove the pain."

Mara, the demon king, asked the Buddha, "If someone repeats my name, it brings them neither benefit nor harm, but if they repeat Mañjushri's name even once, they will be relieved of their suffering. Why?"

The Buddha said, "That power comes from the strength of the compassion and loving-kindness that great bodhisattvas such as Mañjushri have generated."

The great master Padmasambhava, Guru Rinpoche, is an emanation of Avalokiteshvara and the very embodiment of compassion. His dedication to others is so potent that even now, in this degenerate age, simply to remember him or invoke his name instantly cuts through obstacles, adverse circumstances, and evil influences, rendering them powerless, and brings the blessings of his body, speech, and mind. When Guru Rinpoche arrived in Tibet, he subdued all the negative forces, such as the Twelve Sisters, the Twenty-one Upasakas, and many others who were creating obstacles to the establishment of Dharma. He was able to do so not because he was motivated by anger, but by the power of his compassion and bodhichitta.

Some people may have the idea that these teachings on compassion and exchanging self and others are part of the "gradual path" teachings of the sutras, and are not nearly as effective as the more advanced "direct path" teachings of the Great Perfection or the Great Seal. That is a complete misunderstanding. Only if you have developed the love and compassion of relative bodhichitta can absolute bodhichitta (the very essence of the Great Perfection and the Great Seal) ever take birth in your being.

If the teachings of Longchen Rabjam and Jigme Lingpa have become so widespread and have been of benefit to so many people, it is because the minds of these two great teachers were constantly pervaded with compassion and bodhichitta. Jigme Lingpa's great disciple, Dodrup Jigme Trinle Öser, went to Kham, the eastern provinces of Tibet, and helped thousands of people there by transmitting the teachings of the *Longchen Nyingthig*, the *Heart Essence of the Vast Expanse* to them. He later wrote to Jigme Lingpa, "This could only happen because I had meditated for so long in mountain solitudes on compassion."

**The exchange of yourself and others can be approached step by step. The first stage is to see yourself and others as equally important; others want to be happy and want not to suffer, just as you do. So you should wish happiness for others in the same way that you wish it for yourself, and wish that they may avoid suffering, just as you do. The second stage is the exchange of yourself and others; you wish that others may have your happiness and that you may take their suffering. There is a third stage, which is to cherish others more than yourself, like the great bodhisattvas who, meeting a blind person, would have no hesitation in giving him their own eyes. At that point, all selfish preoccupation has completely disappeared and you are solely concerned with the welfare of others. Keep right on with this practice until it becomes a reality.**

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

It is from the constant wish to benefit others that the thirty-two major and eighty minor marks of a buddha, manifestations of his everlasting bliss and perfection, arise. It is also due to the power of compassion and bodhichitta that the Buddha Amitabha can lead beings to be reborn in his buddhfield simply by their hearing his name.

The Buddha, who loved all beings like his only child, said:

*To benefit beings is to benefit me;  
To harm beings is to harm me.  
Just as a mother rejoices when someone is helpful to her child,  
My heart gladdens when someone is helpful to any being.  
Just as a mother is distressed when someone harms her child,  
My heart is distressed when someone harms any being.*

To have love and compassion for all beings as if each one was your only child is by far the best way to repay the Buddha's kindness, and to help them is the most supreme offering to the Buddha. As he himself said:

*Incense, flowers, lamps, and so on are not the best offering to the Buddha;  
The best offering to the Buddha is to benefit all beings.  
Therefore to make offerings to the Buddha, benefit all beings—  
Your offering will delight all buddhas and make all beings happy.  
There is no other way to please the Victorious Ones than to bring all beings to happiness.*

To have overflowing love and unbearable compassion for all beings, therefore, is the best way to fulfil the wishes of all the buddhas and bodhisattvas. As a beginner you may not be able to help beings outwardly very much, but you should meditate constantly on love and compassion until your whole being is imbued with them. The training of exchanging suffering and happiness is something to practice, not just for one session or for one day but over the days, months, and years, until the bodhichitta fully blooms from within you. The core text of the teachings on bodhichitta is Shantideva's *The Way of the Bodhisattva*. When the great yogi Patrul Rinpoche was studying it, he did not learn more than two or three verses a day, because he was meditating on them and integrating their meaning thoroughly. He was constantly struck by how wonderful and profound a teaching it was, and felt sad each time he reached the end of the text. He always had it with him, till the end of his life.

## **B. The post-meditation practice of using unfavourable circumstances on the path**

To continue the practice of relative bodhichitta into daily life, it is necessary to make use of the adverse circumstances that one is bound to meet as fuel for spiritual practice. In the post-meditation stage, the practice is the training related to the bodhichitta of application.

**Adverse 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.**

## i. 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.<sup>22</sup>

### a. How to use loss on the path

#### 12 Embracing Adversity

*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.*

To have wealth and property is normally thought of as desirable, but attachment to them is actually an obstacle on your spiritual path. So someone who deprives you of your money and possessions is, in fact, freeing you from the fetters these things have created in your mind, and is preventing you from falling to the lower realms. You should feel nothing but gratitude. If you own nothing at all, you are free. No enemies or thieves will bother you. As the saying goes:

*If you have no wealth, thieves won't break in.*

*If you carry no bags, robbers won't lie in wait.*

It is important to remember that if you lose everything you possess, it can only be the karmic result of your having deprived others of their possessions in the past. There is therefore no reason to feel angry with anyone other than yourself. Seen from that point of view, is it not you who are attracting enemies with your wealth, fame, and rank? If there were no target, there would be nothing at which to shoot arrows. As a result of negative actions in your past lives, you have set yourself up as a target at which the arrows of suffering are now being shot.

A great bodhisattva never has angry thoughts toward anyone who harms him. Instead, his main concern is for that person's welfare. In each of the Buddha's past lives as a bodhisattva, he met an incarnation of the same person, 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, when he became the fully enlightened Buddha, the person was reborn as his cousin, Devadatta. 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 as a kind teacher who had taught him how to act as a bodhisattva.

Once, in a previous life, the Buddha was born as a snake that was eventually stoned to death by a band of children. Although he could have killed them by simply looking at them, he kept his mind filled with compassion and died praying to be able to benefit them in the future through this connection.

Whatever harm others may inflict on you, always pray that all beings' suffering may come to you and not to them. Make the wish that you will always be able to serve them, and that their minds will be ever full of joy. In the same way that, in the Guru Yoga practice, you meditate on the teacher visualised above the crown of your head, so, too, meditate here on all beings as though you were carrying them on your head, and pray to be able to dispel their suffering and bring them happiness. As we have already seen, there is no greater offering to the buddhas than that.

**To feel compassion for someone who is harming you is such an effective way of purifying your obscurations, freeing yourself from anger, and developing the positive side of your nature that, in fact, the harm that the person has done to you will carry you along the bodhisattva's path. As it is said, therefore, "I take refuge in whoever harms me, as he is the source of all happiness."**

In the beginning, this may seem difficult to put into practice. But **to have a truly good heart is something for which everyone has the capacity. Take all the suffering of the person harming you into your heart, and send him your own happiness, with great compassion. With the same attitude, you can also offer a water *torma*, the burned offering of *sur*, and the**

<sup>22</sup> The "four things that you do not want to happen": loss, suffering, disgrace, and disparagement. Their opposites are gain, pleasure, fame, and praise, and all together these eight are called the "eight ordinary concerns".



visualisation practice of giving away your body as an offering to the Three Jewels, a present to the Dharma protectors, a gift to suffering sentient beings, and repayment of your karmic debts to harmful spirits and obstacle makers.

For all these practices, it is important to have a thorough grounding in the practice of the four boundless attitudes. They are as follows: 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, or nonexistent relationship you may have with them in the narrow perspective of the present.

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

To bring about a true change in your attitudes is hard at first. But if you understand the meaning behind this mind training, and keep on trying to apply it, you will find that it helps you in every difficult situation, just as a well-designed vehicle can travel any distance quickly, and with ease.

## b. How to use suffering on the path

### 13 Bringing Suffering onto 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.*

Whatever someone may be about to inflict on you (even beheading you or some other terrible suffering) it is important to remember that this is the result of your own past actions. You must have done the same to others in a previous life. Do not get angry. Let your enemy do whatever he wants to get satisfaction. Be full of compassion for him and the karma he is about to accumulate. Drom Tönpa said:

*Should someone chop my body into a thousand pieces,  
May I not be the least bit upset,  
But straightaway put on the armour of patience.*

In return for harm, a bodhisattva tries to give help and benefit. If you see someone doing something negative, think of all the suffering he is accumulating for himself and pray that, rather than his being reborn in the lower realms, the results of his negative actions may come upon you instead; and dedicate to him the results of your own positive actions.

To practice in such a way also helps to eradicate your belief in a truly existing self. For, finally, your true enemies are not some ruthless people in power, some fierce raiders or merciless competitors who constantly harass you, take everything you have, or threaten you with legal proceedings. Your real enemy is your belief in a self.

That idea of an enduring self has kept you wandering helplessly in the lower realms of samsara for countless past lifetimes. It is the very thing that now prevents you from liberating yourself and others from conditioned existence. If you could simply let go of that one thought of "I," you would find it easy to be free, and to free others, too. If you overcome the belief in a truly existing self today, you will be enlightened today. If you overcome it tomorrow, you will be enlightened tomorrow. But if you never overcome it, you will never gain enlightenment.

This "I" is just a thought, a feeling. A thought does not intrinsically possess any solidity, form, shape, or colour. For example, when a strong feeling of anger arises in the mind, with such force that you want to fight and to destroy someone, is the angry thought holding a

weapon in its hand? Could it lead an army? Might it burn anyone like a fire, crush them like a stone, or carry them away like a raging river? **No. Anger, like any other thought or feeling, has no true existence. It cannot even be definitely localised anywhere in your body, speech, or mind.** It is like wind in empty space. **Instead of allowing such wild thoughts to determine what you do, look at their essential emptiness.** For example, you might find yourself suddenly face-to-face with someone you think wants to harm you, and a strong feeling of fear would arise. But once you realised that the person, in fact, had only good intentions toward you, your fear would disappear. It was just a thought.

Similarly, even though you have spent many lifetimes believing in the reality of this “I,” once you realise that it has no inherent existence, your belief in it will easily disappear. It is only because you are unaware of its true nature that the idea of “I” has such power to affect you. Without that belief in a self, anger, desire, fear, and so on can no longer arise. Look at the actual nature of harm itself: it is ungraspable, like a drawing made on the water’s surface. When you truly experience that, resentment vanishes of its own accord. As soon as the fiery waves of thoughts subside, everything becomes like empty sky, which has nothing to gain and nothing to lose.

**“I” is merely a label you have given to a transient combination of concepts and attachments to your body, speech, and mind. It is not an absolute, eternal, indestructible truth, like the dharmakaya nature of the buddhas.** Use any practice you do to dissolve this idea of “I” and the self-oriented motivations that accompany it. Even if you do not succeed in the beginning, keep trying.

## c. How to use disgrace on the path

### 14 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.*

**If someone defames and disgraces you, that is simply the result of having criticised and dishonoured others in the past, especially bodhisattvas. Instead of feeling angry with such people, you should feel grateful to them for giving you the opportunity to purify your past misdeeds. In all circumstances, it is important to act in accordance with the teachings; but especially at such moments. What is the point of having received teachings if you do not apply them? Unfavourable circumstances are the best opportunity you will have to put the teachings into practice.**

Once a pure monk of Ratreng Monastery was blamed for the theft of a lost plate. He went to see his abbot and asked him, “I am not at fault, what should I do?” The abbot advised him, “Accept the blame, offer tea to all the monks, and eventually your innocence will be proved.” The monk did so. That night he had many good dreams indicating a great purification of his being. Soon after, the plate was found, and the monk was cleared of the accusation. Informed of the matter, the abbot concluded, “This is the right way to behave!”

**Whether you have a good reputation or a bad one, it has no objective reality at all. It is not worth caring about. The great teachers of the past never bothered about such things. They always answered slander and disparagement with kindness, and patience.**

Langri Thangpa was one such master. Once, in the region of the cave where he was meditating, there was a couple whose children always died in infancy. When yet another child was born to them, they consulted an oracle, who said that the child would survive only if they claimed that he was the son of a spiritual master. So the wife took her baby boy up to Langri Thangpa’s cave and set him down in front of the sage. She said, “Here is your son,” and went away. The hermit said nothing about it apart from simply asking a devoted woman he knew to feed and care for the child. Sure enough, Langri Thangpa being a monk, gossip spread about him having fathered a child. A few years later, the parents of the boy came with large offerings, and respectfully said to him, “Please forgive us. Although you were not in the least at fault, we let ill

rumour spread about you. The child has survived due only to your kindness.” Serene as always, Langri Thangpa gave the boy back to his parents without a word.

**Some people spend all their energy, and even risk their lives, to achieve fame. Fame and notoriety are both no more than an empty echo. Your reputation is an alluring mirage that can easily lead you astray. Discard it without a second thought, like the snot you blow from your nose.**

## **d. How to use disparagement on the path**

### **15 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.*

**If you want to be a genuine follower of the Buddha, never retaliate when you are harmed. Always remember the four principles of positive training, which are as follows: (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.**

**If someone criticises you, picking on your most sensitive points, or angrily insults you with the most offensive language, do not return like for like, no matter how difficult it is to bear. Practice patience, and never give way to anger. Take it positively, and use it as a chance to let go of your own pride. Practice generosity and compassion by giving the victory to others and being happy to lose. Allowing others to win is a characteristic of all Buddhist paths. In fact, what is there to be won or lost? From an absolute viewpoint, there is not the slightest difference between winning and losing.**

Many Buddhist teachers were abused, treated as criminals, and beaten when the Chinese communists came to Tibet. Instead of feeling hatred, they prayed that the negative actions of all beings would be purified through the vindictive attacks against them. Like them, when you are insulted and humiliated, pray that, using the connection you have established with those insulting you, you may be able to bring them all to liberation.

**There should be no insult or humiliation that is too great for you to bear. If you were ever to feel it was justifiable to respond vindictively, the exchange of bitter words and recriminations that ensue would be bound to inflame and escalate the anger on both sides. This is how people start to fight and kill each other. Murders and wars all begin with just one angry thought.** As Shantideva says,

*No evil is there similar to anger,  
No austerity to be compared with patience.*

**Never give way to anger, therefore. Be patient; and, moreover, be grateful to someone who humiliates you, as they are giving you a precious opportunity to strengthen your understanding and practice of bodhichitta.** The great Jigme Lingpa said:

*Ill treatment by opponents  
Is a catalyst for your meditation;  
Insulting reproaches you don't deserve  
Spur your practice onward;  
Those who do you harm are teachers  
Challenging your attachment and aversion—  
How could you ever repay their kindness?*

**Indeed, you are unlikely to make much spiritual progress if you lack the courage to face your own hidden faults. Any person or situation that helps you to see those faults, however uncomfortable and humiliating it may be, is doing you 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.  
The best incentives are enemies, obstacles, and the sufferings of illness.*

And the Kadampa master Shawopa used to warn his disciples as they came to see him, saying, "I only show people their hidden defects. If you can avoid getting annoyed, stay; but if not, go away!"

Of the eight ordinary concerns, therefore, even from the relative point of view there are many ways of eliminating the distinction between the good and the bad, those you want to happen and those 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.** As Shantideva says,

*Thus, with things devoid of true existence,  
What is there to gain, and what to lose?  
Who is there to pay me court and honours,  
And who is there to scorn and to revile me?  
Pain and pleasure, whence do these arise?  
And what is there to give me joy and sorrow?*

## ii. Using on the path the two things that are difficult to bear

The two things that are difficult to bear are: (a) being wronged in return for kindness, and (b) humiliation.

### a. How to use on the path being wronged in return for kindness

#### 16 When being Wronged Return 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.*

**If you do something good for others, it is a mistake to expect anything in return, or to hope that people will admire you for being a bodhisattva. All such attitudes are a long way from the true motivation of bodhichitta. Not only should you expect nothing in return; you should not be disturbed in the slightest when people respond ungratefully. Someone for whom you have risked your very life may return your kindness with resentment, hatred, or harm. But just love him all the more.** A mother with an only child is full of love for him no matter what he does. While she is suckling him, he may bite her nipple and badly wound it, but she will never get angry or love him any less. Whatever happens, she will continue to care for him as best as she can.

Many people do not have the good fortune that you enjoy of having met a spiritual teacher, and thus cannot find their way out of delusion. They need your help and your compassion more than anyone else, no matter how badly they may behave. Always remember that people who harm you are simply the victim of their own emotions. Think how good it would be if they could be free of those emotions. When a thoughtless child wrongs a thoughtful adult, the adult will not feel resentment, but will try with great love to help the child to improve.

**To meet someone who really hurts you is to meet a rare and precious treasure. Hold that person in high esteem, and make full use of the opportunity to eradicate your defects and make progress on the path. If you cannot yet feel love and compassion for those who treat you badly, it is a sign that your mind has not been fully transformed and that you need to keep working on it with increased application.**

**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. But if someone who has done him harm later changes his behaviour, is set on the path, and achieves liberation, that is something that will make a bodhisattva rejoice wholeheartedly and be totally satisfied.**

## b. How to use humiliation on the path

The next section considers how we may deal with receiving humiliation in return for kindness.

### 17 Receiving Humiliation in Return for Kindness

*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.*

Someone with your own ability or status, or an inferior without any good qualities, might (despite being treated politely and considerately by you) criticise you contemptuously out of pure conceit and arrogance, and try to humiliate you in various ways. When such things happen, do not be angry or upset, or feel badly treated.

See and respect such people as kind teachers showing you the path to liberation. Pray that you may be able to do them as much good as possible. Whatever happens, do not wish for a moment to take your revenge. The capacity to patiently bear scorn and injury from those who lack your education, strength, and skill is particularly admirable. To remain humble while patiently bearing insults is a very effective way of countering your ingrained tendency to be interested only in your own happiness and pleasure.

Never be proud, but instead take the most humble position and regard everyone as being above you, as though you were carrying them on your head. It is said, "Carrying all beings above one's head is the torch and banner of the bodhisattvas."

The great teacher Drom Tönpa Gyalwai Jungne would circumambulate even a dog on the side of the road, in recognition of the buddha nature that, like all beings, it possessed.

## iii. Using deprivation and prosperity on the path

### a. How to use deprivation on the path

#### 18 Being Compassionate When Things are Difficult

*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.*

Countless people in this world are deprived of everything; food, clothing, shelter, affection. They can hardly keep themselves alive. Many people are victims of ill treatment or are stricken by serious illness. When you yourself suffer such torments, **wish with compassion and courage to take the difficulties and anguish of all beings upon yourself and to give them whatever happiness you may have. Try to provide others with whatever they need in reality. Reflect on the positive qualities of suffering.**

Suffering, in fact, can be helpful in many ways. It spurs your motivation, and as many teachings point out, without suffering there would be no determination to be free of samsara. Sadness is an effective antidote to arrogance. Patrul Rinpoche says,

*I don't like happiness, I like suffering:  
If I am happy, the five poisons increase.  
If I suffer, my past bad karma is exhausted.  
I don't value high positions, I like low ones.  
If I am important, my pride and jealousy increase;  
If I am lowly, I relax and my spiritual practice grows.  
The lowest place is the seat of the saints of the past.*

And Kharak Gomchung said:

*Difficulties are our spiritual teachers;  
Obstacles are a spur to Dharma practice:  
Suffering is a broom to sweep away our evil deeds,  
Do not regard them with dislike.*

It is indeed when difficult times and circumstances arise that the difference between genuine

practice and its mere semblance is revealed.

There are negative spirits who thirst to take life. The best way to stop them from harming you and others is not to combat them with anger but to satisfy them by repeatedly making visualised offerings of your body. Until you are ready to give your life and body for the sake of others in reality, which is not the case at present, you can at least do it mentally. As your mind grows used to altruistic love and compassion, your words and actions will naturally reflect that attitude.

Once, five rakshasas, ogre-like beings who live on flesh and blood, arrived in a country that was new to them and set out on a killing rampage. They started by attacking sheep, trying to kill everything in sight with their weapons and sharp teeth and claws, but to no avail; they were unable to kill a single animal, and could not even wound them. The beings of this country seemed invulnerable, as if they were made out of rock. So their anger gave way to surprise. They asked some shepherds, “Why is it that we cannot kill any of your sheep?” The shepherds told them that the kingdom was ruled by a monarch called The Strength of Love. He spent all his time in the highest tower of his palace, absorbed in deep meditation on compassion and love. Such was the strength of his love that there were no famines, no sicknesses or plagues, and no living being in his kingdom could ever be killed.

The five rakshasas went to see the king. They told him that in order to survive, they needed to eat flesh and blood, but they could not find any in his kingdom. The king said, “I would like to provide you with sustenance, but I cannot allow you to harm anyone. As you need flesh and blood to sustain your own lives, however, I shall give it to you myself.” Piercing his body with a spear, he gave them his own flesh and blood. As soon as they tasted the blood of the bodhisattva king, they suddenly experienced a deep meditative state of love. They vowed never to harm any being from that moment onward.

This story illustrates the power and strength of love. The *Ornament of the Mahayana Sutras* mentions the eight supreme qualities that arise from meditating upon love. Patrul Rinpoche said that to meditate on love pacifies all calamities and troubles in the surrounding countryside. Jetsun Milarepa, too, said that to treat human beings like celestial beings is to offer a treasure to ourselves; if we wish only good for others and are full of love, it opens up a mine of perfections, and all our aspirations will naturally be accomplished.

## **b. How to use prosperity on the path**

### **19 Recognising What is Truly Valuable**

*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.*

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 hollow as a bubble, as evanescent as the skin of a snake. A bodhisattva is never conceited or proud, no matter what worldly achievements and privileges may come to him.

However much wealth you may gather, it will eventually be taken away; by robbers, by people in power, or by death. If your descendants inherit it, there is no certainty that it will do them any real good; they are likely to use it to get the better of their enemies, influence their relatives, and so on, accumulating negative actions that will propel them to the lower realms of existence.

Jetsun Milarepa always taught his lay disciples that the best way for them to accomplish the Dharma was to be generous to those in need. Even a small act of generosity done with an altruistic mind accumulates great merit. If you have power and wealth, make it meaningful; use it for the sake of the Dharma and to benefit beings, as did the three great religious kings of Tibet.<sup>23</sup> To be miserly, on the other hand (whether you are rich or poor at present) is to sow the seeds of rebirth among the tortured spirits, who are deprived of everything.

Pray to be able to follow the example of the great bodhisattvas, who, because of their past generosity and accumulated merit, were born as powerful monarchs with fabulous wealth, using

<sup>23</sup> The three great religious kings of Tibet: Songtsen Gampo (609–98), Trisong Detsen (790–844), and Tri Ralpachen (reigned 815–38). It was thanks to their faith, their efforts, and their generosity that in each of their reigns the Buddhist scriptures, commentaries, and teachers were brought to Tibet.

their riches to help the poor and to alleviate famine and sickness. In addition to caring for the physical welfare of their people, they taught them to avoid the ten negative actions<sup>24</sup> and to perform the ten positive ones. As a result of their compassionate activity, not a single being in their kingdoms would be reborn in the lower realms. Good harvests, prosperity, and general happiness abounded.

Think, “May the needs of all beings, even the smallest insect, be fulfilled.” Use your wealth and possessions in the best possible 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 fulfil their ultimate needs by giving them the sublime gift of the Dharma.

## **iv. Using hatred and desire on the path**

### **a. How to use objects of hatred on the path**

#### **20. Giving Peace a Chance**

*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.*

Once you overcome the hatred within your own mind, you will discover that in the world outside, there is no longer any such thing as even a single enemy. But if you keep giving free reign to your feelings of hatred and try to overcome your outer adversaries, you will find that however many of them you manage to defeat, there will always be more to take their place. Even if you could subjugate all the beings in the universe, your anger would only grow stronger. You will never be able to deal with it properly by indulging it. Hatred itself is the true enemy, and cannot be allowed to exist. The way to master hatred is to meditate one-pointedly on patience and love. Once love and compassion take root in your being, there can be no outer adversaries. As The Hundred Verses says,

*If you kill out of anger,*

*Your enemies will be never-ending;*

*If you kill anger,*

*That will kill your enemies once and for all.*

In one of his past rebirths, the Buddha was a giant ocean turtle. One day, while he was far from any land, he saw that a ship carrying some merchants had been wrecked and was sinking. The merchants were about to drown, but the turtle rescued them by carrying them the long way to the nearest shore on his back. After carrying them to safety, he was so exhausted that he fell asleep on the beach. But while he slept, eighty thousand flies began to eat their way into his body. The turtle awoke in great pain, and realized what had happened. He saw that there was no way to be rid of all the flies; if he plunged into the sea, all of them would die. So, being a bodhisattva, he stayed where he was and let the flies eat away his body. Filled with love, he made the prayer, “Whenever I attain enlightenment, may I, in turn, consume all these insects’ negative emotions and actions, and their belief in true existence, and thus lead them to buddhahood.” As a result of this prayer, when the Buddha turned the wheel of Dharma for the first time in Varanasi, the former flies had been reborn as the assembly of eighty thousand fortunate celestial beings who were present. Had the turtle killed the insects in anger by diving into the sea, however, there would have been no end to his sufferings. The result of killing a single being out of anger is to be reborn in the hell realms for the duration of five hundred human lives, or a great kalpa.

Never get angry, even with someone who has deliberately and maliciously harmed you. As we have already seen, you should be grateful to such a person for helping you to purify past negative actions, to increase your determination to be free from samsara, and to develop love and compassion.

These days, famines, conflicts, wars, and other upheavals are increasing all over the world. This is because people allow their emotions to run wild, and act under their power. Were hatred,

<sup>24</sup> The ten negative actions: three of the body; taking life, taking what is not given, and sexual misconduct; four of speech; lying, sowing discord, worthless chatter, and harsh words; and three of the mind; wishing harm, covetousness, and wrong views. The ten positive actions are to avoid the ten negative ones and to practice their opposites.

pride, jealousy, desire, and stupidity to decrease, not only conflicts but also epidemics and natural calamities in the world would decrease as well, like the smoke disappearing when a fire is extinguished. People would naturally turn their minds toward the Dharma.

It is a crucial point of the teachings to become conscious that attachment, aversion, and ignorance are your oldest enemies, and that once you have overcome them, there are no further enemies in the world outside. The time will come when you see very clearly and precisely how this is so. If you do not understand this point, and act carelessly, your emotions can get completely out of control. In anger, you could be prepared to sacrifice your life in war, and you could go so far as to kill everyone on the face of the earth in one blinding instant without any regret. Such things can happen when anger is allowed to take over the mind and gather its full force.

Examine anger itself, and you will find that it is nothing but a thought. If that angry thought disappears, it will not lead to an action done in anger, with its negative karmic results. Trample on anger with realisation, and it dissolves like a cloud in the sky; and as it dissolves, the notion of “enemy” will vanish with it.

Anger and the other emotions will keep coming up in the mind of an ordinary person, yet they can all be neutralised with the right antidotes, for they are completely empty in essence. It is important to realise that all outer torments come from harbouring these poisons within your mindstream. 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.*

Turn your mind inward and apply the right antidotes, with pure motivation. You will be able to transform yourself in accordance with the Dharma, and to act in the way of the bodhisattvas.

## **b. How to use objects of desire on the path**

### **21. Dropping Greed**

*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.*

Whatever comfort, wealth, beauty, and power you enjoy today is the result of some minor good actions in a past life. However much of them you have, it is the characteristic of ordinary people never to feel satisfied. You may have more wealth than you actually need, you may have triumphed over many opponents, you may have close relationships with friends and relatives, but it is never enough; even if coins of gold were to rain down on you from the sky, it would probably not be enough.

When craving for all sorts of desirable things<sup>25</sup> becomes so ingrained in your mind, trying to satisfy your wants is like drinking saltwater; the more you drink, the more you feel thirsty.

The destructive power of dissatisfaction is illustrated by the story of King Mandhatri,<sup>26</sup> who had accumulated a lot of merit in a past life and was reborn as a universal monarch. He gradually ascended the different levels of god realms, eventually reaching the celestial Heaven of the Thirty-three. There he was able to share the throne with Indra, the god of the gods, who had a life span of many kalpas, could enjoy the fruits of the wish-fulfilling tree, drink the nectar of ambrosial lakes, and illuminate the whole universe with the light emanating from his body. King Mandhatri could have continued to enjoy such exquisite happiness. But he conceived the idea of killing Indra in order to make himself even more powerful and become the greatest being in the

<sup>25</sup> Dzatrul Rinpoche’s commentary here includes a long description of the dangers of alcohol, meat, and sex.

<sup>26</sup> The story is recounted in the *Jataka* tales of the Buddha’s previous lives. King Mandhatri had been a small boy in a previous life at the time of the Buddha Vipashyin, whom he met when the Buddha was going to beg for alms. He instantly felt great faith in the Buddha and wanted to make an offering to him, but could only find a handful of peas in his pocket. He threw them toward the Buddha in a gesture of offering. Four peas fell in the Buddha’s begging bowl, two peas fell at the level of the Buddha’s heart, and one remained stuck to the Buddha’s robe. As a result of this the boy was reborn as King Mandhatri, who had power over the four continents. He then gained power over the Four Great Kings and, finally, reached the Heaven of the Thirty-three, where he shared the celestial throne with thirty-seven successive Indras. According to one version of the *Jataka* tales, the boy had also thrown four peas on the ground with a negative attitude at the end of his offering, and his fall was the result of these final four peas.



universe. This thought came to him just as his merit was exhausted, and he died wretchedly, falling back into the ordinary world.

Looking at life in the great cities of ancient and modern times, you can see how people feverishly accumulate ever-increasing amounts of wealth, but still die without having satisfied their craving. As Lord Atisha said,

*Abandon desire for everything,  
And stay without desire.  
Desire does not bring happiness,  
It cuts off liberation's very life.*

To know how to be satisfied with what you have is to possess true wealth. The great saints and hermits of the past had the ability to be content with whatever they had, and with however they lived. They stayed in lonely places, sheltering in caves, sustaining their lives with the very barest of necessities.

When you know how to judge what is enough for you, you will no longer be tormented by wants, desires, and needs. Otherwise, as the saying goes, "Craving is like a dog; the more it gets, the more it wants." The followers of the Buddha (the arhats and the *shravakas*) possessed only their saffron Dharma robes and a begging bowl. They spent their lives absorbed in deep concentration. That was how they freed themselves from samsara. They did not hanker after wealth, fame, or position, which they saw as utterly meaningless and left behind without a second thought, like spittle in the dust. Nowadays, people chase busily after externals and are preoccupied by what they can get. As a result, learning, reflecting, and meditating have declined, and with them the Buddha's teachings themselves.

Learning, reflecting, and meditating are, in fact, the only things of which you can never have enough. Not even the most learned sages (such as Vasubandhu, who knew 999 important treatises by heart) ever thought they had reached the ultimate extent of learning; they were aware that there was still an ocean of knowledge to acquire. The bodhisattva Kumara Vasubhadra studied with one hundred fifty spiritual masters, yet no one ever heard him say that he had received enough teachings. Mañjushri, sovereign of wisdom, who knows all that can be known, travels to all the buddhafiels in the ten directions throughout the universe, ceaselessly requesting the buddhas to turn the Wheel of the Mahayana for the sake of beings.

Be satisfied, therefore, with whatever you have by way of ordinary things; but never with the Dharma. If your ordinary desires and dislikes are insatiable, on the other hand, and you have no wish for the Dharma, you can only sink lower and lower.

## II. Absolute bodhichitta

The practice of absolute bodhichitta consists of (A) the meditation practice of remaining in a state free of conceptual elaborations without any clinging, and (B) the post-meditation practice of abandoning any belief in the objects of desire and aversion as truly existing.

### A. The meditation practice of remaining in a state free of conceptual elaborations without any clinging

#### 22. Embracing the Non-dual

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

The many different perceptions of everything around you in this life arise in your mind. Look at your relationships with others, for example. You perceive some people in a positive way—friends, relatives, benefactors, protectors; while there are others whom you perceive as enemies—those who criticise and defame you, beat, fool, or swindle you. The process starts with the senses, through which the mind perceives various forms, sounds, smells, tastes, and feelings. As it becomes aware of those objects outside, it categorises them. Those that it finds pleasant it is attracted to, while those that it finds unpleasant it tries to avoid. The mind then suffers from not getting the pleasant things it wants and from having to experience the unpleasant things it wants to avoid. It is always busy running after some pleasant situation or other that it really wants to

enjoy, 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 you perceive. They arise only in the mind.

Take as an example the process of perceiving visual form. The object is a particular form in the outer world, the organ that senses it is the eye, and that which perceives the image and categorises it is consciousness. If you see a beautiful person, a dear relative, or a sacred statue, you feel glad. If you see something ugly, or some ill-intentioned person come to ridicule or attack you, you feel upset, anxious, or angry. All these perceptions arise in the mind itself. They are triggered by the object perceived, but they do not themselves exist in that object, nor do they originate anywhere else outside the mind.

Generally, mind is the slave of its own biased perceptions. Dividing everything into pleasant or unpleasant, it constantly tries to experience what is pleasant and to get rid of what is not—blind to the fact that this is not the way to achieve happiness and avoid suffering. Blind ignorance drives the mind constantly to generate feelings of like and dislike. You engage in endless ordinary worldly activities with no more durability than drawings on water. Preoccupied entirely by these distractions, you exhaust your life and squander this precious human existence with all the freedoms and advantages that you now enjoy.

The mind thus contrives everything, so the only thing to do is to master the mind. As Tilopa taught Naropa:

*It is not what you perceive that binds you,  
It is your clinging to it that binds you.  
Cut through your clinging, Naropa!*

If you master your mind, it will remain naturally concentrated, peaceful, and aware. You will even be able to wander around in a crowd without being distracted and carried away by desire or aversion. But if you have no mastery over your mind and are influenced and conditioned by your habitual tendencies, even in the quiet of an isolated retreat your thoughts will follow one upon another like ripples on water. Memories of past events will well up vividly in your mind; as will plans, decisions, and speculation about your future. You will spend your whole time running after thoughts and concepts, a lot of mental activity with no benefit at all for your practice.

A mind that has been brought under control is indeed the only true source of happiness. But to master your mind, you need to know more about how it works. So, what is this mind?

When you see a pleasant form, a friend or a relative, a feeling of happiness arises, and you think, “What a joy to meet them!” This is mind, in one aspect. Another aspect of the mind is the feeling of outrage and fury that might arise when you see someone who dislikes you and accuses you of stealing or being dishonest. All such reactions are just thoughts, but once they arise in your mind, they can expand and give rise to further thoughts, becoming very powerful. Once hatred arises, it may increase to the point where you are ready to kill. Once attachment and desire are kindled, you may soon be ready to do anything and give every penny you have to get whatever it is you desire so much, whether it is a woman or a man or some other object. Look at what is happening, and you will see that it is all just thoughts, and nothing more. Everything you perceive is like that.

At present you are seeing me sitting here, and you are thinking, “He is teaching the Dharma, I had better listen to what he is saying.” These are thoughts, too. You think there is something solid in front of you because you have perceived an object, and various different feelings are arising in relation to it.

The process begins, as I have said, with sense perception. There is one consciousness that perceives visual forms, another consciousness that perceives sounds, another that perceives taste; and there are consciousnesses that perceive smell and physical feelings. But these are not yet what we call thoughts. They are merely basic perceptions. Then, when you come into contact with something, a train of thoughts is triggered. If, for instance, you have just heard someone praising you, you start to feel elated, and to think how your reputation is increasing. Or if someone has just insulted you, you start to feel annoyed. These are just thoughts. To put it simply, the mind is just this random collection of thoughts.

Past thoughts are dead. The countless thoughts that have arisen in your mind since sunrise have all gone. Future thoughts have not yet arisen, and what they will be is utterly unpredictable.

Who knows what you are going to think about from now until midnight? So you are left with only the present thought as something you could investigate.

Let us examine such 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 colour; 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?

No matter how much you look, there is nothing that you can point your finger at and say, “Here is the thought!” And the reason you cannot do it is because the nature of thought is empty. There is nothing but emptiness.

When a rainbow appears vividly in the sky, you can see its beautiful colours, yet you could not wear it as clothing or put it on as an ornament. It arises through the conjunction of various factors, but 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 you, nor is there any reason why you should become their slave.

The endless succession of past, present, and future thoughts leads us to believe that there is something inherently and consistently present, and we call it “mind.” But actually, as I said before, past thoughts are as dead as a corpse. Future thoughts have not yet arisen. So how could these two, which do not exist, be part of an entity that inherently exists?

It is hard to imagine a present thought that is not connected to either past or future. On the other hand, how is it that a present thought can rely on two things that do not exist? Could there be points of mutual contact where past, present, and future thoughts are joined together? If the present thought was in contact with the past thought, for example, then either that present thought must actually be a past thought, or else the past thought would have to be in the present. The same is true for the meeting of present and future thoughts. Either the present thought is actually still part of the future or else the future thought is already a present thought.

When you look at the mind, it seems superficially that past thoughts lead to present thoughts and present thoughts to future ones. But if you examine these thoughts more closely, you will see that none of them truly exist. To formulate the existence of something that has no existence at all is called delusion. It is only your lack of awareness and your grasping that make thoughts seem 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.

However, that nothingness is not just a blank emptiness like empty space. There is an immediate awareness present. This is called clarity. If someone gives you an apple, you are cheerful; if a bee stings you, you feel pain. This is the clarity aspect of mind. This clarity of mind is like the sun, illuminating the landscape and allowing you to see mountain, path, and precipice; where to go and where not to go.

Although the mind does have this inherent awareness, to say there is “a mind” is to give a label to something that does not exist; to assume the existence of something that is no more than a name given to a succession of events. One hundred and eight beads strung together, for example, can be called a rosary, but that “rosary” is not a thing that exists inherently on its own. If the string breaks, where did the rosary go? Likewise, the thought “I” is the very cause that makes you wander in samsara. But if you examine it closely, there is no such thing as an “I.” It is a mistaken belief in something that does not exist. Once that concept “I” is rooted in your mind, it grows & becomes a number of associated beliefs, such as in “my body,” “my mind,” “my name.”

Your body is composed of the five aggregates, and your mind of the various kinds of consciousnesses. Your name, or the idea “I,” is the label affixed to the momentary association of these two.

Examine first the concept “body.” If you single out the skin, the flesh, and the bones of your body one by one, and then ask yourself if the body is dwelling in the skin, if flesh could be the body, or if you can call the bones the body, what will you find? The farther you take your investigation, all the way down to the atomic particles, the less you can point to the “body”—or to any other material object, for that matter—as a discrete entity. “Body” is merely a name given to a

conglomeration of different things to which, once they are separated, that label no longer applies.

The same is true of the mind. What you call “my mind” is something you believe to have a certain continuity. But, as we have just seen, past, present, and future thoughts and feelings can have no veritable point of mutual contact. It is not possible to conceive of an entity that is an amalgam of thoughts of which some have already ceased, some have not yet happened, and some exist in the present.

As for your name, you hold on to your identity as if it had some autonomous existence—as if it truly belonged to you. But if you examine it carefully, you will find that it has no intrinsic reality; as is the case with the name of anything. Take the word lion, for instance. It is made up of the letters l, i, o, and n. Take those four letters apart, and there is nothing left; the name has vanished.

Once you recognise these three concepts of “body,” “mind,” and “name” as being empty, there is no longer anything left of the so-called I. The “I” is purely an invention, an imposture conjured up by delusion. Someone with eye disease might see all kinds of objects apparently floating in the sky (lights, lines, and spots) when in truth there is nothing there. Similarly, because we have the disease of believing in an “I,” we see that “I” as an inherently existing entity.

In essence, the mind is what is aware of everything; it is a clarity that perceives all external objects and events. But try to find it, and it turns out to be as impossible to grasp and as elusive as a rainbow; the more you run after it, the farther away it appears to recede; the more you look at it, the less you 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.<sup>27</sup> As the Great Master of Oddiyana said:

*Like a precious jewel buried under a poor man's house,  
Primordially pure awareness has always been present in the dharmakaya.  
It is because it is not recognised that the delusion of samsara takes place.  
By being introduced directly to that awareness and recognising it,  
One realises the wisdom of primordial space; and this is known as buddhahood.*

Once you have been able to recognise the empty nature of mind, attachment and desire will not arise when your mind sees something beautiful, and hatred and repulsion will not develop whenever it comes across anything horrible or unpleasant. Since these negative emotions no longer arise, the mind is no longer deceived or deluded, karma is not accumulated, and the stream of suffering is cut.

If you throw a stone at the nose of a pig, it will immediately turn around and run away. Likewise, whenever a thought develops, recognise it as being empty. That thought will immediately lose its compelling power and will not generate attachment and hatred; and once attachment and hatred are gone, realisation of the perfectly pure Dharma will unfold naturally from within.

Indeed, try as you might, there is no way you will ever be rid of your attachment and hatred as long as you keep believing that they arise because of the external objects or circumstances to which they are connected. The more you attempt to reject external phenomena, the more they will spring back at you. Hence, therefore, the importance of recognising the empty nature of your thoughts and simply allowing them to dissolve. When you know that it is mind that both creates and perceives samsara and nirvana, and also, at the same time, that the nature of mind is emptiness, then mind will no longer be able to delude you and lead you around by the nose.

Once you have recognised the empty nature of mind, to allow love to arise for someone who is harming you becomes easy. But without that recognition, it is very hard to stop anger from arising instead, is it not? Look into it, and you will see that mind is what does positive actions, and mind is what makes circumstances negative. Because the Buddha entirely understood the empty nature of mind and remained in the *samadhi* of great love, the weapons the Maras showered upon him were transformed into a rain of flowers. If, instead, the Buddha had allowed the thought “The Maras are trying to kill me” to stoke him into an outburst of anger, he would certainly have

<sup>27</sup> Dzatrul Rinpoche quotes the fifth Dalai Lama (1617–82), who says:

*All phenomena are primordially pure; they cannot be located, and are empty;  
Empty though they are, like a magic show they clearly appear to our perception;  
What appears to our perception, when we look into its nature for something identifiable, is nonexistent.  
Nonexistent though it is, it can give rise to the experience of all happiness and suffering.*

been vulnerable to those weapons, and suffered greatly from the wounds they would have inflicted.

Letting the mind become peaceful and staying in a meditative state of stillness free from many thoughts is called *shamatha*, or sustained calm. Recognising the empty nature of mind within that state of calm is called *vipashyana*, or profound insight. Uniting shamatha and vipashyana is the essence of meditation practice. It is said:

*Looking at the mind  
There is nothing to see.  
Seeing nothing, we see the Dharma,  
The source of all buddhas.*

As the great Kadampa teachers used to say:

*I will hold the spear of mindfulness at the gate of the mind,  
And when the emotions threaten,  
I, too, will threaten them;  
When they relax their grip, only then will I relax mine.*

In truth, if you cannot tame your own mind, what else is there to tame? What is the use of doing many other practices? The aim of the whole Buddhist path, both the Basic and the Great Vehicles, is to tame and understand the mind.

In the Basic Vehicle, you realise that the world is pervaded by suffering, so you try to control your own craving and grasping in order to be able to progress on the path to liberation from that suffering. In the Great Vehicle, you let go of your grasping to the idea of “I,” to the truly existing self, and become solely concerned with the welfare of others. You also recognise the essential indivisibility of emptiness and phenomena, or absolute bodhichitta, seeing that it is because phenomena are empty by nature that they can appear unobstructedly, just as empty space allows the whole universe, with its continents and mountains, to take shape.

## **B. The post-meditation practice of abandoning any belief in the objects of desire and aversion as truly existing**

### **i. Abandoning any belief in the objects of desire as truly existing**

#### **23. Recognising the Illusion**

*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.*

It is easy to think that if only you could get enough of the things you want (relatives, friends, possessions, or whatever) you would be completely happy. The problem is that, in practice, if you let the mind follow its natural propensities, what it wants may turn out to be a lot. A person who has one friend wants a hundred; a general with a hundred soldiers under his command would like a thousand.

Moreover, the more friends you have, the more friends you will have to be parted from when death suddenly descends and robs you of everything, even of this cherished body of yours. What is the point, in fact, of having so many friends? The best friends you could have might be a peaceful mind and self-control; strict teachers, perhaps, but friends kind enough to show you the way to liberation.

There is nothing definitive about obtaining whatever it is you long for. Observe how rich people get robbed, how generals get killed, and relatives separated. People crave the most lavish food and alcohol, and kill their fellow sentient beings to fulfil their desire for meat, even though, in the end, it all just turns to excrement. You could easily spend all your time trying to get rich enough to fulfil a taste for expensive clothes and the pleasure of owning more material goods. Craving, by its nature, brings only trouble and dissatisfaction.

The outer world and its living inhabitants are all impermanent. Your mind and body are together for the time being; but the mind is like a guest, and the body like a hotel in which that guest will

only be making a short stay. Once you truly understand that, the seeming reality of your ordinary ambitions will fall away and you will realise that the really meaningful thing to do, for the present and the future, is to practice the Dharma.

## ii. Abandoning any belief in the objects of aversion as truly existing

### 24. Letting Go of Illusion

*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 unfavourable circumstances,*

*To view them as illusions is the practice of a bodhisattva.*

Faced with the prospect of something unpleasant happening to you, the usual reaction is to do everything possible to avert it. Whatever might be threatening you, whether sickness, poverty, or some emotionally unbearable situation, it would surely be unworthy of a person like you to be overcome by such a thing, you think—so you muster all your energy and resources, seek help from influential people, and do all you can to fight it off. In doing so, to give free rein to your attachment and hatred seems quite justifiable.

In reality, however, you have simply become the slave of your negative emotions. Try as you might to avoid or overcome unfavourable circumstances, there will always be more. They can never be completely eliminated.

The best way to deal with anything undesirable that happens to you is to reflect that this is the result of your own negative actions in the past. Whatever difficulties you are faced with now may seem disastrous, but remind yourself that compared with the overwhelming suffering you could face in the future in the realms of the tortured spirits or in the hells, your present problems are almost negligible. Pray from the depth of your heart that, through your experiencing these present difficulties, all your past negative actions and their results may be purified, leaving no karmic seeds for such rebirths in the future. Seen in this light, sickness and suffering are far from being undesirable.

Remember, too, how many sick people there are in this world, and pray that you may be able to take all their sickness and disease upon yourself, and that all their suffering and illness may be exhausted through your present experience of suffering and illness. Or, faced with material difficulties, even if you are utterly destitute, remember how many deprived and underprivileged people there are in the world, and pray that their impoverishment can be exhausted through your own.

It is the feeling that you will be unable to bear some impending suffering that drives you to take action outwardly in order to eliminate whatever it might be. Such attempts will never fully succeed; indeed, they will lead you into one pointless problem after another. But suffering does not have to be unbearable. Surely, it would be much more profitable to generate the inner serenity that would allow you to face such circumstances unperturbed.

If you are the target of some harsh criticism or insulting talk, for example, the harder you try to avoid being exposed to it, the more of it you seem to hear. It would be better to be like the great sages of the past, who felt neither upset when criticised nor pleased when praised, because they were able to perceive all sounds as empty echoes and to hear all criticism and praise about themselves just as though people were speaking about a person who had died long ago. They were aware that thoughts, perceptions, and feelings, if examined, have no intrinsic reality, so they could always remain simply present and not lose control of themselves.

A woman might have a dream in which she gives birth to a child, to her great joy. But should the child in her dream then die, she would feel devastated. In reality, nothing has happened at all. The same applies to your everyday perceptions. It is only because you give credence to their seeming reality that you feel sadness or joy. When you are watching a film, the people in it appear to be really fighting battles, loving each other, and so forth, but none of those things are actually happening. It is all just a fantasy. Try to see all your joys and sorrows as if you were watching a movie, letting go of the idea that you have to strive hard to avoid whatever is difficult or unpleasant. This will make your happiness indestructible. It is said:

*Whatever difficulty may arise, the way to bring it onto the path is not to dwell on it, which will only let your thoughts proliferate. People with narrow, crowded minds are besieged by a life full of suffering, attachment, and aggression. People with relaxed minds never lose their happiness.*

The Kadampa teachers said:

*Happiness and suffering, that's all lies;  
It's just a matter of knowing or not knowing how to deal with situations.  
Strong emotions, few emotions, that's all lies;  
It's just a matter of how strongly you counteract them.*

If you have contemplated the empty nature of all phenomena in your meditation sessions, it is easy to see the dreamlike nature of phenomena between sessions. At the same time, you will feel an effortless flow of compassion toward all those who suffer needlessly because they are unaware of the illusory nature of everything. Gyalse Thogme himself said:

*Between sessions see all phenomena as illusions; They appear, yet are devoid of any inherent existence. To accomplish the benefit of others without clinging is the post-meditation practice of absolute bodhichitta.*

### **3. The precepts for training in those practices**

- I. Training in the six transcendent perfections*
- II. Training in the four instructions taught in the Sutra*
- III. Training in how to be rid of the negative emotions*
- IV. Training in accomplishing others' good with mindfulness and vigilance*
- V. Dedicating the merit to perfect enlightenment*

#### **I. Training in the six transcendent perfections**

The following six sections expound the practice of the six transcendent perfections, or 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 fulfilment of all beings' aspirations. (4) It can bring others to the full maturity of their potential.

#### **A. Transcendent generosity**

##### **25. Practicing 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.*

Generosity is the natural expression of a bodhisattva's altruistic mind, free from attachment. A bodhisattva is clearly aware of the suffering that can be caused by amassing wealth and by trying to protect and increase it. Should he ever have any wealth or possessions, his first thought is to give it all away, using it to make offerings to the Three Jewels and to support those who are hungry or without food and shelter. As it is said:

*Generosity is the gem that fulfils all wishes  
And the sublime sword that cuts through the knot of miserliness.*

And 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.*

If you are truly generous, you will be free of all difficulties and will possess whatever wealth you need to carry out altruistic deeds until you attain enlightenment.

The Tibetan king Trisong Detsen is a good example of a bodhisattva who became a great ruler. He used his tremendous wealth to invite Guru Rinpoche, the great abbot Shantarakshita, the great pandita Vimalamitra, and 108 other Indian panditas to Tibet. It was because of his patronage that the teachings of both sutra and tantra were given in Tibet and that the first Tibetan

translators were trained. His boundless generosity made the Dharma flourish, and there was immense happiness in the Land of Snows. Later, during the reign of other kings, the treasure rooms were locked and put under heavy guard, and both the Dharma and the prosperity of the Tibetan people declined.

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, where not even the words *food* and *drink* are heard.

Never hope for anything in return for an act of generosity, and do not expect as a result that in your next life you will be treated well or be happy and prosperous. Generosity is complete in itself; there is no need for any other reward than having made others happy. If you give something motivated by self-interest, the joy you might have felt will be spoiled, and further unhappiness is certain to follow. But giving out of sheer devotion, love, or compassion will bring you a feeling of great joy, and your gift will create yet more happiness. The motivation behind the act of giving makes all the difference.

Recognising all possessions to be like dreams or magical illusions, give them away as offerings or as charity without holding back. Through generosity, you will perfect your accumulation of merit, which leads in the end to the attainment of the major and minor marks of a buddha. Make sure that your generosity is always permeated with the enlightened attitude of bodhichitta, which is what makes it truly meaningful by turning it into an unerring cause for buddhahood.

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 second kind of generosity is to save life, and to provide beings with protection from fear. Follow the example of great bodhisattvas like Patrul Rinpoche and Shabkar Tsokdruk Rangdrol,<sup>28</sup> who would save thousands of domestic animals from slaughter by buying them and setting them free, convince people to give up hunting and fishing, obtain clemency for prisoners sentenced to death, and pacify bloody feuds.

The third kind of generosity is giving the Dharma. A bodhisattva should do everything he can to make the sound of the teaching of Dharma resound in places where it has never been heard before. He can 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 the buddhas to flourish and increase.

A very miserly man once came to see the Buddha for advice. He was totally incapable of giving anything away. The Buddha told him to begin training himself by giving small objects with his right hand to his left hand. As the man slowly got used to the idea of giving, the Buddha encouraged him to give small things to members of his family, then to friends, and then finally to strangers. Eventually, the man was able to give away whatever he had with great joy to anyone he came across. Through gradual familiarisation, great aims can easily be achieved.

The essence of generosity is non-attachment. Transcendent generosity is generosity that is free of the three limiting concepts, that is, 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, in this case generosity, works as a cause of enlightenment.

## ***B. Transcendent discipline***

### **26. Practicing 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*

<sup>28</sup> Shabkar Tsogdruk Rangdrol, 1771– 1851): a lama of Amdo Reikong famed for his great compassion. Wherever he traveled throughout Tibet and Nepal, he ransomed the lives of domestic animals and set them free; he convinced many local people to give up hunting and reduce slaughtering. He himself had vowed to give up eating meat (unusual for Tibetans) in front of the Jowo Rinpoche statue in Lhasa. When he was in retreat in the wilderness, he protected small water birds from large birds of prey, prevented insects from eating each other, and performed other such compassionate actions. On many occasions, he pacified bloody feuds between rival tribes in Amdo. Patrul Rinpoche did the same in eastern Golok, where he saved countless human and animal lives.



*Without samsaric motives is the practice of a bodhisattva.*

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 Hinayana, 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 pratimoksha vows,<sup>29</sup> the bodhisattva precepts, and the Mantrayana samayas. These three sets of vows should be kept in harmony with one another.

As your 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 discipline of the pratimoksha begins when you take the refuge vows and enter the path of Dharma. 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 the bodhichitta, the vow to bring all beings to perfect enlightenment. Mahayana practitioners therefore keep either lay or monastic vows themselves, adding the wish that all beings might keep perfect discipline in order to be free from samsara's bonds, and apply the various precepts of the bodhisattva. Thus infused with the bodhisattva's motivation, discipline grows greatly in its power. It culminates in the discipline of the Vajrayana, which is to maintain the samayas, the sacred links between the spiritual master and the disciple; the very life force of the Vajrayana.

Without discipline there is no way to achieve either the temporary happiness of liberation from suffering or the ultimate bliss of enlightenment. Whatever vows you take—whether the 253 vows of the pratimoksha, the 18 root and branch vows of the bodhisattvas, or the 100,000 samayas of the Vajrayana; they all need to be observed with great care, like that of a farmer doing everything possible to protect his crops against wild animals, thieves, hailstorms, and all other harmful eventualities.

Guard your own discipline, therefore, as carefully as you protect your own eyes. For discipline, if you can keep it, is the source of bliss; but if you transgress it, it becomes a source of suffering.

There are three kinds of discipline to be practiced. The first is to give up all actions that harm either others or yourself. The second is to undertake positive actions by practicing the six paramitas. The third is to do everything possible to benefit others in their present and future lives.

Without discipline, you will never even be able to accomplish any of your personal aims, let alone be able to help others. To keep pure discipline, it helps to spend your time with virtuous friends. 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. As the Buddha said:

*In this decadent age, to maintain even one monastic vow for a day brings greater merit than to offer a million buddhas quantities of food, drink, canopies, lamps, and garlands as vast as the number of grains of sand in the Ganges.*

Perfect discipline is to keep the vows in a pure way with constant mindfulness, free from conceit or pride. In essence, discipline is to have a peaceful, self-controlled, and altruistic mind.

## **C. Transcendent patience**

### **27. Practicing 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.*

There are three kinds of patience. **The first** is to bear without anger whatever harm people may do you. **The second** kind is to endure without sadness whatever hardships you may experience for the sake of the Dharma. **The third** is to face without fear the profound meaning of the Dharma

<sup>29</sup> Pratimoksha, "self-liberation": the goal of this discipline is to free oneself from cyclic existence or samsara.

and the boundless qualities of the Three Jewels.

**For the first**, when you feel you are being harmed by someone, remember that the harm that person may be inflicting on you (or on someone dear to you) is the direct result of you yourself having harmed others in the past. Reflect that this person is so overpowered by delusion that he or she is as if possessed, and cannot resist harming you. As a result of this harm, he or she will have to suffer in samsara's lower realms in a future life. When you think how terrible that will be, you will feel only sadness and pity rather than anger.

Remember, too, that if you can patiently accept all this harm, many of your own past negative actions will be purified, and you will accumulate both merit and wisdom. Indeed, this person who appears to be harming you is therefore doing you a great kindness, and is a true spiritual friend. As an expression of your gratitude, dedicate whatever merit you have accumulated to him or her.

Seeing all such situations in this way, train yourself not to get upset when someone harms you, not to seek revenge, and never to bear the slightest grudge.

Moreover, *when you look even more deeply into what is happening, you 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? Understand it all as being like the vast, empty sky.

Now for the **second kind of patience, enduring hardships for the sake of Dharma**. In order to be able to practice Dharma, it may happen that you have to endure illness, or suffer from heat, cold, hunger, or thirst. But since these short-term sufferings will help you purify your past negative actions and, in the long term, reach ultimate buddhahood, accept them with joy, like a swan gliding into a lotus pond. In *The Way of the Bodhisattva*, Shantideva says:

*Is a man not relieved when, though condemned to death,  
He's freed, his hand cut off in ransom for his life?  
Enduring likewise merely human ills,  
Am I not happy to avoid the pains of hell?*

**The third kind of patience** is to have the deep, inner courage that it takes to be ready, out of compassion, to work over many aeons for the sake of beings and to face without any fear the highest truths of the teachings; that ultimately all phenomena are totally empty by nature, that emptiness is expressed as radiant clarity, that there is a buddha nature, a self-existing primordial wisdom that is uncompounded, and an absolute truth beyond the reach of the intellect. If you are afraid to accept the reality of emptiness, and criticise practices such as the Great Perfection by which the true nature of all phenomena can be realised, you are rejecting the very essence of the Dharma and are preparing your own downfall into the lower realms. When Lord Buddha taught the profound teachings on emptiness, some of the monks who were present reacted to the deep truths of the teaching with panic so intense that they vomited blood and died forthwith. *These truths are by no means easy to fathom, but it is of the utmost importance 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 skilful means.

**To practice the paramita of patience is essential, so that you can never be overcome by anger, hatred, and despair. Once you have entered the path of the bodhisattvas, you should in any case have kindness in your heart for all beings, seeing them as your former parents. So when people are against you and do you harm, you should have even more love, dedicating all your merit to them and taking all their suffering upon yourself.**

Indeed, *adversaries and people who try to harm you can be powerful sources of help on the bodhisattva path. By bringing about situations that would normally trigger your anger or hatred, they give you the precious opportunity to train in transforming those negative emotions with patience. On the path, such people will do you far more good than any well-disposed friend.*

Now, Shantideva says:

*Good works gathered in a thousand ages,  
Such as deeds of generosity,  
Or offerings to the blissful ones—  
A single flash of anger shatters them.*

And in the *Sutra of the Meeting of Father and Son* it is said:

*Hatred is not the way to buddhahood.  
But love, if constantly cultivated,  
Will give rise to enlightenment.*

So, if you react to an enemy with hatred and anger, he will certainly be leading you to the depths of the hell realms. But if you know how to see such a person with the deepest loving-kindness, he can only lead you toward liberation. No matter how much harm he tries to do you, it will only do you good. The difference is crucial. You may have studied various teachings and meditated for a while, and even feel rather proud of it. But if, as soon as someone says a few bad words to you, you burst with anger, that is a sign that you have not let the Dharma really permeate you; it has not changed your mind in the least.

Shantideva also says:

*No evil is there similar to anger,  
No austerity to be compared with patience.*

If the land were full of sharp stones and thorns, you might try to protect your 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 your feet. In the same way, **even if the whole world is full of enemies, they can do you no harm as long as you keep loving-kindness and patience in your mind.** Whatever apparent harm they do you would, in fact, help you on the path to enlightenment. As it is said:

*When you encounter the emotions' formidable army,  
Don the solid and excellent armour of patience;  
Thus, unscathed by the weapons of harsh words and vindictive blows,  
Pass through them to reach the land of nirvana.*

There is no peace for a person whose mind is filled with anger and hatred. Anger and hatred need to be subdued by the great army of patience, for they are your true enemies. It would be impossible for you to experience harm if your own anger and hatred had not, in the past, brought about the causes from which the present harm arises, like the returning echo of your own voice.

Look, too, at the true nature of harm itself. It is as ungraspable as writing on water. Let resentment vanish of its own accord, and as soon as the fiery waves of thoughts subside, let everything become like an empty sky, where there is nothing to gain and nothing to lose.

## **D. Transcendent diligence**

### **28. Practicing 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.*

To awaken and to develop all the paramitas, diligence is vital. Diligence is the joyous effort and active determination to carry out positive actions, without any expectations or self-satisfaction.

Diligence has three aspects. The first, called “armour-like diligence,” is to develop a joyous courage and fortitude, which you wear like armour against discouragement. The second is “diligence in action,” 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. Diligence should permeate the practice of the other paramitas, and invigorate them all.

The first kind, armour-like diligence, is to put on the armour of a strong and courageous determination that you will never fall prey to obstacles created by the four demons (negative emotions, attachment to comfort, physical sickness, and death) but will persist, come what may, in your efforts to accomplish the extraordinary activities of a bodhisattva until you have established all beings in enlightenment.

The second kind, diligence in action, is determined perseverance in the actual application of that wish. Feeling a great joy to be able to practice, to travel the five paths and attain the ten levels, you enthusiastically undertake endless meritorious activities, particularly study, reflection, and meditation. Engaging in all this, sustain an indomitable courage and never fall prey to discouragement, laziness, or procrastination.

The third kind, diligence that cannot be stopped, is the insatiable energy to work constantly for the sake of others. Day and night, engage in every possible way, directly or indirectly, in your thoughts, words, and deeds, to benefit beings. If you are not able to help them directly, you should keep nothing in your mind but the benefit of others, and dedicate everything you do toward their attainment of buddhahood. Never feel self-satisfied because of the few good qualities you may have been able to achieve, and never be diverted from your aims by people's abuse or other adverse circumstances. Just remain determined to continue constantly until you reach your goal.

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 your 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. You feel discouraged before you have even begun trying to do something, because you think a person like you will never reach enlightenment no matter how hard you try. The antidote is to strengthen your fortitude by reflecting on the benefits of liberation and enlightenment.

The third kind of laziness is a neglect of your true priorities. You become stuck in negative and unproductive habits. Forgetting or ignoring deeper aims, you stay preoccupied solely with matters limited to this life. The antidote is to realise that all such ordinary concerns are invariably causes of suffering alone, and to cast them far away.

People work with great endeavour, day and night, to accomplish things that are merely for their own comfort, fame, and power; in other words, for things that in the long term are utterly meaningless. Of the hardships you may undergo for the sake of the Dharma, however, not a single one will be without meaning. The difficult situations you experience will help you to purify the negativity accumulated in many past lives and to gather merit as a provision for lives to come. They are sure to be meaningful.

Without diligence, bodhichitta and the activities of a bodhisattva will have no means to take root and grow in your mind. As Padampa Sangye said:

*If your perseverance has no strength, you will not reach buddhahood;  
People of Tingri, make sure you don't that armour.*

The Buddha Shakyamuni is renowned for having brought the paramita of diligence to its ultimate perfection. The power and merit generated by his endeavour over countless lifetimes could have brought him rebirth a thousand times over as a universal monarch, but instead he chose to direct all his efforts toward achieving enlightenment. As followers of the Buddha, we should use the story of his life and the stories of great saints of the past as inspiring models. Jetsun Milarepa, for example, displayed incredible endeavour, enduring many hardships to achieve his profound aims. Vairocana left for India in search of the Dharma at a very young age, undergoing fifty-seven unbearable difficulties to obtain the teachings and often coming close to losing his life. He and the other great translators of Tibet encountered tremendous hardships on their travels; the burning heat and the fevers then endemic in the Indian plains, the harsh animosity of local rulers, and so forth. Nevertheless they persevered, and succeeded in bringing the authentic Dharma back to Tibet.

You are living today in countries where the Dharma has only just begun to take root, like a fragile new shoot in the ground. Only your sustained diligence will bring it to fruition. Depending on the effort you put into study, reflection, and meditation, and to integrating what you have understood into your spiritual practice, accomplishment may be days, months, or years away. It is essential to remember that all your endeavours on the path are for the sake of others. Remain humble and aware that your efforts are like child's play compared to the ocean-like activity of the great bodhisattvas. Be like a parent providing for much-loved children, never thinking that you have done too much for others; or even that you have done enough. If you finally managed, through your own efforts alone, to establish all beings in buddhahood, you would simply think that all your wishes had been fulfilled. Never have even a trace of hope for something in return.

A bodhisattva must have far greater diligence than a shravaka or pratyekabuddha, because the bodhisattva has taken the responsibility of accomplishing the ultimate happiness of buddhahood not only for himself but for countless beings. As it is said:

*The hero who carries the burden of all beings on his head has no leisure to walk slowly.*

And:

*Since I and all others are tied by a hundred bonds,  
I must multiply my diligence a hundred times.*

To increase your diligence, reflect on how impermanent everything is. Death is inevitable and may come suddenly and very soon. Think how shallow and superficial this life's ordinary concerns really are in that light, and how free you could be if you could turn your mind away from them. If you suddenly realised that in your lap, in a fold of your clothes, a venomous snake was hiding, would you wait to take action; even for a second?

## **E. Transcendent concentration**

### **29. Practicing 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.*

**Examine body, speech, and mind, and you will find that mind is the most important of the three. If your mind is thoroughly trained in sustained calm and profound insight (shamatha and vipashyana), your body and your speech will naturally follow your mind along the path of liberation.**

Hitherto your mind, like a restless monkey, has been running ceaselessly after forms, sounds, smells, tastes, and sensations outside, and thoughts and feelings inside. But you can learn to take control of it by maintaining mindfulness and vigilance. As you do so, study, reflect, and meditate on the teachings, integrating them into your mind. Finally you will become free of desire, hatred, and ignorance.

As Kharak Gomchung said:

*In the mind of a beginner  
There is clarity, but no stability;  
To stop it being consigned to the wind of thoughts,  
Fasten it with the rope of mindfulness.*

To gain stability in concentration, it is helpful to stay in quiet, secluded retreat places free from distractions. Of sustained calm and profound insight, it is profound insight that is the most important; but profound insight cannot arise without a preliminary calming of the mind. What is crucial here is to calm all the wild thoughts that constantly agitate, unsettle, and condition your mind, for such thoughts give rise to negative emotions, which, in turn, you express as the words and actions that comprise the causes of suffering.

Calming the mind is like closing the glass of a lantern around the flame so that it can shine brightly and steadily, protected from the wind. There are many ways to practice sustained calm and profound insight, such as the "nine ways of settling the mind" and other methods explained in the Mahayana sutras. (Appendix 3) All of these methods are directed toward supreme enlightenment. Techniques of concentration are also found in non-Buddhist paths, but they should not be confused with Buddhist methods, as they are not practiced with the same goal. Such contemplations, instead of being aimed at true enlightenment, are undertaken with the idea of bringing the elements to exhaustion, transcending form, and attaining a state of absorption in the formless realms as their ultimate goal.

Methods for attaining sustained calm, or shamatha, fall into two main groups: those in which an object of concentration is used, and those in which there is no object. Here, I will explain the first method, using as the object of concentration a visualisation of Lord Buddha, which brings more blessings than some ordinary object.

Sit in the perfect seven-point posture of the Buddha Vairochana; your legs crossed in vajra posture, your two hands resting in the mudra of equanimity, your shoulders raised up, your vertebral column straight like a pile of gold coins, your chin slightly tucked in, your eyes steadily focused in the space in front of your nose, and the tip of your tongue touching your palate. If you find this posture difficult to maintain, at least sit upright and well balanced on a suitable cushion. Avoid leaning backward or to one side, or taking any other lax posture.

Allow your mind to settle naturally, and visualise Buddha Shakyamuni in the sky in front of you. He is seated upon a moon disk, on a lotus that rests on a throne supported by eight fearless lions. His body has all the radiance of gold. With his right hand he touches the ground near his right knee in the “gesture of taking the earth as witness,”<sup>30</sup> while with his left hand, in the “gesture of equanimity,” he holds in his lap a begging bowl filled with nectar. He is sitting cross-legged,<sup>31</sup> wearing the three Dharma robes. His body is graced with all the thirty-two major and eighty minor marks of a buddha, notably the *ushnisha* on the top of his head,<sup>32</sup> wheel patterns or *dharmachakras* on the palms of his hands and soles of his feet, and a long hair between his eyebrows, curling counterclockwise like a white conch. From his body emanate infinite light rays of wisdom, which fill the whole universe. He is directly in front of you in the sky, gazing straight at you with compassion. Visualise the Buddha as alive, not inert like a statue made of clay or bronze or like a two-dimensional drawing. The colours and details of his form are perfectly clear and vivid, yet he is insubstantial and transparent like a rainbow. He is not made of flesh and bones, but appears as the empty but radiant unborn wisdom body of the buddhas, full of compassion and wisdom.

Try to concentrate one-pointedly on the visualisation, seeing all the details as clearly as possible. Have total confidence that the Buddha is actually there, remembering that for those with faith the Buddha is always present. As you visualise the Buddha, all your wandering thoughts will eventually subside. To keep your mind concentrated in this way on a clear and steady visualisation is shamatha, or sustained calm.

To make your concentration more and more stable, you will need to counteract different disturbances of the meditation as they arise. If your mind grows wild and your thoughts begin to race, preventing you from achieving a clear visualisation, look slightly downward in the space in front of your nose and concentrate on the lower parts of the visualisation, the crossed legs of the Buddha, the lion throne, and the lotus seat. This helps to reduce wildness. If your mind sinks into a state of drowsiness, slackness, or dull indifference, raise your gaze higher into the space in front of you and concentrate on the upper parts of the visualisation, the perfect oval of the Buddha’s face, his eyes, the hair between his brows. This clears away the sinking feeling of dullness and slackness.

As long as your mind stays balanced, neither wild nor dull, concentrate straight ahead on the Buddha’s heart, the eternal knot of the secret treasure of pristine wisdom.<sup>33</sup> If the visualisation is not yet clear, try again and again to make it better defined and more precise. If it is already clear, keep your mind concentrated on it in a natural, unforced way.

Concentrate on being aware of the presence of the Buddha in front of you, confident that he is actually there. As your visualisation becomes more stable and your thoughts more infrequent, visualise more of the details of the Buddha’s beautiful form, as though you were a skilled painter. Visualise the perfect mandala of his face, his two eyes gazing with compassionate wisdom upon all sentient beings, his perfectly proportioned nose and ears, his smile, the boundless rays of light emanating from him, and, gradually extend the visualisation to all the details of both the upper and the lower parts of his body. This will make the whole visualisation more vivid.

When your visualisation is clear and your mind still and quiet, permeate the state of sustained calm with profound insight. First, consider who or what it is that is perceiving the visualisation. You will become aware that it is the mind. You will also see that the image you are visualising is not itself actually the Buddha who came into this world, but rather a projection created by your

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<sup>30</sup> The symbolic gesture the Buddha made, in response to the skepticism expressed by Mara, to take the earth as witness of the merit he had accumulated over countless lifetimes in preparation of his enlightenment. As he made the gesture, the earth shook and opened, and the Earth Goddess appeared and proclaimed the Buddha’s perfection.

<sup>31</sup> Having his two legs crossed is a symbol of the oneness of samsara and nirvana within all-pervading emptiness.

<sup>32</sup> The ushnisha, or crown prominence, one of the major marks of a fully enlightened Buddha, is usually represented in paintings and statues as a protuberance resembling a topknot in size, but is said in fact to rise up from the top of a buddha’s head to the infinity of space. Its full extent, however, can only be seen only by a bodhisattva who has attained the first bhumi. In the *Kalachakra Tantra*, the ushnisha corresponds to the Sky Chakra, the sixth chakra, which extends upward without limit and represents the unlimited wisdom of enlightenment. In the *thögal* practice of the Great Perfection, the ushnisha corresponds to the visions of 5-coloured lights and buddhafiels that manifest above one’s head as the infinite display of sambhogakaya realisation.

<sup>33</sup> The “eternal knot” mentioned here refers to the unchanging pristine wisdom of the buddhas, rather than to any particular form (such as the drawing of an eternal knot) that is supposed to be visualised.

mind in order to develop concentration.

The mind has the ability to concentrate on an object, yet when you search for the mind, you cannot find it anywhere. As we saw earlier, if you look inward at the mind, and try to locate it or identify its shape, its colour, its form, where it came from, where it is now, or where it goes to, you will never find anything. Ask those who know the teachings and have experience of meditation, and see if anyone has ever been able to point to anything as “the mind.” And just as you will never find a particular entity that can be said to be the mind, the same is true for the body. What we call “the body” is simply a conglomeration of many elements put together. We give the name “heap” to a collection of grains, “sheaf” to a collection of dried straw, and “crowd” to a gathering of people, but none of them are entities in their own right. Likewise for this collection of things we call the body, if you take away the skin and the flesh, the marrow, the bones, and the different organs, once they have all been separated from one another there is no other entity present that you can identify as “the body.”

All phenomena in their infinite variety throughout the universe, in fact, appear as a result of particular causes and conditions coming temporarily together. You take phenomena to be things that truly exist simply because you have not examined them properly. In truth, they have no solid, intrinsic existence at all.

When it becomes clear that your body, the image of the Buddha you are visualising, and all phenomena are the display of the mind and that the mind’s nature is empty, simply remain in the recognition of that nature without wandering, remaining attentive to whether or not thoughts interrupt this recognition. This is called profound insight, vipashyana. As Gyalse Thogme 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.*

Uniting sustained calm and profound insight in this way is the key method for perfecting transcendent concentration.<sup>34</sup>

## **F. Transcendent wisdom**

### **30. Practicing Wisdom**

*In the absence of wisdom, perfect enlightenment cannot be attained  
Through the other five perfections alone.  
Therefore, to cultivate wisdom combined with skilful means  
And free from the three concepts<sup>35</sup> is the practice of a bodhisattva.*

The paramitas of generosity, discipline, patience, endeavour, and concentration can help you to accumulate merit, but they are still associated with concepts. Only wisdom can perfect the accumulation that leads you to realise primordial awareness 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 the citadel of liberation. 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.

Transcendent wisdom has three aspects, which are stages in its progressive realisation: first, the wisdom of the learning acquired through hearing the teachings; then, the wisdom that arises through reflecting on the meaning of these teachings; and finally, the wisdom that arises from meditating.

You, the practitioner, should first of all be like a bee going from flower to flower collecting nectar. At the stage when you are listening to and studying the teachings, learn all of them

<sup>34</sup> In parallel to the other transcendent perfections, there are also three kinds of concentration described in the texts: “the concentration practiced by ordinary beings,” “clearly discerning concentration,” and “the excellent concentration of the Tathagatas.” In the present teaching, Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche chose not to mention them, but a brief summary may be found in the excerpt from Shechen Gyaltsap’s *The Oral Transmission of the All-Knowing Ones* set out in appendix 3: “Supplementary Commentaries on Transcendent Concentration (Verse 29),” “B. Concentration.”

<sup>35</sup> The concepts of subject, object, and action.

carefully, in both words and meaning. Then, you should be like a wild animal. Not satisfied with a mere theoretical understanding, go and live in mountain solitudes where you can be free of all the busy involvement of ordinary life. Be self-sufficient and firm in one-pointed practice as you discover directly for yourself the profound meaning of the teachings. Finally, as you put the teachings into practice and integrate them with your being, you should be like a peg driven into hard ground. Unshaken by thoughts during meditation, remain unwavering. Cut away all limiting concepts of existence and nonexistence from within, and directly encounter the face of the ultimate nature of everything.

So here we have come to the very heart of the paramitas. Wisdom is not only the most important of the six; it is their very life force. To realise wisdom is the ultimate goal; it is the reason why all the branches of the teachings are explained.

For the first aspect of wisdom, to perfect the wisdom of the learning acquired through hearing the teachings, the scriptures to be studied include all the Mahayana teachings, which are referred to as “profound and vast.” The profound teachings are those that expound emptiness, and the vast teachings those that explain the different stages on the bodhisattva path; the five paths, the ten bhumis, and so on. The profound teachings are found in sutras such as the *King of Concentrations Sutra* and the *Great Compendium Sutra*. The vast teachings are found in *The Ornament of the Mahayana Sutras*, *The Ornament of True Realisation*, and other texts. There are other treatises that explain the wisdom intention of the Buddha’s words in a way that is easy for later followers of the Buddha to understand. You should hear all of these teachings from a qualified teacher.

However, hearing the teachings alone is not quite enough; even animals can hear the sound of the Dharma being taught. The second stage is to develop the wisdom that arises through reflecting on the meaning of these teachings. Think about what you have heard and extract the essential meaning from it so that the teachings do not just remain as intellectual knowledge. It is important to develop confidence in the meaning of the Dharma, and be sure you have understood it correctly. Whatever you are going to practice has to be considered very carefully. Clarify all your doubts and hesitations with your teacher. In particular, remember clearly what your teacher tells you about all the obstacles that can arise, and what deviations from the path you might find yourself making. Then, when you are ready to put your instructions into practice, it will be like setting out on a journey with full knowledge of all the different conditions you are likely to encounter, and all the money you will need to meet your expenses on the way.

Some teachings belong to the category in which the meaning expounded is provisional or expedient, or of relative truth; others to that in which the meaning is direct and definitive, or of absolute truth. Of the two, the absolute meaning is the more important, so you should put your effort into recognising that absolute meaning and becoming familiar with it. The more you study and reflect on the teachings of the scriptures and of the rediscovered treasures, the more your understanding, your confidence, and your certainty as to the meaning of the teachings will grow. When gold is being refined, the refining processes, such as melting and drawing off the pure metal, are repeatedly applied. In the same way, refine your understanding by reflecting, over and over again, on the meaning of the teachings so that you develop a clear confidence in their absolute meaning.

Study and reflection will cut through your more gross misconceptions. But the subtler ones can only be dispelled by meditation, and by integration of the absolute wisdom that arises from it into your very being. To engender it, go to a secluded place and stay as much as possible in meditation, practicing shamatha and vipashyana (sustained calm and profound insight) to realise emptiness, the ultimate nature of all phenomena. This is the wisdom that arises from meditation. To have recognised that all phenomena are empty by nature is to have recognised the ultimate point of all the teachings.

Through the understanding of emptiness, you will perceive no difference between yourself and others. You will be free of self-cherishing, compassion will arise spontaneously, and you will benefit beings without any effort. Even great bodhisattva acts such as giving your life for another’s benefit will not be difficult for you, and you will be able to perform altruistic deeds effortlessly over many kalpas. Everything happens without effort because it all takes place within the continuum of the realisation of emptiness. Here generosity, patience, and all the other



perfections now truly merit the term *paramita*, as they are utterly beyond the realm of delusion. For a bodhisattva who has realised emptiness, the number of beings to be liberated and the time it might take to liberate them arouse feelings neither of discouragement nor of pride. Dawning freely in your enlightened mind is an all-inclusive compassion, devoid of all concepts of subject and object. Having realised the sameness of self and others, you remain as unchanging as primordial space.

A thorough, experiential understanding of emptiness is the only antidote to the belief in an “I,” in a truly existing self. Once you recognise emptiness, all your attachment to such a self will vanish without a trace. Realisation will blaze forth like a brilliant sun rising in the sky, transforming darkness into light.

At first, until you actually recognise emptiness, you have to gain an understanding of it through deep and careful reflection on the teacher’s pith instructions. Then, when you first recognise it, your experience of emptiness will not be stable. To improve it, blend meditation and post-meditation periods. Try not to fall back into ordinary delusion, but to maintain the view of emptiness in all your daily activities. Meditation and the path of action will mutually enhance each other. Finally, you may reach a point where there is no difference between meditation and post-meditation, a point at which you no longer ever depart from emptiness. This is called the realisation of great sameness. Within that great sameness, compassion for all beings will arise spontaneously; for the more you realise emptiness, the less there will be any impediment to the arising of compassion. With it will come a natural ability to benefit others without effort, in the same way that if, among a hundred blind people, one of them were to recover his sight, he would be able to guide all the others.

Without the realisation of emptiness, both love and compassion are limited and narrow. As the *Bodhisattva-bhumi* explains, there are three successive levels of boundless love, compassion, joy, and impartiality. Consider love to start with. At first, boundless love is focused on sentient beings. Remembering that all beings have been your parents, you wish that they may all have happiness. This form of love everyone, from ordinary people to bodhisattvas, has in common.

At a second stage, boundless love has phenomena as its reference. The practitioner, while recognising that in absolute truth nothing has any inherent existence, wishes nevertheless that within the illusory, dreamlike reality of relative truth all beings may find happiness. Love of this kind is unknown to ordinary people, but is common to practitioners of the Basic Vehicle (shravakas and pratyekabuddhas) and to those of the Mahayana (bodhisattvas).

The third and highest level of boundless love is non-referential, beyond any concept of an object. From the outset of the meditation, the practitioner knows that the nature of both self and others is emptiness, free of all conceptual elaborations, like the sky. That intrinsic lack of substantial existence, omnipresent and vivid, unceasingly radiates a love that is lucid and spontaneous. This kind of love is, by nature, free of all concepts and without any goal. It is beyond the three ideas of there being a subject, an object, and an action. It is only found in the Mahayana.

These three successive approaches can be similarly applied to boundless compassion, joy, and impartiality.

The practice of the paramita of wisdom should be done in stages to begin with. First, divide your practice into meditation periods during which you meditate on emptiness, and post-meditation periods in which you try to improve your understanding of the view of emptiness by studying the philosophical system of the Madhyamika, until you attain certainty in it. The Madhyamika view leads to an understanding of the two truths. The recognition of the absolute truth is helped by understanding how all phenomena arise through a combination of causes and conditions.

As your practice becomes more stable, it will no longer be necessary to meditate intentionally on emptiness; it will be integrated into your understanding. You will reach a point when you see that emptiness and compassion, emptiness and phenomena, and absolute and relative truth, are intrinsically one, rather than being in each case two separate entities like the horns of a goat. The vaster your view of emptiness, the clearer your understanding will be of the infinite ways phenomena can manifest in accordance with the law of cause and effect. And it is from emptiness inseparable from compassion that a bodhisattva manifests.

This is the ultimate fruit of all the different teachings of the Mahayana and Mantrayana, of Madhyamika, Mahamudra, and Dzogchen. The most important point of these teachings is to realise them through your own experience, and no mere proliferation of words will be of much help to you in doing that. To put it simply and directly, developing perfect wisdom in your mindstream is the actual practice of the bodhisattvas.

## II. Training in the four instructions taught in the Sutra

### A. To examine oneself for one's own defects and to give them up

#### 31. Examining Oneself

*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.*

Ordinarily, whatever you do, say, or think is an expression of your belief in the true existence both of yourself as an individual and of phenomena as a whole. Your actions, as long as they are based on that false premise, can only be deluded, and permeated by negative emotions. As you follow a teacher, however, you can learn how to keep everything you do with body, speech, and mind in accordance with the Dharma.

Intellectually, you can probably recognise right from wrong, and truth from delusion. But unless you apply that knowledge in practice all the time, there can be no liberation. You have to bring your own wild mind under control by yourself—no one else can do it for you. No one else but you can know when you have fallen into delusion, and when you are free from it. The only way to do it is to keep looking into your own mind, as if you were using a mirror. Just as a mirror enables you to check if your face is dirty and see where the dirt is, so, too, being constantly present in every situation and looking within at your own mind allows you to see whether or not your thoughts, words, and deeds are in accordance with the Dharma.

Identify your own shortcomings, but never those of other people. As Gyalse Thogme himself said:

*Despite not having the slightest learning or moral standing, you conceitedly pose as a good practitioner. Overlooking a mountain of your own faults, you discern the minutest of faults in others. Motivated entirely by your own ambition, you proclaim how you are taking care of others. You pretend to be practicing Dharma, but all you are achieving is ordinary self-aggrandisement. Anyone who, like you, fails to check his own behaviour from the very start will deceive no one more than himself.*

As a Tibetan expression puts it, “The promise went to Dharma, but the practice goes to sin.”

Whenever you think or do something harmful or false, it is important to recognise it. As soon as a thief has been identified, he can be arrested. In the same way, negative thoughts and deeds, once you have seen them as such, will be powerless to continue as they were. As soon as negative emotions arise, swoop down on them with mindfulness. Whenever positive thoughts arise, reinforce them using the “three supreme points” described earlier.

The only way to practice the Dharma authentically is to mix the teachings with your own mind. If you neglect to examine yourself for faults and mistakes, you might not be aware how lacking you are in any obvious learning, self-control, contentment, humility, or other positive qualities. Being blind to your obvious defects, you may begin to believe that you are a Dharma practitioner, and even get other people to believe it; while in fact it is no more than the outer facade, the mere pretence 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 skilfully praise oneself and skilfully disparage others is a hidden fault of practitioners.*

Only by being mindful all the time, whatever the situation, can you keep yourself from falling prey to such dangers. Maintain a constant awareness of what should be done and what should be avoided, with the same care you might take on a perilous mountain

path to keep constantly to the right track.

Among the precepts of the bodhichitta of application are four basic downfalls that you have to train yourself to avoid. The first is, out of desire for wealth or prestige, to praise yourself and disparage others. The second is, out of miserliness, not to give what you can to those who are destitute and suffering, or not to give the Dharma to those worthy of receiving it when you have the capacity to do so. The third is, out of animosity and hatred, to abuse others verbally, or worse, with physical violence, or to harbour resentment against wrongdoers who have sought forgiveness and changed their ways. The fourth is, out of ignorance, to criticise and reject the Mahayana teachings, or hypocritically to assume an outward appearance of Dharma.

More generally, refrain from everything harmful or meaningless done merely to obtain wealth, fame, status, or gratification, for there is nothing to be gained from such actions but suffering. Cultivate actions that are in accordance with the Dharma, for they will take you closer to liberation and farther from delusion. To differentiate positive from negative actions, it is important to maintain constant awareness.

As well as distinguishing right from wrong, you will also need to keep your intelligence and faculties alert to make sure that you are indeed applying appropriate antidotes instead of just continuing to follow after your bad habits and tendencies. When you get angry, for instance, you need to counter it by practicing patience. When you have feelings of mindless bewilderment, the antidote is to cultivate a clear understanding of samsara and determination to be free from it. When you crave something, you should deal with your desire by reflecting how whatever it is you crave is, on deeper analysis, not really desirable at all.

The ability to transform your own mind will naturally bring you the ability to help others' minds. To be constantly alert, forever mindful and aware, observing the state of your mind so that you can correct and improve yourself, is the authentic practice of the bodhisattvas.

## ***B. To give up speaking of a bodhisattva's faults***

### **32. Abandoning Criticising Others**

*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.*

You can consider all other Dharma practitioners as your close relatives, and in many ways all beings are, too. All of them have certainly been your parents in one life or another. What is more, all of them possess the same ultimate nature, the tathagatagarbha or buddha nature. As it is said,

*Buddha nature is present in all beings:*

*Not a single one of them lacks it.*

As Gampopa explains at the beginning of *The Precious Ornament of Liberation*, the fact that beings have the buddha nature is the basis that gives them the possibility, when fully actualised, of becoming buddhas. Disparaging any one of them is therefore inappropriate; we should rather all respect one another. As the Buddha said, "An ordinary person cannot assess another ordinary person, only a buddha can." It is even more important not to criticise all those who are like sons and daughters of the same parents, in that they have taken refuge in the Three Jewels and started out on the path of the Buddha's teachings through confidence in the basic truth of what he taught; for example, that "All that is compounded is impermanent; all that is defiled is suffering; all phenomena are without inherent existence; that which is beyond suffering is peace."

Even more closely related are those of us who have entered the Mahayana. Together, we should be like a thousand princes and princesses of one universal monarch who never feel animosity or contempt for one another, but instead always extol one another's virtues and qualities. Treat one another with great kindness and openness, and above all do not look for one another's mistakes. Once you start finding defects somewhere, you will see them everywhere and in everyone. By proclaiming someone's faults to all and sundry, you are burning yourself and hurting the other person; which can only be wrong. It is the sangha that upholds the teachings; its members must be in harmony, and their discipline perfect. Develop confidence and pure vision. To respect the sangha (all those who have taken monastic vows and all those who have entered the Dharma) is a commitment of the refuge vows. Consider all your brothers and sisters in the

Dharma as being free from any faults.

Malicious criticism of other traditions of Dharma, in particular, is a major cause of the Dharma as a whole declining and being corrupted. View all traditions and views as noncontradictory, and as true expressions of the Buddha's teachings. As Panchen Lobsang Yeshe said:

*The various different doctrinal views*

*Are all the very teachings of the Victorious One.*

*Instead of a blaze of enmity ignited by the demon of sectarianism, how much finer*

*To see everything lit up by the radiant jewel of pure perception!*

Your impure perception of the world can easily falsify the way you see the actions of bodhisattvas. Any faults you may perceive in them are due only to your own imperfections, just as a white conch may look yellow to someone with jaundice. Whenever you think you have seen some defect in a bodhisattva's conduct or thinking, therefore, remind yourself that the problem is your own distorted perception and that in reality that person is free of all defects.

You 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. There have also been many bodhisattvas who manifested as beggars or low-status, rough-looking people with unsuitable occupations and no obvious good qualities. Tilopa killed fish, Saraha was an arrow smith, and Shavaripa a hunter. Anyone you meet, could actually be a fully matured bodhisattva who has assumed an ordinary appearance, or even an offensive one; so you should respect all beings and regard them as teachers.

When you hear the stories of Buddha Shakyamuni's past lives, you can understand how each time he manifested in a different way it was an expression of his intention to help beings, his infinite bodhisattva activity. Bodhisattvas are free from all selfish intentions, and everything they do is the application of skilful means. In the same way that a drop of mercury that falls in the dust remains spotlessly clean with nothing adhering to it, so too bodhisattvas manifest in the world without being contaminated by it.

To recognise bodhisattvas' perfect goodness, and with confidence and faith to see everything as pure, will ensure that your Dharma practice does not become rotten at the root. Faith is what opens the gate of the teachings wide. Of the seven noble qualities,<sup>36</sup> faith is the most noble of all.

**With complete confidence and devotion, see the teacher as a real buddha and whatever he does as a manifestation of his perfect wisdom.**

The way you behave should be in harmony with the teacher and with all of your Dharma friends. Fitting all your actions smoothly with whatever the others are doing, make sure that your presence is never oppressive or constraining; like a comfortable belt that can be worn all the time without ever being felt. Enter into all situations without creating problems and difficulties; like salt that readily dissolves in any water. Receive teachings and guidance from your teacher without ever creating inconvenience for him, and act toward your spiritual friends in a way that does not trouble them at all; like a swan on a lotus lake, gliding serenely over the water without disturbing it, and navigating between the lotus flowers without any disruption of their delicate arrangement.

Keep your perception pure, considering all that appears to be infinite purity. Then everything will inspire you to practice the Dharma, and everything will be an illustration of the teachings. As Milarepa said:

*The world all around is the best of all books—*

*I don't need to read a book in black and white.*

For the Vajrayana, faith and pure vision are the two main roots of practice. If you do not have them yet, try to give rise to them. Once you have developed them, try constantly to increase them. As soon as you think or do something that goes against faith and pure vision, be aware of it, confess and counter it right away. **Set your own defects right, instead of proclaiming those of others.** This will help to preserve the purity of the samaya and maintain harmony within the sangha, performing a great service to the teachings.

After receiving empowerment from a Vajrayana master, you have to remain in harmony with

<sup>36</sup> The seven noble qualities, or riches: faith, discipline, conscientiousness, modesty, learning, generosity, and wisdom.

your vajra brothers and sisters, those who entered the same mandala with you, until you all attain enlightenment, just as the wick and flame of a lamp stay alight together until both of them die. To spoil or weaken the samaya, the sacred links you have with other disciples, will obscure your spiritual experiences and realisation, and hinder the attainment of all ordinary accomplishments and especially the supreme accomplishment of enlightenment. **The antidote is to see the primordial purity of everything.** This is the authentic practice of the bodhisattvas.

## **C. To give up attachment to a sponsor's property**

### **33. Not Profiting from Dharma**

*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.*

By putting all your efforts into the affairs of this life, you could no doubt make yourself tremendously wealthy, amass gold in vast quantities, and reach the very pinnacle of fame and power. Yet even then you would probably be bitterly resentful of anyone even wealthier or more influential than yourself; you would regard with contempt the people you left behind, now your social inferiors, while toward your peers, you would feel competitive and jealous, waiting for any opportunity to get the better of them. Even beggars burn with jealousy when other beggars get the alms.

People get themselves into situations where they no longer even have the time to eat or sleep. You can be so preoccupied trying to achieve your ordinary ends that you become as busy as an ant, constantly out till late at night and up early in the morning; as the holy Physician of Dagpo, Gampopa, put it, “having stars for a hat and hoarfrost for boots.”

Finally, however, the net result of all this unending activity is that you turn into someone ready to slide into obsequious hypocrisy, and become no more than a pathetic beggar prepared to face the bites of fierce guard dogs, all for the sake of a scrap of food. As Shantideva says:

*For I am one who strives for freedom;  
I must not be bound by wealth and honours.*

And Jetsun Milarepa said:

*Thunder, mighty though its blast, is empty sound;  
Rainbows, superb though their hues, just melt away;  
This world, charming though it seems, is but a dream;  
Pleasures of the senses, great though their joys, cause evil.*

Make a clean break from all ordinary activities. Be content with whatever you have and satisfied with whatever happens, day by day. Everything else will then fall naturally into place. As Gyalse Thogme 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.*

When you practice Dharma, to begin with you may experience hardships. But later, those sufferings give way to great happiness and serenity. With worldly activities, however, it is just the opposite. To begin with, they seem to bring happiness. But later, they deteriorate into suffering—for such is their nature. To keep making the right choice in this matter is the practice of the bodhisattvas.

## **D. To give up harsh speech**

### **34. Giving 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.*

Now you have given rise to the idea of attaining enlightenment for the sake of others. From now on, therefore, you should never say things that hurt others; words that upset their feelings and are bound to lead to anger. Instead, you should only say kind and gentle words that will encourage them.

Most of the wars that devastate the world are started by harsh words. Quarrels, rancorous resentment, and endlessly perpetuated feuds all arise because tolerance and patience are lacking.

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.

Kharak Gomchung says:

*Stop shooting the poisoned arrows of harsh speech,  
And give up your ill-natured aggression.*

If you allow unkind words to spew out of your mouth, you will upset both other people's minds and your own mind, too. At such moments, the bodhisattva's way is lost. Those who divulge other people's failings, loudly proclaiming them everywhere, or disparage teachers and other spiritual lineages, are only building themselves a mountain of negativity.

The way a bodhisattva uses speech, in contrast, is to bring people onto the path of liberation. He or she would start by saying things and telling stories that open people's minds by making them happy, and then gradually and skilfully introduce to them the meaning of Dharma. The Buddha taught beings in ways that matched their differing capacities and degree of receptivity. Those with lesser capacity he instructed in the teachings of the Basic Vehicle, stressing the need to give up all ordinary activities focused on this life, to go forth from home to homelessness, and to live in secluded places. Those with greater capacity he instructed in the vast and profound teachings of the Great Vehicle, explaining how to be generous, keep discipline, and be patient; how to start by renouncing all worldly affairs, entrust oneself to the guidance of a teacher, and practice his instructions one-pointedly in solitary retreat. He taught them how to sustain their determination by reflecting on the futility of the eight ordinary preoccupations,<sup>37</sup> and how to permeate their practice with bodhichitta by giving rise to a truly altruistic attitude and directing to the benefit of others everything they think and do.

### III. Training in how to be rid of the negative emotions

#### 35. Cutting 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.*

Whatever practice you are doing, it has to work as an effective antidote to your negative emotions and to your belief in substantial existence.

Now, any emotion can only begin as a tiny thought or feeling, which then grows stronger and stronger. If you can recognise that thought the very moment it first arises, it will be easy to let it subside again. An emotion recognised at that stage is like a small wisp of cloud in a clear and empty sky, which is not going to produce any rain.

If, on the other hand, you remain unaware of such thoughts and let them expand and multiply, there will soon be such a rapid succession of thoughts and feelings, each one adding to the one before, that you 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 *The Ornament of the Mahayana Sutras* warns, "The emotions destroy oneself, destroy others, and destroy discipline."

At the end of the chapter on carefulness in *The Way of the Bodhisattva*, Shantideva likens the negative emotions to enemies who must be repulsed and routed. But, he points out, unlike ordinary, human enemies, they do not have anywhere to retreat to. You get rid of them simply by recognising them for what they are: "Miserable afflictions, scattered by the eye of wisdom!"

In the struggle against the emotions, if you lose your vigilance even for a moment, you have to revive it at once; in the same way that a swordsman in battle who lets slip his sword must pick it up again immediately. The very instant an emotion arises, the thought of using the antidote should occur to you. What else is the Dharma for, if it is not to stop you giving full vent to your

<sup>37</sup> The eight ordinary preoccupations: pleasure and pain, gain and loss, praise and defamation, fame and obscurity.

negative emotions? As Drom Tönpa said,

*Whatever works to counteract emotions, it is Dharma;  
Whatever does not work is not Dharma.*

Indeed, there is no time to waste. If you had been shot at with a poisoned arrow, would you just wait with it sticking in your flesh, or would you immediately set about extracting it and making the wound bleed?

As Shantideva also said:

*Wandering where it will, the elephant of mind  
Will bring us down to pains of deepest hell.  
No worldly beast, however wild and crazed,  
Could bring upon us such calamities.  
But if, with mindfulness's rope,  
The elephant of the mind is tied on every side,  
All fears will come to nothing,  
And every virtue drop into our hands.*

When Yeshe Tsogyal asked Guru Rinpoche, "Who is the worst enemy?" he said, "**Obscuring emotions.**"<sup>38</sup> Gyalse Thogme concludes:

*Train yourself to control the three poisonous thoughts between sessions.  
Until all thoughts and appearances arise as the dharmakaya,  
There is no way to do without that training. Remember whenever you need it,  
And never give deluded thoughts free rein, you Mani-reciters.*

Always stay alert, therefore, and watch what your mind is doing. Think about it. Over countless lifetimes, have you not been deluded, fallen under the power of your negative emotions, and as a result had to undergo (time and time again) the sufferings of birth, sickness, old age, and death? Yet still you cling to samsara as if it were a happy place. You take things that are impermanent to be permanent. You work frantically to amass possessions you will never be able to keep, without ever being satisfied. Surely now it is high time to start observing your mind.

Be aware of everything that arises in your mind immediately, as though watching your face in a mirror. Identify your emotions as the enemies that have spoiled your past lives, and will spoil your future lives, too, if you fail to cut them at the root as soon as they appear. There is no emotion that you 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.

However, in just the same way that someone who attains a high position may find that his worries and difficulties increase, so too, when you set yourself the ambitious goal of getting free from samsara, you may find that your thoughts and habitual tendencies seem even stronger and more numerous than before. If you fall immediately under their power, your practice will be interrupted. It may stagnate, to the point that you end up as an old hermit only interested in making money. Or you could stray into an intellectual approach, endlessly acquiring more and more knowledge. But if you can manage to overcome your wild emotions by concentrating on sustained calm and profound insight, you are sure to make steady progress on the path.

When your mind is distracted, you can be bitten by a mosquito without your even noticing it. But when your mind is quiet, you will feel a mosquito bite straight away. In the same way, the mind needs to be relaxed and quietened if it is to become aware of its empty nature. The practice of shamatha (calm abiding) is done for this reason, and through such practice even a person with strong emotions will gradually acquire self-control and inner calm. When the mind comes to a stable state of relaxed concentration, your habitual tendencies fade away by themselves, while altruism and compassion naturally develop and expand. Eventually, you will come to a state of ease in the unceasing flow of the absolute nature.

Why are all of us beings wandering in samsara? As Chandrakirti said:

*Beings think "I" at first, and cling to self;  
They think of "mine" and are attached to things.  
They thus turn helplessly as buckets on a waterwheel,*

<sup>38</sup> anger, greed, pride, jealousy, or fear

*And to compassion for such beings I bow down.*

The buddha nature, tathagatagarbha, is present in all of us, but we fail to recognise it, instead mistakenly taking what arises through its natural power of manifestation (the universe and its six realms (place), the various physical forms of the beings in those realms (body), and the eight consciousnesses (mind)) to be things outside and separate from ourselves. This dualistic perception is responsible for the split between self and others, from which arises the tendency we all have to cherish ourselves and to consider others much less important than we are. The root of all this is ignorance, the false belief in an “I.” If your mistaken belief in a self disappeared, so too would the whole idea of “other.” You would realise the essential sameness of “self” and “other”.

The separation of everything into yourself and others is how the entire play of attachment and aversion begins. “Others” can only be conceived in relation to yourself. Without the idea that there is an “I,” how could the notion of “other” arise? When you recognise the empty nature of “I,” you simultaneously recognise the empty nature of “other.” When ignorance disappears, so too does the distinction between self and other. You stop treating people as adversaries to be overcome, and perceive friends and relatives as dreamlike magical illusions.

Be aware of whatever negative tendency may be contained in your thoughts as they arise, and quickly apply the appropriate antidote. For instance, if you are thinking of someone and the idea of this being an “enemy” arises, do not let any hatred develop. Instead, generate great love for that person as though he or she were your dearest friend. If attachment arises, view the person as an illusion, and remember that whatever comes together is bound to separate. When you let attachment subside, there will be no habitual tendencies or karmic seeds to accumulate for future lives. By trying to classify the infinitude of living beings into friends and enemies, you will only overload your mind. Instead, simplify everything and see everyone as your kind parents.

Only an omniscient buddha could know how long ago it was that you fell into the delusion of samsara, in which you have spent an incalculable number of lives. All beings must have been your parents in one life or another. Realising this, feel a deep, impartial love for them all.

## **IV. Training in accomplishing others’ good with mindfulness and vigilance**

### **36 Being Mindful**

*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.*

Every day, check to what extent you are applying the teachings, how often you are managing to control your mind, and how many times you are falling under the power of negative emotions. Examining your own progress in this way will help you to decrease your clinging to the ordinary concerns of this life, and to increase your confidence in the teachings.

Now, for once, you know exactly where the authentic path lies. It will take you without fail to enlightenment, as long as you make the right choices and do not mistake priceless jewels for ordinary stones. Right now is the time to practice Dharma, while you are free from physical illness and mental torments.

What do we mean by *Dharma*? The Tibetan word for Dharma, *chö*, means both “to repair all defects” and “to bring into being all positive qualities.” The Sanskrit word *Dharma* means “to hold,” implying that once you have made a connection with the Dharma, it will unfailingly take you from the depths of samsara to enlightenment; just as a fish once caught on the hook is sure not to be staying in the water for long. This is not an ordinary connection, but a very profound one.

Here, we come to the conclusion of the text, *The Thirty-seven Verses on the Practice of a Bodhisattva*. Its essence, in summary, is that whatever actions and whatever Dharma practice you do with body, speech, and mind, you should do them with the intention of benefiting the infinity of sentient beings. If your intentions are purely altruistic, without any self-clinging, perfection will naturally arise.

The way this pure, altruistic intention (the bodhichitta) is cultivated is analogous to cultivating a crop by plowing the soil and making it fertile. First you need the intention to attain enlightenment



for the sake of all beings, which you can then bring to maturity by putting these thirty-seven precepts into practice. To be of real help to others may be beyond your capacities at present, but you should constantly keep in mind your aim to help them. As Langri Thangpa said, “In the Mahayana, there is nothing else to do but benefit beings. So don’t let your armour of helping others be too small.”

The essence of the practice of a bodhisattva is to transcend self-clinging and dedicate yourself completely to serving others. It is a practice based on your mind, rather than on how your actions might appear externally. True generosity, therefore, is to have no clinging; true discipline is to have no desire; and true patience is to be without hatred. That bodhisattvas can even give away their kingdom, their life, or their spouse and children is because they do not have the slightest inner feeling of poverty or need, and are ready to fulfil others’ needs unconditionally. It does not matter how your actions might seem to anyone else; no particular “compassionate” appearance is necessary. What you do need is a pure mind. Sweet and pleasing words spoken without any intention of helping others are meaningless. Even birds sing beautiful songs. Wild animals such as tigers behave in a loving way to their cubs, but theirs is a partial love mixed with attachment. It does not extend to all beings. A bodhisattva possesses impartial love for all beings.

You might teach the Dharma to hundreds of thousands of students, and do thousands of spiritual practices and meritorious acts, but if self-clinging is still your mind’s most firmly rooted theme, your activity will never be that of a bodhisattva. To be a bodhisattva and to carry out a bodhisattva’s activity, you must uproot all trace of selfishness from within.

Outwardly, most of the great siddhas of India looked like unimpressive beggars. Their lives were not filled with conspicuous deeds of grandiose charity. But inwardly they had realised emptiness, and their minds were constantly overflowing with love and compassion for all beings. In Tibet, Jetsun Milarepa was the same. He never made grand offerings or performed meritorious deeds for everyone to see. Yet Milarepa is considered foremost among all the enlightened yogis of India and Tibet, and has been able to turn the minds of countless beings all over the world toward the Dharma because he completely cast off all self-clinging and realised emptiness.

If you remain unable to master your own mind, to have studied many scriptures and to have met many spiritual masters will be of no real help to you.

What matters most is the strength of your compassion. There was once an eminent lama of Lhasa who used to make a daily offering of water torma for the hungry ghosts, using beautiful vessels made of solid gold. One day, he was late making his offering, and some of the spirits appeared before him. They urged him to make haste. The lama asked them why they were in such a hurry, and the spirits replied that they wanted to go to receive Kharak Gomchung’s water torma offering, as his was more satisfying than any other. Were they to miss it, they feared, they would have to starve.

The lama wanted to know more about this Kharak Gomchung, and made some inquiries. He discovered that he was a humble hermit living in a cave at Tsang Kharak. When Kharak Gomchung offered his water torma, he used half a walnut shell as the container, and put only a few grains in it. The water for the offering came from the tears of compassion that fell from his eyes. Because his compassion was limitless, all the spirits of Tibet came to receive his offering.

Everything depends on your intention. All the time, therefore, check your attitude and motivation. As Patrul Rinpoche said, everyone wants happiness, but the true way to reach perfect happiness yourself is to bring happiness to others.

## **V. Dedicating the merit to perfect enlightenment**

### **37 Dedicating on Behalf of Others**

*Dedicating to enlightenment*

*Through wisdom purified of the three concepts*

*All merit achieved by such endeavour,*

*To remove the suffering of numberless beings, is the practice of a bodhisattva.*

There are three sections to the teachings: 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 seals the practice, and 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 your meritorious actions of body, speech, and mind to the enlightenment of all beings, beginning with those who have harmed you and created obstacles for you.

If you share with all beings the merit of a practice or positive action, that merit will last until you reach enlightenment, just as a drop of water that you put into the ocean will never dry up for as long as the ocean remains. But if you neglect to 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 you fail to seal your merit with authentic dedication, then however vast the offerings and positive actions you have performed may be, their results can only be ephemeral, and vulnerable to the destructive effects of your negative emotions, such as anger, pride, and jealousy.

It is also important to dedicate your merit to the right goal, and not just to the petty achievements of this life, such as wealth, good health, success, and influence. Your true goal should be total, unsurpassable enlightenment for the sake of others.

To dedicate merit in the best possible way (a way entirely free from the three concepts of a subject, an object, and an action) is possible only for someone who has fully realised emptiness. How, then, should we ordinary beings dedicate the merit, incapable as we are of such perfect dedication? We can do it by following in the footsteps of those who have that realisation. The bodhisattva Samantabhadra mastered the ocean-like infinitude of a bodhisattva's aspirations, while Mañjushri and Avalokiteshvara mastered the ocean-like infinitude of a bodhisattva's activity to benefit beings. When you dedicate merit, do it with the idea of emulating the way these great bodhisattvas dedicated merit, and use the perfect verses spoken by the Buddha or his followers who realised the ultimate, empty nature of everything. It gives your prayers much more power and efficacy. Use *The King of Aspirations for Excellent Conduct*, or extracts from it, such as:

*Just as fearless Mañjushri did to attain omniscience,  
And in the same way that Samantabhadra, likewise, did too,  
Just so, to follow all of them and train myself,  
I perfectly dedicate these meritorious actions.*

Or this prayer, spoken by Lama Mipham:

*By the power of omniscience, love, and prayers arisen  
From the enlightened hearts of the sugatas,  
May we all realise  
The magical transformation of the guru's wisdom.*

Or:

*By the blessings of the attainment of the Three Bodies of the Buddha,  
By the blessings of the unchanging truth of the dharmata,  
And by the blessings of the intentions of the undivided Sangha,  
May all my aspirations, just as made while dedicating now, in future come to be.*

And:

*When, stricken by impermanence,  
They cross to the next existence,  
May I lead all beings in general  
And all those who have been connected to me In a positive or negative way.  
May I guide them efficiently,  
May I cut the stream of their suffering,  
May I ferry them across the four rivers.<sup>39</sup>  
May they soon obtain unsurpassable enlightenment!*

And:

*Throughout all of our lives, may we never separate from the perfect Teacher;*

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<sup>39</sup> The four rivers of suffering, in which living beings, especially humans, are helplessly carried along: birth, sickness, aging, and death.

*May we avail ourselves of all the beneficial glory of the Dharma.*

*Fully perfecting the qualities of the paths and bhūmis,*

*May we swiftly reach the very level of Vajradhara.*

Actions done with neither pride nor regret, and then dedicated correctly, bear an unhindered energy that enables us to progress quickly toward enlightenment.