

THE 37 PRACTICES OF A BODHISATTVA

By Ngulchu Thogme

Commentary by Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso Rinpoche www.ktgrinpoche.org ISBN 09710523-0-1
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Commentary based on an oral translation by Suzanne Schefczky, Taiwan 1993. Special thanks to Ari Goldfield for his careful review of the root texts, and to Pema Clark and Yeshe Parke for proofreading the Commentary with care and devotion.

PLEASE NOTE: THIS TEXT IS A DHARMA TEACHING, AS WITH ALL DHARMA TEXTS, IT SHOULD NOT BE PLACED ON A FLOOR OR OTHER DIRTY PLACES. ONE SHOULD NOT LICK THEIR FINGERS TO TURN THE PAGES NOR PLACE MUNDANE MATERIALS NOR OBJECTS ON TOP OF THIS DOCUMENT. AND IT SHOULD BE PLACED ON THE TOP SHELF OF A BOOKCASE OR OTHER CLEAN PLACE FOR DHARMA MATERIALS. IF YOU NO LONGER WISH TO KEEP IN WRITTEN FORM, PLEASE RETURN TO A BUDDHIST CENTER OR DESTROY BY FIRE WHERE APPROPRIATE.

The basic structure of the text illustrates the complete path of the Bodhisattva in 43 verses, which include a verse for each of the 37 Practices with an additional 2 verses in the beginning and 4 at the end. The first 2 verses are the traditional ones which express homage to a deity, the embodiment of enlightened qualities and then state the purpose for writing the text and the author's commitment to do so.

The main body of the text is divided into 3 parts, the first which deals with the causes that give rise to bodhichitta (the mind of awakening). The mind training of a superior individual is discussed in the second part of the text, where the central topic is how to engender supreme Bodhichitta. In this section there are 5 main divisions that give advice on how to develop Bodhichitta and how to keep it from degenerating. First one should realize the equality of self and other and learn how to exchange one's own happiness for another's suffering. Secondly the text shows how to bring all situations of worldly life, including obscuring emotions and mistaken views onto the path, or how to integrate them into one's practice. The third is how to practice the six perfections. The fourth describes how to work with one's negative side and failures, and finally, there is a summary and dedication. The third main section is the conclusion, which contains a recapitulation of the purpose of the text, the reasons that establish its integrity in relation to the tradition of the teachings, an apology for any errors that might be found and a dedication. In summary, Ngulchu Thogme has given us the entire structure of a Bodhisattva's path: from first engendering bodhichitta in one's mindstream, to maintaining, and then further developing this bodhichitta up to the level of enlightenment.

(When reciting the 37 Practices, as a Dharma practice it is recommended to read the Prostration (before Practice #1) and all Epilogues A-E also (after Practice #37). The commentaries for each stanza should be read enough to familiarize understand each Practice).

Aspiration of Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso Rinpoche

May the virtue that arises from working with this text

Contribute to the liberation and happiness of all beings.

Let us begin by developing the enlightened attitude- that we want to attain the perfect state of Buddhahood for the benefit of all sentient beings, in number as vast as the sky. To accomplish this state, we must diligently engage in listening, reflecting, and meditating upon the genuine teachings. In general, the tradition of the Mahayana contains two types of practices: one purifies obscurations of the mind; the other develops a sound motivation, a good attitude. The former practice, in which we purify our mind of mental obscurations and stains, is the "progressive stages of meditation on emptiness," about which I wrote a book of that name. These progressive stages progressively lead the meditator from the relative to the ultimate. This text fits into the latter category. Its title in Tibetan is *The Thirty-seven Practices of a Bodhisattva: a Summary of the Heart Essence of a Bodhisattva's Conduct*. This full title indicates two points: first that the text condenses all the Mahayana sutras, which teach the conduct of a Bodhisattva; and second, that it summarizes the heart essence of a Bodhisattva's conduct, of which there are thirty-seven main practices. In Tibetan, the word for "practice" literally translates as "to bring into experience." So, 37 practices can actually be brought into experience.

While *The Thirty-seven Practices of a Bodhisattva* contains a few stanzas on the progressive stages of meditation on emptiness, the text deals primarily with meditation on the relative.

Its purpose is to help us with our motivation!

Beginning of Text

(The Practices themselves are in bold italics, the commentary is in normal font following each stanza).

Prostration

Namo Lokeshvaraya.

You see that all phenomena neither come nor go.

Still you strive solely for the benefit of beings.

Supreme Guru and Protector Chenrezig,

to you I continually bow with body, speech, and mind.

Namo Lokeshvaraya is a Sanskrit phrase that we use in prostrating to the Tibetan deity, Chenrezig, the Lord of the World. Chenrezig ("you") is the Noble One who dwells on the bhūmis. Chenrezig has seen that on an absolute level no phenomena of samsara and nirvana exist in their own essence. Therefore, he realizes that phenomena neither arise nor cease, neither come nor go. Though realizing that phenomena have no self-nature, Chenrezig still works diligently on behalf of others. He has abandoned self-interest and strives only to benefit beings.

Ngulchu Thogme, the author of this text, addresses his own lama as "Supreme Guru," whom he knows to be inseparable from the Protector Chenrezig. He acknowledges their union in one breath by prostrating continuously to his Supreme Guru and Protector Chenrezig. By "continuously," Ngulchu Thogme indicates that from now until he has reached enlightenment, with the three doors of his body, speech, and mind he will always respectfully bow down.

The Bodhisattva Ngulchu Thogme, who composed this text, was an amazing being. His life contains wonderful stories of great loving kindness and compassion. I cannot recount all the marvelous episodes here, but will choose a particularly significant one.

When just a small boy in Tibet, on an especially frigid day Thogme's parents dressed him warmly and sent him out to play. Not long after, they saw their son outside completely naked. When questioned, Thogme explained that he had come upon a hill of freezing ants; wanting to keep them warm, he had sheltered them with his own clothes. Clearly, even as a child Thogme's loving kindness and compassion were extensive, signaling that in a previous life he had meditated on bodhicitta. Similarly, if we meditate strongly on loving kindness and compassion in this life, in a future life we, too, may display Thogme's remarkable qualities in our early youth.

Author's intention

The perfect Buddhas, sources of benefit and happiness,

Arise from accomplishing the genuine Dharma.

Since that in turn depends on knowing how to practice,

The practices of a Bodhisattva shall be explained.

The Buddhas are the source of benefit and happiness. Benefit refers to a temporary state within samsara. Practicing the genuine Dharma benefits us temporarily by preventing us from being reborn in the lower realms- in the hell realms, the animal realm, and so on. By practicing the Dharma, we can gain a precious human rebirth in which we again practice the Dharma.

While benefit is a temporary condition within samsara, happiness refers to the ultimate state of liberation and omniscience. The Buddhas are the origin of both, namely temporary benefit and ultimate happiness.

How did the Perfect Buddhas, the source of all happiness and benefit, themselves arise? From having practiced the genuine Dharma. To help us accomplish this aim, Thogme intends to describe the practices of male and female Bodhisattvas.

Practice 1
Commitment

***Now that you have obtained a precious human body,
the great boat so difficult to find,
In order to free yourself and others from the ocean of samsara,
To listen, reflect, and meditate with diligence day and night
Is the practice of a Bodhisattva.***

This precious human body with its eight freedoms and ten endowments is rare and difficult to obtain. Not all human bodies are precious because not all people study the Dharma. A precious human body indicates an individual with great faith in the Dharma, the wisdom with which to analyze and comprehend its teachings, and the diligence and joyful effort with which to practice it. The body is compared to a great boat able to carry us across the ocean of samsara, across the suffering of this existence. With this body, we can attain peace for ourselves and, more important, for others. Our motivation is to carry all sentient beings across the ocean of the three realms of existence.

Thus, we promise that day and night, without laziness or distraction, we will listen, reflect, and meditate on the genuine Dharma. First, we listen. Then we use our intelligence to analyze what we have heard—we reflect. Finally, we meditate upon what we have heard and analyzed. This is how a Bodhisattva practices.

The Tibetan phrase for precious human body actually says "the freedoms and the endowments," a reference to the eight freedoms and the ten endowments that compose it. This is not the time or place to explain these factors, but Jamgon Kongtrul Lodro Thaye's *The Torch of Certainty* summarizes them; and Gampopa's *Jewel Ornament of Liberation* presents an extensive explanation.

Practice 2
Detaching from passion, aggression, and hatred

***Passion towards friends churns like water.
Hatred towards enemies burns like fire.
Through dark ignorance, one forgets what to adopt and what to reject.
To abandon one's homeland is the practice of a Bodhisattva.***

Like one wave of water following hard upon the other, the more one is drawn towards friends, the more one's passions increase. The basis for this attachment is taking friends to be truly existent. When fire burns, it consumes all the fuel that feeds it. In the same way, hatred towards enemies is like a fire that consumes one's mind. In the grasp of attachment and aversion, passion and hatred, one forgets what to adopt and what to reject. This forgetfulness is described as the darkness of ignorance. There are two ways to give up one's homeland. One is by directly abandoning it, just packing up and departing. The other is to relinquish one's attachment to home by not taking it to be truly existent. The latter is the more important. The homeland in some places is called the fatherland, in others the motherland. It is the land of our birth or any country to which we are attached. We are bound not by the country itself, but by taking it as real. Therefore, it is very important to know that the fatherland, motherland, or homeland does not truly exist.

Gampopa was born in a place called Dhagpo, where the circumstances for practice were so favorable that he stayed there, obtained high realization, and even came to be called Dhagpo Rinpoche, so closely associated was he with that place. Though Gampopa remained where he was born because it benefited his Dharma practice, he stayed without attachment. But if one's homeland does not provide suitable conditions for practicing Dharma, if it is a place of disputes and fights, then it is advisable to physically leave it.

Practice 3
Relying on solitude

***Giving up negative places, Mental afflictions gradually decrease.
With no distractions, virtuous activities naturally increase.
When mind becomes clear, Certainty in the Dharma is born.
To rely on solitude is the practice of a Bodhisattva***

Negative places are those where one cannot practice the Dharma at all, or where unfavorable conditions make one neglect practice. In giving up such places, afflictions will subside. They will not be eliminated all at once, but will gradually diminish-first the coarse and then, one after the other, the subtle ones as well. When you are alone in an isolated place, distractions caused by outside objects wane, while virtuous activities of practicing the genuine Dharma naturally grow. Solitude clears the mind and sharpens awareness. From this mental clarity, certainty and deep trust in the Dharma are born. Male and female Bodhisattvas do well to occasionally seek solitude.

To reduce mental afflictions, abandoning negative places benefits both the beginning practitioner and the Bodhisattva who is an ordinary being. But if one is an Arya Bodhisattva who dwells on a bhumi, then there is no need to abandon places of negativity. It is actually preferable for Bodhisattvas who know how to take negative places to the path remain where they are.

Some Bodhisattvas take birth in countries where conditions for Dharma practice are not very good. For the benefit of bringing the Dharma there, they do not abandon their fatherland. For example, Marpa the Translator traveled to India three times. The first time, he studied in India for twelve years, the second time for six years, and the third time for three years-twenty-one years in all. He did this to bring Buddhism to his homeland, an activity in accord with Naropa's prediction that Marpa would return to Lhodrak, the land of his birth, in order to spread the Dharma. That is exactly what he did: Through Marpa, the Dharma was heard, analyzed, and meditated on in his own country. Other Bodhisattvas give up their country to benefit beings elsewhere. For instance, Milarepa's student, Rechungpa, was born far from Lhasa. But as Jetsun Milarepa predicted, Rechungpa went to Yarlung, near Lhasa, and built a monastery called Lharo Dolgyi Gompa, where many beings studied and practiced Dharma. Rechungpa's path was the opposite of Marpa's in that he left his own land to benefit people. Some Bodhisattvas are able to practice the Dharma precisely because they have lost their country and all their possessions to enemies. In such a way the Lord of Yogins, Milarepa, was deprived of everything. His painful circumstances brought him to the Dharma. Therefore, he attributed great acts of kindness to his enemies, because through them he became a Dharma practitioner.

On the ultimate level, Milarepa realized the equality of friends and enemies. On the relative level, he developed pure love and compassion for all sentient beings, friends, and enemies alike. As a result of his bodhichitta, even Milarepa's worst enemies became his disciples. We, too, must meditate on loving kindness and compassion for all sentient beings, without distinction. Maybe we can develop bodhichitta in this life, maybe not. If not, there is a good chance it will arise in a future life.

Practice 4

Abandoning attachment to this life

Old friends and relatives will separate.

Possessions gained with effort will be left behind.

Consciousness, the guest, will leave the guesthouse of the body.

To let go of this life is the practice of a Bodhisattva.

Death will separate us from all our friends and relatives, no matter how long we have been connected, no matter how deep our bond may be. Should someone ask why it is necessary to relinquish attachment to this life, the inevitability of death is the first reason. The second is that at the time of death, regardless of the extent of our riches or how hard we have worked to accumulate them, all material possessions, all wealth- everything- will be relinquished. The third reason is that the body is a kind of hotel in which mental consciousness, the mind, temporarily resides. When we die, the consciousness departs, and the body is put in a coffin, then buried or burned. Therefore, there is no benefit in clinging to this body.

For these three reasons, the practice of a Bodhisattva is to mentally discard this life. This attitude does not mean actually giving it up. It suggests developing an attitude of renunciation. By realizing that this life is just like a dream and an illusion, you can abandon attachment to it.

In Tibet, human corpses were discarded in four ways. The first accorded with the Vajrayana. The body was cremated and a fire puja, or ceremony, performed to clear away negative obscurations. The second tradition was to throw the corpse into the water and offer it to the fish as an act of generosity. The third tradition, which originated in China, was to bury the body as quickly as possible in order to purify the place of death, so that afterwards it would not harm those who lived there. According to this tradition, when someone died, a burial expert was immediately summoned to determine the most auspicious burial site. By consulting this specialist and precisely carrying out his or her instructions, the family believed that benefit instead of harm would descend upon them. The fourth method was to feed the corpse to vultures.

This act was performed to benefit the vultures because these birds do not kill to eat; they depend on carrion for their survival. Offering corpses to the vultures was also regarded as an act of generosity.

One of the largest charnel grounds in Tibet was at Sera Gompa, close to Lhasa. So busy was this charnel ground that the vultures there fed on corpses every day. It is still like that. If you have the opportunity to visit Tibet, go to Sera Gompa, watch how the bodies are chopped into parts and how the vultures come to eat. It is a good opportunity to meditate on impermanence.

A charnel ground in Drikung was so famous that Tibetans brought their dead from afar to have them consumed by the Drikung vultures. Before roads were built, the bereaved would place the corpse on a yak and travel as long as fifteen days, sometimes longer, to reach Drikung. Regardless of the difficulties, offspring considered they had disposed of their parent's body auspiciously by offering it to the vultures of Drikung. Nowadays, a road and the availability of cars make the journey much easier.

Practice 5

Giving up negative friendships

***When friendship with someone
Causes the three poisons to increase,
Degrades the activities of listening, reflecting, and meditating,
And destroys loving kindness and compassion,
To give up such a friendship
Is the practice of a Bodhisattva.***

If you are a special being who possesses skillful means, you can carry all mental poisons and afflictions onto the path. That is, you can use them as a basis for practice. But if you are an ordinary person, then associating with negative friends will cause your three poisons to increase. This is the first reason to give up negative friendships. The second reason is to prevent the activities of listening, reflecting, and meditating from degenerating. And the third reason is that even if you have already developed loving kindness and compassion, the influence of a negative friend will impair these positive qualities and will hinder you from practicing them. These are the three reasons to give up negative friendships.

To clarify the respective meaning of "ordinary being" and "special being," let us use an analogy: Consider the vast amount of waste eliminated by the inhabitants of a large city. Ordinary beings are disgusted by sewage and want to be rid of it. It is dirty, it smells, it breeds disease. But the farmer is a special being grateful to obtain what everyone else rejects. His skill allows him to use this "waste" to fertilize his fields and make them more productive so that he can reap an abundant harvest. So you see there are two attitudes toward waste products and what to do with them.

It is the same way with the five afflictions. While ordinary beings must rid themselves of afflictions, the skillful individual can carry them onto the path and transform them into the five wisdoms. For example, the Vajrayana teaches a practice called "Clear Light Meditation" that transforms the affliction of mental dullness into clarity while one sleeps. Using this practice, an Indian mahasiddha named Lawapa realized Mahamudra by meditating in his sleep for twelve years by the side of a busy road. This is how to take mental dullness onto the path. If you're a skillful sleeper, then Clear Light Meditation is the ideal practice for you.

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Practice 6

Relying on a spiritual friend

***When in reliance on someone, your defects wane
And your positive qualities grow like the waxing moon,
To cherish such a spiritual friend even more than your own body
Is the practice of a Bodhisattva.***

The "someone" mentioned is the spiritual friend. If, by relying on a spiritual friend whom you deeply respect, your defects, and afflictions, negative karma, suffering, and so, on diminish, then this is a sign to continue your reliance. "Positive qualities" refer to the qualities of the bhūmis and of the paths. They also refer to qualities that develop from listening, reflecting, and meditating. If such virtues increase like the waxing moon, these are also signs to rely on such a person.

Because your relationship with the genuine spiritual friend decreases your afflictions and increases your good qualities, you should consider this friend as even more precious than your own body. Examples of how to rely on a spiritual friend are the way Tilopa relied on Naropa, and the way the great yogi Milarepa relied on Marpa. Naropa had to surmount twenty-four hardships, twelve small and twelve great. For examples of how Milarepa relied on his teacher, read his life story.

Practice 7

Seeking refuge

***Themselves captives in the prison of samsara,
Whom can the worldly gods protect?
Therefore, to seek refuge in those who do not deceive,
the Three Jewels, Is the practice of a Bodhisattva.***

Worldly gods like Brahma, Ishvara, and Vishnu are themselves prisoners of samsara, bound by afflictions, karma, and suffering. Thus, they have no ability to protect other beings. For refuge, one must go to true protectors. Only the three Rare and Supreme Ones—the Rare and Supreme Buddha, the Rare and Supreme Dharma, and the Rare and Supreme Sangha—are able to offer refuge. They are rare because they are difficult to find in this worldly realm. They are supreme because there is no higher protection to be found. The protection offered by the three Rare and Supreme Ones does not deceive. This is not a case where one believes they protect, but in the end they do not; or where they assure you they protect, but in the end cannot. Since only the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha offer unfailing protection, the practice of a Bodhisattva is to take refuge in these Three Jewels.

Throughout Buddhist texts, the qualities of the three Rare and Supreme Ones are explained repeatedly in great detail. In one text called *The Mahayana Uttarantra Shastra* (published by Snow Lion under the title *Buddha Nature*), of the seven vajra points, the first three concern the qualities of the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha. I propose that you read this text again and again in order to understand it well. In brief, what are the qualities of the three Rare and Supreme Ones? The qualities of the Buddha are mainly two—the perfection of abandonment and the perfection of realization. The quality of the Dharma is that it is a remedy against affliction, suffering, and confused appearances. The quality of the Sangha is friendship. Sangha is a community of practitioners who help us practice the Dharma and the friends who accompany us on the Dharma path. This is a brief explanation of all the qualities. If we think Dharma is books, something outside ourselves, we are mistaken. Genuine Dharma is the process of actualizing within our minds the wisdom that realizes emptiness and selflessness. Such wisdom overcomes all confused appearances and afflictions. This is real Dharma. It is like recognizing a dream for what it is, so that in the dream state we do not suffer from being burned by fire or drowned in water. Dharma is the remedy to overcome our actual afflictions and actual suffering because it enables us to realize emptiness and selflessness.

Refuge is of two kinds, relative and absolute. Relative refuge arises when we see that samsara has the nature of suffering and we develop complete trust in that recognition. We come to fear samsara and seek refuge from it. And who is able to protect us? Only the three Rare and Supreme Ones have this capacity. However, if we take refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha in such a way, this is relative refuge. Why? It is refuge based on concepts; it involves thoughts. Ultimate refuge, by contrast, is the realization of emptiness, the selflessness of persons and of phenomena. If we realize emptiness, we actualize ultimate refuge. When ultimate refuge arises, all our afflictions and suffering are self-liberated.

Practice 8

Relinquishing negative actions

***The suffering of the lower realms, so difficult to bear,
Is the fruit of wrong deeds, so the Buddha taught.
Therefore, even at the cost of your life,
Never to commit negative actions
Is the conduct of a Bodhisattva.***

Beings in the hell realms suffer from extreme heat and cold. Hungry ghosts suffer from hunger and thirst. Animals suffer from stupidity. Suffering is not the creation of gods or devils, nor does it arise without causes or conditions. Suffering is the inevitable consequence of negative actions. Therefore, it is better to die than to commit them. At a deeper level, the suffering of the lower realms is just confused appearance that arises from habitual tendencies. It is the same as the example of the suffering in a dream. This is why the Mahayana and the Vajrayana assert that suffering does not truly exist.

Practice 9

Striving for unchanging liberation

***Like dew on the tip of a blade of grass
Happiness in the three worlds evaporates in a single instant.
To strive for the supreme state of liberation that never changes
Is the practice of a Bodhisattva.***

The reference to the three worlds can be interpreted as the subterranean world where the nagas abide, the earth where humans and animals live, and the sky that is the abode of the gods. Or, this term might be understood to encompass the three realms: desire, form, and formless. Regardless of interpretation, the nature of happiness within all these worlds is temporary. Whether that of gods or humans, happiness is as evanescent as a dewdrop on a blade of grass. One instant and it is gone. Since this happiness is impermanent and ever changing, we need to strive for an unchanging happiness, which in Buddhism is the changeless state of liberation. A Buddhist practices the Dharma to achieve a result. Were there no result, why bother to practice? The Dharma describes three types of results. The first is gaining the happy realms or the happy state. The second is achieving liberation. The last is attaining Buddhahood.

There are those who practice Dharma to avoid the suffering of rebirth in hell or as a hungry ghost or as an animal. Fear of the lower realms motivates them to strive for a favorable rebirth as a god, or in a deity realm where they can continue to practice the Dharma. The person in this category may also seek the benefit of longevity to have more time to practice or to accumulate the means to practice in ease. The motivation of practitioners who follow the Dharma for these reasons is considered inferior because the result sought is temporary.

A person motivated by desire for liberation attains his or her goal by understanding that samsara has no essence. Since it has no essence, it can be totally abandoned. Liberation is the highest state sought by the Shravakas and Pratyekabuddhas—that is, by Shrivakayana practitioners. A practitioner seeking liberation embodies a medium level of motivation.

One who strives for Buddhahood is endowed with supreme motivation—the desire to attain complete and perfect enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings. Buddhahood emerges as the result of practicing the Mahayana, wherein one cuts the root of existence through the superior intelligence that realizes emptiness. While Mahayana practice does, in fact, liberate the practitioner from samsara, the great compassion it engenders motivates the Bodhisattva to remain in existence to benefit all sentient beings. This is the attitude of the Mahayana, its supreme motivation. In his text, *The Precious Garland of the Supreme Path*, Gampopa describes these three kinds of motivation: inferior, middling, and supreme.

Practice 10

Developing bodhichitta

***From beginningless time your mothers have cherished you.
If they now suffer, what good is your own happiness?
Therefore, in order to liberate limitless sentient beings,
Giving rise to bodhichitta is the practice of a Bodhisattva.***

The Mahayana speaks of all sentient beings as having once been our mother, our father, and our friend. Without exception, not a being exists who has not been related to each of us throughout all our lifetimes. The mother is most often used as an example because of her untold acts of kindness. What is the good in attaining liberation for our own sake alone if our mothers continue to weep due to their suffering in samsara?

Therefore, in certain kinds of meditation, to visualize the mother as the person who has been kindest to us, and then to meditate on all sentient beings as being our mother, is very beneficial. The male or female Bodhisattva responds by developing the enlightened attitude of the Mahayana and working to liberate all sentient beings. According to the Mahayana, one must develop the enlightened attitude, supreme bodhichitta. Before bodhichitta can arise within our minds, we must have previously meditated on it at length. The chapters in Gampopa's *Jewel Ornament of Liberation* on loving kindness and compassion offer guidance and help. I advise you to read these chapters again and again, to meditate on them, and to practice them so that you will give rise to the authentic attitude of the Mahayana.

Practice 11

Exchanging happiness for suffering

All suffering comes from yearning for your own happiness.

The perfect Buddhas are born from the intention to benefit others.

Therefore, to truly exchange your own happiness for the suffering of others

Is the practice of a Bodhisattva.

Whether related to our body, possessions, friends, or enemies, all suffering without exception arises because we want happiness for ourselves. The root of desire for personal happiness is ego-clinging. But where do the perfect Buddhas come from? Buddhas arise from the intention to benefit others. This intention is rooted in compassion, and if one has such compassion, one can become a perfect Buddha. The intention of a Bodhisattva is to benefit others by truly exchanging his or her happiness for the suffering of other beings. The text says, "to truly exchange," which means you do not just perform lip-service by mouthing, "I exchange my happiness for your suffering." Nor should it be merely a thought or an intention. You should actually be able to accomplish this exchange. Then you are a true Bodhisattva.

How do you develop the ability to do this? Begin by visualizing according to the instructions on *tong len*, the practice of giving and taking. First visualize that when you exhale, you give away your happiness in the form of white light for the benefit of all sentient beings, and then when you inhale that you take upon yourself their suffering in the form of black smoke which you perfectly purify when it reaches your heart. This visualization takes some getting used to. After you have become accustomed to *tong len*, have continued it for a long time, and have attained the Bodhisattva levels, then you will truly be able to exchange your own happiness for the suffering of others.

In his text, *The Bodhicharyavatara: A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*, Shantideva makes many aspiration prayers on exchanging himself for others. Chapter 3, in particular, contains a number of them. One line says: "*May I become a servant for those sentient beings who need a servant*".

In an aspiration prayer, you aspire to help others who need help. You give yourself up for the benefit of helping others. Here, Shantideva wishes to become a servant to those who need a servant. He doesn't pray, "May I become the boss and give orders to others." In an aspiration prayer, you do not wish for your own welfare. If you do not read Shantideva's entire text, at least study the third chapter again and again to help you develop the right attitude.

In general, the Mahayana can be divided into two categories of practice: meditation on emptiness, which is a remedy against confused appearance and habitual tendencies because it cuts the root of samsara; and meditation on bodhichitta because it shows how to behave in everyday life within the relative world of samsara. Ngulchu Thogme's thirty-seven practices provide short, clear instructions for both categories of meditation that we can apply just as he teaches.

These thirty-seven Bodhisattva practices are as important for the Vajrayana as for the Mahayana, because if you carry them out, your Vajrayana practice will become more profound and you will be able to benefit many sentient beings. Because Ngulchu Thogme was such a great Bodhisattva, he composed these verses so that ordinary beings could comprehend them. But merely understanding them isn't enough. You need to be convinced. Even conviction is insufficient. The practices must be applied and worked with. Reading them once and saying, "Oh, how easy! I understand everything," and then putting them aside will not bring any benefit at all. You need to read them again and again, memorize them, and strive to put them into practice.

Practice 12

Responding to theft

***Even if someone driven by desire steals all your wealth
Or incites someone else to steal it,
To dedicate to this person your body, possessions,
and all your virtue of the three times
Is the practice of a Bodhisattva.***

The application of bodhichitta and the act of dedication enable you to benefit the thief. You also benefit yourself, since these practices accumulate merit and lead you closer to Buddhahood. Loving kindness and compassion are therefore very important.

If someone steals all your wealth and possessions or instigates someone else to do it, why should you dedicate everything to this person? The basis for the apparent contradiction is that sometime in a previous lifetime that thief was your parent. The Mahayana speaks of many lifetimes, throughout which every sentient being at some point has been your parent. In some past life this very thief showed you great kindness. Understanding this process encourages compassion for the thief—which means not developing anger. Compassion enables us to be patient so that we can actually dedicate everything to him or her. Without bodhichitta, we merely become angry.

There are many stories of how people came to the Dharma as a result of having been harmed by others. Milarepa is a good example. When he was very young, his aunt and uncle stole all his family's wealth and property. Because of this painful experience and others that followed, Milarepa undertook the practice of Dharma and subsequently developed gratitude toward his relatives. Like Milarepa, Mahayana practitioners should consider those who harm them as friends helpful to their Dharma practice.

It may be easy to comprehend this Bodhisattva practice, but to apply it is quite another matter. When someone steals everything we own, we become enraged. It is so difficult not to. Nevertheless, we cannot practice the Dharma when we are angry. We cannot develop compassion towards the thief. Until we behave in accordance with this verse, we are not following the practice of a Bodhisattva. We really must find out whether we can do so.

Practice 13

Responding to injury

***If someone cuts off your head
Even when you have not done the slightest thing wrong,
Through the power of compassion
To take his misdeeds upon yourself
Is the practice of a Bodhisattva.***

You have not done anything wrong, but still someone is trying to seriously harm you. Cutting off your head is the ultimate act of violence because it ends your life. How do you generate compassion towards someone trying to kill you? How do you quell your own rage? Understand that this person has not analyzed his or her actions with superior knowledge. He or she lacks wisdom, is ignorant, afflicted, and confused. This dark state of mind inevitably leads to negative actions that create negative karma for the one who wishes to injure you. Then think, "I see what a pitiable state this person is in, and I wish to arouse compassion towards her. In a previous life she was my father or mother, yet now she is lost in such ignorance and confusion that she wants to kill me." A thought process like this can be very effective in nurturing compassion. Once fully aroused, compassion enables you to take upon yourself the current misdeed of the person who intends to kill you. And on the basis of great compassion, you can take on all misdeeds the person has ever committed. By practicing *tong len*, absorbing all the person's negativity and sending out all your positive qualities, the enemy becomes your Dharma friend, your benefactor who increases the vast store of merit needed to reach Buddhahood.

The Buddha himself offers many inspiring examples. In his multiple lives as a Bodhisattva, The Awakened One was often killed, but he viewed these deaths as an opportunity to accumulate merit and to develop deep compassion for the person who took his life. Thus, he amassed great merit and in his final incarnation attained enlightenment.

When someone is trying to physically injure us, the practice is to meditate on patience for oneself and compassion for our enemy. Imagine a child who loves his mother very much. Suddenly, the mother goes crazy and begins to beat him because she is emotionally unbalanced.

The child's affection makes it easier for him to respond to the mother's distress patiently and compassionately, and to help her find a cure. Using this example, we can regard someone trying to harm us as our mother who has gone mad, and our attitude should be helpful. Those compelled to injure, even kill, have no control over their emotions. Possessed by anger or rage, they lose all self-control and strike out or even commit murder. There was once a book printer called Pharken Togden, which means "the one with high realization." In those days, books were printed from letters carved into pieces of wood, so his name became "the book printer of high realization." He was a very famous siddha with many qualities arisen from meditation. How Pharken Thogden came to practice the Dharma was rather unusual. One day as he sat carving, his mother unexpectedly showed up and disturbed his concentration. Pharken Thogden became so enraged that he lost control and beat her on the head with a block of wood until she died. Regaining his senses and seeing the horror of what he had done, he was overwhelmed by grief and shock.

Pharken Thogden's remorse was so great that he undertook a long pilgrimage to all the holy places in Tibet, including Mount Kailash, which was as far from his home in Eastern Tibet as he could go. Wherever he traveled, the grieving son carried his mother's head with him. Lama Pharken Togden endured many hardships on his pilgrimage. Afterwards, he returned home and dedicated the rest of his life to Dharma practice. In this way he became a highly realized being with many special qualities.

This example shows that without intending to, anyone can be overpowered by anger, lose control, and commit terrible deeds. Thus, sentient beings that harm others do not have power over their own senses. Through ignorance, they lose control; through confusion, they cause harm. Remembering this, we develop deep compassion. Have you ever been so furious that anger kept you awake and lack of sleep disturbed your mind and made you unhappy the next day? Perhaps you could not eat, could not concentrate, were irritable and distressed. All this because of anger. Now imagine that the person wishing to harm you is experiencing the same agitation: seething with hatred, unable to sleep, obsessed by vengeance. On the basis of your own experience, you can empathize and feel compassion for someone whose anger is the root of his suffering. More methods on how to take upon yourself the misdeeds of others are well described in Jamgon Kongtrul Lodro Thaye's *Seven Points of Mind Training*, called *The Great Path to Awakening*.

Practice 14

Returning praise for slander

***Should someone slander you
Throughout a billion worlds,
With a heart full of love, to proclaim his good qualities in return
Is the practice of a Bodhisattva.***

Each of us thinks we are very important. When someone challenges our conceit by circulating unflattering lies about us, we condemn him or her. In Thogme's example, a slanderous person is broadcasting these lies throughout a billion worlds. In Tibetan, the term for "billion worlds" is sometimes translated as one tricosm, meaning one thousand to the power of three. Try to imagine a thousand worlds, multiplied by another thousand, which again is multiplied by another thousand. This is a very vast space! There are countless tricosms, a vast, endless number of worlds. Therefore, the text uses the metaphor of a billion worlds to suggest how far slander can extend. In our time, through television, radio, email, and other technology, it is possible to circulate a slanderous rumor around the globe. But that is as far as we can go. When someone is going about slandering you, what can you do? The first reaction is to retaliate, to tell everyone who will listen how despicable the other fellow is-not exactly a Bodhisattva's response. But if, instead of striking back, you can lovingly praise this person and proclaim his or her virtues, then you are behaving like a true Bodhisattva.

Also be aware that it is generally better for one's Dharma practice to be obscure than to be famous. When we are not well known, pride has less opportunity to take root. Obscurity helps us develop an aversion to samsara and brings us to the Dharma. On the other hand, fame and prominence can generate so much pride that we eventually behave counter to the Dharma. We commit negative actions that contradict the Buddha's path or that destroy our own practice. This is important for us to know.

Though we practice correctly, if we think, "What a good person I am, what fine qualities I possess, what a warm and loving heart I have!" this is pride. Then, when somebody reveals what a miserable person we really are, our inflated self-esteem pops. Therefore, our slanderer is actually a friend who helps deflate our pride, the real enemy. Instead of harboring anger against this person, gratitude is more appropriate.

Practice 15

Responding to public humiliation

If in the middle of a crowd of people

Someone reveals your hidden faults and abuses you for them,

To see him as a spiritual friend and to bow with respect

Is the practice of a Bodhisattva.

This verse speaks of an abusive person who publicly reveals all our hidden faults and secrets. How do we respond like a Bodhisattva? Once again, the first impulse is to retaliate in kind. However, if we suppress this impulse in order to objectively ponder the actual criticisms, we may realize that they are accurate. We do have such faults. Observing them diminishes pride. What our abuser has actually done is to instruct us as a guru might. Whatever points out our actual faults and humbles us is a Dharma teaching. If we have a guru, he or she does not constantly praise us. That would just increase our pride. To keep us humble, the master may occasionally even abuse or hit us. Similarly, we can consider our public abuser no less than a spiritual friend, a helpful guru who restrains our pride. On this basis, we bow respectfully to the individual. If we can actually do this, we are behaving like a Bodhisattva.

In Milarepa's early life, his aunt and uncle continually insulted him and his family. These insults helped him develop a thorough disgust for and renunciation of samsara that enabled him to generate compassion for the cruel relatives. Renunciation and compassion became the bedrock of immense inner strength that enabled the Jetsun to meditate throughout his entire life. Another example concerns the translator, Vairochana, and the great practitioner, Namkhai Nyingpo, at a time when the Vajrayana was new to Tibet. When people saw them, they decided the two were dangerous practitioners of black magic, very bad men. This rumor spread and soon Vairochana and Namkhai Nyingpo were forced into exile. Vairochana was banished to the very east of Tibet, where the forest was so dense it was thought no one could survive there. Namkhai Nyingpo was sent to the far south, where the forests were also very thick and water scarce. Both practitioners accepted exile as an opportunity for solitary practice, became accomplished meditators, and attained great realization. Their story illustrates how it is possible to bring lies against oneself onto the path of Dharma.

Practice 16

Responding to ingratitude

If someone whom you dearly cherish like your own child

Takes you for an enemy,

Then, like a mother whose child is sick,

To love that person even more

Is the practice of a Bodhisattva.

In this example, a mother has a beloved child whom she has nurtured from birth. The child becomes ill, cries all night, and is cranky. Because she cherishes her child, she does not lose her temper. Instead, she tries to calm and soothe her baby. Keeping this analogy in mind, imagine that someone we have loved and nurtured for many years irrationally turns against us. The Bodhisattva's challenge is to increase compassion toward this person. An angry response is of no benefit, and it destroys Bodhisattva activity. If when someone dear to us treats us like an enemy and we can still practice loving kindness and compassion, then we are acting like a Bodhisattva.

Remember that the person behaving so ungratefully is incapable of seeing our kindness and good intentions because his or her negative state makes it impossible. The situation is like the process of observing a flower. Light allows us to perceive a flower and appreciate its beauty. Without light, perception cannot take place because the conditions are wrong, the circumstances negative. It is like this when someone we care about imagines we are their adversary. Another example is a teacher eager for his students to become skilled and learned. This teacher imposes a challenging, disciplined schedule. The students must study diligently, behave properly in the classroom, and so on. So the students start to think, "Oh, this teacher is terrible. How he makes us suffer! We do nothing but study, study, and more study. What a hard time he gives us!" They do not understand that their work will benefit them in the future. Anger and resentment darken their minds, and negative circumstances blind them to the qualities of the teacher and his teaching. They perceive

the teacher as their adversary, even though he or she has their best interests at heart. If we apply this example to individuals whose negative thoughts distort their perception of us, we can develop compassion.

In the lineage of the Shangpa Kagyu, there was once a very kind woman who was not well treated in return. This woman, later known as Sukhasiddhi, was married and the mother of two sons. The family was very poor. One day, when she was about sixty years old, her husband and sons went out to search for food. Only a single bowl of rice remained in the house. While they were away, a starving beggar knocked at her door and asked for food. So great was her compassion that Sukhasiddhi cooked the rice and gave it to the beggar. Her husband and sons returned that evening exhausted and hungry. They had not found anything to eat and ordered the mother to cook the last of the rice. When she told them she had given it to a beggar, the men became so enraged that they beat her, dragged her by the hair, threw her out of the house, and told her not to come back. Though forced to abandon home and family and to experience many difficulties, Sukhasiddhi eventually encountered an accomplished yogi who taught her Dharma. She meditated so well that siddhis arose through which she transformed herself into a young woman of sixteen, became renowned as a great yogini, and obtained the rainbow body when she died. You can read the biography of Sukhasiddhi and study her many profound teachings. Sukhasiddhi's life, in which the wrath of her husband and sons helped her along the path, exemplifies how the anger of another can benefit one's Dharma practice. In brief, for a Bodhisattva with great wisdom and great compassion, all conditions-whether negative or positive-can be brought to the path of Dharma.

Practice 17

Responding to spite

***Even when someone who is your equal or inferior
Driven by spite seeks to defame you,
To place him on the crown of your head
With the same respect you would accord your guru
Is the practice of a Bodhisattva.***

Being despised is a wonderful remedy for pride. Praise has the opposite effect: Instead of deflating pride, praise inflates it. Of the two, then, which benefits your Dharma practice more? And why is it that praise causes pride, and blame causes frustration? Why do we enjoy praise and reject blame? When we analyze that question with our intelligence, we discover that both pride and frustration are concepts dependent on thoughts. Once we understand this conceptual process, it is easy to understand emptiness.

You may start out as a good Dharma practitioner, then everyone begins to praise you. The result? Your pride grows. You do not notice it happening, so you do not apply a remedy. And then? You begin to act against the Dharma and to harm others. But when people blame you and are spiteful, then naturally your pride is squashed. Therefore, blame is much more useful than praise, and we should respect those who despise us no less than we revere our guru.

Even an excellent student endowed with a good heart and good fortune can succumb to wrong views. For example, the Dakinis foretold that the pride of one of Milarepa's main disciples, Rechungpa, would be an obstacle in his spiritual development. Having gone to India twice, Rechungpa began to think, "What a very educated man I've become, and a very fine scholar, too." He became puffed up with pride, even imagining he was Milarepa's equal. Milarepa, eventually tamed Rechungpa's pride by manifesting miracles through which the disciple realized what an accomplished yogi his guru was. You can read about Rechungpa in the biography of Milarepa. Also, *The Thousand Songs of Milarepa* contains many stories about Rechungpa and how he developed wrong views. One of the main ones is the story of the yak horn.

Practice 18

Abandoning discouragement

***Though gripped by poverty and always scorned,
Though stricken by disease and tormented by evil spirits,
To take upon yourself the negativity and suffering of every being
And never to get discouraged
Is the practice of a Bodhisattva.***

You have no money or food. Adding to your misery, you live under poor conditions that invite scorn. Then you fall ill. In the days of Thogme, you might have succumbed to leprosy, the most incurable illness in Tibet at that time. (Today, the disease is cancer.) On top of everything, your mind bedevils and torments you.

Difficulties such as these arise in our lives and create intense suffering. Yet this text tells us that even then we must not lose heart. Not only must we endure our own suffering, we must take upon ourselves the negativity and suffering of every other being by practicing *tong len*. This is the real practice of a Bodhisattva. If we are serious about the Dharma, then suffering is preferable to happiness. Happiness is a negative influence coaxing us not to practice, while suffering is a friend always beckoning us to practice and study.

The nun Phagmo Gelongma Palmo lost her limbs to leprosy. This suffering motivated her to intensively practice the Thousand Armed Chenrezig. Her practice eventually cured her leprosy. In the end, she reached the Bodhisattva bhumis. In Tibet there were no hospitals to treat eye diseases. Many who went blind devoted their life to Dharma practice, to reciting the Mani mantra. There are many stories of people regaining their sight from having practiced intensely. Disease was a helper that pushed them onto the path of Dharma.

When people in Tibet got old, they stayed at home and recited the Mani mantra all day long. Their recitation was actually very beneficial, for through it they forgot all their suffering. Also, their children didn't think, "Oh, these old people just sit around doing nothing." They appreciated their parents' Dharma practice. Though the adult children had to work, their elders could spend their time reciting OM MANI PADME HUM, inspiring the entire family and creating a positive atmosphere in the house.

By teaching us how to transform all situations of suffering, we develop mental courage. The Kagyu lineage provides examples of many whose great suffering or unfavorable circumstances turned their minds to the Dharma: Gampopa, one of the founders of the Kagyupas, renounced samsara, turned to the Dharma, and became a great siddha-all because of deep sorrow in his life. He had been married and had a son and a daughter. First his son died, then his daughter, and then his wife. Because he lost his entire family, Gampopa developed such unshakeable renunciation for samsara that he vowed to devote the rest of his life to the Dharma. He subsequently became Milarepa's closest and best disciple and was able to benefit countless sentient beings. Called Dhagpo Rinpoche after the name of his homeland, Gampopa founded the Dhagpo Kagyu lineage, one of the four greater and eight lesser vehicles of the Kagyu tradition.

On the other hand, there have always been those who have practiced the Dharma even without having experienced unhappiness and unfavorable circumstances. This is a sign that they have already been practitioners in previous lives and do not need negative situations to nudge them onto the path now. They manifest a natural inclination to renounce samsara. As I mentioned earlier, Ngulchu Thogme was already a great practitioner at an early age. The yoginis, Machik Labdron and Yeshe Tsogyal, were also very advanced from youth. Even as children, these three were compassionate, committed Dharma practitioners. They did not require bad circumstances to motivate them, a sign that they were already great practitioners in their former lifetimes.

Practice 19

Counteracting arrogance

***Though famous and prominent, someone to whom others bow,
Though you amass the riches of the god of wealth,
To see that worldly splendor has no essence
And thus to be without arrogance
Is the practice of a Bodhisattva.***

Today, newspapers, radio, and television, can instantly make a person become world famous. In earlier times, fame was confined to a person's immediate vicinity. But whether on a broad or narrow scale, fame is impermanent: it changes, it vanishes. Therefore Thogme says fame has no essence. Wealth also has no essence. The text speaks here about Vaishnavana, the god of wealth, who is purported to be very rich and who protects the riches of others. But even wealth like Vaishnavana's lacks essence. Especially these days, people are judged by how much they possess. Yet the rich are not happy. Wealth is impermanent, subject to change, and without essence. Still, the wealthy strive to maintain and perpetuate their fortune. Thus, they suffer. While the rich suffer from fear of poverty, the famous suffer from fear of becoming has-beens. Both experience suffering while they still are wealthy and famous because they do not recognize that wealth and fame are groundless, impermanent and empty of true essence. *The Seven Points of Mind Training* devotes an entire chapter to impermanence.

I will not say much about it here because it is a directly observable phenomenon. Simply watch the news on television to see how quickly fame and notoriety fade, how the rich lose their wealth and the poor become rich. All around us impermanence has become more noticeable than ever. Machines and technology make everything move faster and faster. The results are not always beneficial. For example, at one time not a single person died in the sky. Today, when an airplane catches fire and explodes in flight, hundreds of people are instantly killed. This is a sign of accelerated impermanence. Even though you may easily recognize the phenomenon of impermanence, you must still reflect on how it applies to your own life.

Practice 20

Taming the mind

***If you have not tamed the enemy of your own anger,
Combating outer opponents will only make them multiply.
Therefore, with an army of loving kindness and compassion,
To tame your own mind is the practice of a Bodhisattva.***

Generally we think we must defeat outer opponents. If only we could get rid of them, we would be happy. Or so we believe. But we cannot overcome all adversaries, and when we try, their numbers just increase. At first we have one, then two, then many. So what are we to do? The only solution is to tame our anger, tame our mindstream through bodhichitta. Armed with the attitude of loving kindness and compassion, we naturally no longer have any external enemies. Because the Great Teacher, the Buddha, the Bhagawan, had tamed his mindstream, he prevailed against the Maras who tried to distract him as he sat meditating beneath the Bodhi tree in Bodhgaya. The Buddha was armed with the forces of the samadhi of loving kindness, and the Maras could not harm him. The Great Yogi Milarepa tamed the enemy of ego-clinging with the force of the wisdom that realizes selflessness. And he conquered the enemy of anger with the army of bodhichitta. Because he defeated his inner foes of ego-clinging and anger, he became so skillful that even his bitterest enemies eventually became his disciples.

Practice 21

Relinquishing attachment to sense pleasures

***Sense pleasures are like salt water.
The more you partake of them,
The more your craving will increase.
Therefore, when something arouses attachment,
To abandon it immediately is the practice of a Bodhisattva.***

In Tibetan, the term for the sense pleasures is a special one that refers to beautiful forms, lovely sounds, appealing smells, delicious tastes, and objects pleasant to the touch. These are the five sense pleasures. If you take them to be true, your attachment to them—and your suffering—will increase. Like drinking salt water to quench your thirst, the more you drink, the thirstier you become. In the same way, it is necessary to abandon immediately whatever arouses attachment. This is the practice of a Bodhisattva.

There are two ways of relinquishing sense objects: one is literally to give them up; the other is to abandon attachment to them. Milarepa actually gave up all sense pleasures to meditate in solitude. He didn't need or want them. Marpa, on the other hand, abandoned only his *attachment* to the five sense pleasures. He lived a normal householder's life, enjoying all the pleasures of the senses. Though he indulged in everything, Marpa was attached to nothing, for he realized all sense pleasures to be a dream and an illusion. He was thus able to completely relinquish attachment to them. In fact, Marpa took sense pleasures onto the path, using them as a practice. Then there was Gampopa, a monk. Gampopa decided to adopt a half-and-half approach. He gave up half of the sense objects; the other half he understood to be without any essence, no more than a dream and an illusion.

Practice 22

Transcending dualistic appearances

***All appearances are your own mind, and
Mind itself primordially transcends all mental fabrications.
Knowing this is the precise nature of reality,
To remain free from dualistic conceptions
Is the practice of a Bodhisattva.***

The first line, "All appearances are your own mind," accords with the Mind Only School, known as the Chittamatrin. The second line that says, "Mind itself primordially transcends all mental fabrication", accords with the second Rangtong Madhyamaka School, namely the Prasangika. Some of you may have studied the view and meditation of these philosophical schools. If not, now is not the time or place for an in-depth examination. Briefly, "dualistic appearances" refers to perceived and perceiver. The perceived is the outer perceived object, and the perceiver is the inner perceiving mind. The outer perceived object is merely one's mind, a confused or delusive appearance arising from habitual tendencies. It is just like a dream in which objects seem to arise, yet nothing that appears has any true existence. If the outer perceived object is just like a dream appearance, then what can we say about the inner perceiving mind? The text says that the mind itself, that is, the true nature of mind, transcends all mental fabrications and has done so since beginningless time. You need to know this. If you realize that perceived objects do not really exist and that the true nature of mind transcends all mental fabrications, you can give up clinging to dualistic appearances. Only then will you be able to accomplish this Bodhisattva practice.

Practice 23

Seeing pleasant objects as rainbows

***When you encounter objects that please your mind,
Know they are like rainbows in the summer season.
Though they seem beautiful,
To see they are not real and to give up attachment to them
Is the practice of a Bodhisattva.***

This verse uses the rainbow as an example of form to illustrate that no matter how beautiful an appearance may seem, attachment to it must be relinquished. Beyond what the eye can see, "objects that please your mind" include the four other objects of the senses: pleasant sounds for the ear, appealing smells for the nose, delicious tastes for the tongue, and soft, gentle objects for the skin. Clinging to these as real must be abandoned as well. All sense objects are like rainbows that, though beautiful and desirable, are mere appearances that lack essence. If we believe otherwise, our desire to cling to a desirable object will increase, and our suffering will grow in equal measure. Once the object is understood to be empty of essence, it can be enjoyed without attachment, without suffering. What is there to give up?

In this way all forms, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile objects have no self-nature. They are absolutely empty of essence. Though from the absolute perspective they do not truly exist, still they appear as mere appearances. This apparent contradiction is called *appearance and emptiness inseparable*. Why do not we see this universal quality of the inseparability of appearance and emptiness of phenomena? It is because our minds are obscured by the idea that phenomena exist, and this thought covers up their true nature. Our minds are veiled by concepts.

All appearances are like a dream. When we dream, objects clearly appear to us, but when we analyze these dream appearances, we see they do not exist apart from our mind. Nevertheless, they manifest as appearance and emptiness inseparable. While we sleep, we accept the reality of our dreams because we fail to recognize we are dreaming. Upon awakening, we understand our dreams were only mental events, mere dream appearances. Our idea or concept about them as solid and real was mistaken. All of life's appearances are like that: appearance and emptiness inseparable.

Our tasks are to dismantle the idea that appearances truly exist and to become free from conceptual obscurations that veil how things really are. In this way, the empty nature of appearance will manifest and our life will become relaxed, open, and spacious. Then, no matter what desirable objects appear to us in waking life, our enjoyment of them can be free of pain, affliction, and all disturbing emotions. Once we are able to do this, we have fulfilled the twenty-third practice of a Bodhisattva.

Practice 24

Seeing unpleasant circumstances as delusions

***All suffering is like the death of your child in a dream.
To take such delusive appearances as true, how exhausting!
Therefore, whenever you encounter unpleasant circumstances,
To see them as delusions is the practice of a Bodhisattva.***

Every variety of suffering is similar to experiencing your child die in a dream. We have so many kinds of suffering. Our body, possessions, enemies, friends, relatives, and so on can all cause sorrow. But not one of these sources of pain truly exists. All are delusive appearances, nothing but dreams. We dream we have given birth to a child who is the center of our life. The child dies; we cannot be consoled. The truth of the matter is that there is no reason to mourn because no one has died. We have experienced a dream death. Our grief is dream-grief arising from delusive dream appearances.

All suffering is delusive, like the suffering in a dream. All appearances are delusive and confused, like the appearances in a dream. Life will exhaust you if you do not recognize this. So, do not take delusive appearances to be true. Recognize whatever difficulties and obstacles you meet as delusion.

However, it is not enough to glibly think, "Oh, it's only an illusion." Conviction is needed that this is actually the case. To develop conviction, first correctly analyze why the situation and all its appearances are delusive. This means applying your own experience to the Buddha's teaching that appearances do not truly exist. Do this again and again. Eventually you will develop a firm conviction that waking experience is no different from the dream state. Then, when difficult circumstances arise, you will know they are delusions and you will be able to apply the real practice of a Bodhisattva.

[Practices 25 through 30 address the six perfections, or 6 paramitas.]

Practice 25: The First Paramita

Giving generously

***If those who aspire to enlightenment willingly give up their bodies,
What need is there to mention external objects?
Therefore with no hope of reward or benefit,
To give with generosity is the practice of a Bodhisattva.***

Why is the practice of generosity necessary? Someone who wishes to attain enlightenment must be ready, like the Buddha himself, to make the ultimate offer of his body. In several of his lives as a Bodhisattva, the Teacher gave his own body. Many other Bodhisattvas have done the same.

In order to attain enlightenment, if you need to be ready to surrender your own body, then offering merely your possessions is hardly worth mentioning. Therefore, with no hope of reward or karmic benefit, you must give generously to practice like a Bodhisattva.

Practice 26: The Second Paramita

Guarding discipline

***If lack of discipline prevents you from benefiting yourself,
Then your wish to benefit others is just a joke.
Therefore, to guard discipline
With no longing for worldly existence
Is the practice of a Bodhisattva.***

In general, discipline is of three types: First is the discipline to abandon all faults of body, speech, and mind. Second is the discipline to accumulate virtue. Third is the discipline to work for the benefit of sentient beings.

As applied to the three vehicles, giving up harming others is the discipline of the Sravakayana, benefiting others is the discipline of the Mahayana, and developing the ability to see all appearances as pure is the discipline of the Vajrayana. If, without discipline you cannot benefit even yourself by accomplishing the one-sided peace of nirvana, how will you be

able to accomplish Buddhahood for the benefit of all other beings? Discipline with no longing for worldly existence means foregoing all efforts to secure a favorable rebirth, for example as a god or a human, in which case you are still attached to samsara. The Bodhisattva practices discipline without any attachment to worldly existence.

Practice 27: The Third Paramita

Practicing patience

For a Bodhisattva who seeks a wealth of virtue

Every harm is like a precious treasure.

Therefore, without getting irritated by anything at all,

To cultivate patience is the practice of a Bodhisattva.

What is patience? The genuine definition of patience is the mental ability to remain unperturbed by negative conditions. Applied to the Dharma, it means forbearance in the face of difficulty. Practitioners should be able to withstand whatever obstacles arise when they practice the Dharma. For example, extremes of heat or cold should not influence the commitment to practice. The paramita of patience goes further: It includes the patience to forbear emptiness. The profound nature of phenomena is emptiness. Hearing about this emptiness, some people become fearful. They think, "If everything is empty, then what can I do? I am so afraid!" Thus, patience also extends to one's ability to tolerate the idea of emptiness, the true nature of being.

The *Mahayanasutralankara* describes patience as having four qualities. The first is that it pacifies anger. Anger and patience are direct opposites. If you are angry, you are not being patient. And if you are not being patient, you are not behaving like a Bodhisattva. The second quality of patience is that it is endowed with nonconceptual primordial wisdom. Bodhisattvas who completely understand this point realize the selflessness of phenomena and of the individual.

The third quality of patience is that one comes to like all sentient beings. This is not a matter of saying, "Oh, I like everybody!" A Bodhisattva who has complete patience with everything hurtful or harmful bears affection towards everyone and can bring happiness everywhere. This ability to bestow happiness on all sentient beings is a sign that the paramita of patience has been perfected.

The fourth quality is that through perfecting patience, one can help others progressively develop their Dharma practice. This ability is called "ripening others through the Three Vehicles". Starting with the Shrivakayana and proceeding through the Mahayana and the Vajrayana, a Bodhisattva guides beings along the path, helping them decrease their afflictions and suffering, and increase their compassion and wisdom.

Milarepa had good reason to be angry with the aunt who had stolen everything from him. But as a Dharma practitioner, he applied patience. In fact, he developed complete patience. After many years, Milarepa returned home, where he discovered the bones of his mother and learned that his sister had disappeared. The family house, though damaged, still stood and had value. And one of his fields, though overgrown, was fertile and also had value. Patience enabled Milarepa to give his aunt the house and the field, thereby pleasing her, which is the third quality of patience. By giving away all that he possessed to his worst enemy, Milarepa made her so happy that she became interested in Dharma.

Thus, the fourth quality of patience arose: Milarepa did not say, "I'm justified in being angry toward you, so I will not teach you Dharma. You're a bad woman, my enemy." Instead, he gave his aunt Dharma instructions. Her meditation practice took root and developed, and in the end the aunt became a great yogini. So the fourth quality of patience is ability to ripen others on the path.

Another incident in Milarepa's life concerned a hunter who, one day while out hunting, came upon a deer and set his fierce dog on it. The dog chased after the terrified deer, which fled until it came upon Milarepa meditating. To quell its fear, Milarepa sang to it, and the deer lay down peacefully by the Jetsun's side. Suddenly, it charged the dog. Frustrated and enraged at losing its prey, it attacked Milarepa. Again, the Jetsun sang a song. The dog was pacified and settled down by the yogi's other side. Finally the hunter burst onto the scene. Seeing Milarepa flanked by the deer at ease at one side and the dog equally at ease on the other, he bellowed, "You have used black magic to pacify these animals!" and readied his bow and arrow to shoot Milarepa. He took aim and was about to let the arrow fly when Milarepa called, "Stop! There will be enough time to shoot me with your arrow. First listen to my song." And so he sang a song to the hunter that pleased the man so much he decided to spare Milarepa's life. Later he developed great faith in the Dharma and became Milarepa's disciple.

This story illustrates the four qualities of Milarepa's patience: Pacifying the anger of the dog and the hunter is the first. Demonstrating nonconceptual wisdom is the second. Pleasing and melting the hunter's anger through his song is the third.

And inspiring the hunter's faith in the Dharma so that he could receive the profound instructions of Mahamudra and the Six Yogas of Naropa is the fourth. Thus, Milarepa's perfect patience and compassionate mind transformed his potential murderer into a Dharma practitioner and disciple. What an inspiring story from the life of Milarepa!

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

*Patience decreases all opposite sides.
One possesses nonconceptual primordial wisdom.
One can perfectly fulfill all wishes.
And one ripens sentient beings along the three vehicles.*

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

As a Mahayana practitioner, always remember that anyone who hurts you shows you a great kindness, and that whatever brings you harm bestows a precious treasure. It is like a poor person digging in the earth who finds oil, gold, or silver and suddenly becomes very rich. From the Mahayana perspective, whoever or whatever harms us provides the same opportunity for wealth. Why? To obtain a wealth of virtue requires a harmful opponent. Without a foe or adversary, how can we practice patience? The Bodhisattva wishes to develop virtue, merit, and such. The prerequisite for these qualities, our most precious treasure, is an enemy.

Practice 28: The Fourth Paramita

Cultivating joyous effort

***If Shravakas and Pratyekabuddhas, who strive for their benefit alone,
Expend effort as if to extinguish a fire burning on their heads,
Then for the benefit of all beings,
To cultivate joyous effort, the wellspring of positive qualities,
Is the practice of a Bodhisattva.***

The Shravakas and Pratyekabuddhas practice for their own liberation; that is, they do not take the Bodhisattva vow or develop the enlightened attitude. Yet they apply as much effort to their practice as if they were putting out a fire on their heads. If your head were in flames, can you imagine how fast you would drop everything to extinguish it? The point here is to show how diligent the Shravakas and Pratyekabuddhas are, how much effort they apply to their practice just for *their own* benefit.

We who have developed the enlightened attitude of the Mahayana should apply even greater effort. We should apply *joyous* effort, which is the source of positive qualities that benefit of all sentient beings. That is the practice of a Bodhisattva. Joyous effort possesses the same four qualities as patience. To apply this paramita to Maitreya's verse, we need change only one phrase.

*Joyous effort decreases all opposite sides.
One possesses nonconceptual primordial wisdom.
One can perfectly fulfill all wishes.
And one ripens sentient beings along the three vehicles.*

Joyous effort overcomes its opposite, laziness, and allows us to engage enthusiastically in Dharma. By applying nonconceptual primordial wisdom as we carry out this practice, we transcend concepts of a diligent subject, an object of diligence, and the act of diligence. As a model of joyous effort, Milarepa pleased many beings. Seeing his diligence, they developed trust in him and in the Dharma, which fulfilled the third quality of joyous effort. Having won their trust, Milarepa then gave them Dharma practices and helped bring them to maturity. Even today, Milarepa's example inspires us. We read his biography, admire his diligence, and his example ripens us upon the path. This is an example of the fourth quality of joyous effort.

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Practice 29: The Fifth Paramita

Attaining meditative stability

Vipashyana perfectly endowed with shamatha

Completely conquers all afflictions.

To cultivate meditative stability That transcends the four formless states

Is the practice of a Bodhisattva.

Among the three realms (desire, form, and formless), the highest is the formless, which is reached through samadhi, or meditative stability. Samadhi has four levels, namely, Infinite Space, Infinite Consciousness, Complete Nothingness, and Peak of Existence. The highest, most subtle of these is Peak of Existence. Within all existence, all samsara, no state is higher. But no matter how subtle Peak of Existence may be, it still lies within the three realms. To conquer afflictions and transcend suffering, our meditation must go beyond all existence.

Transcendence of samsara requires superior knowledge, the wisdom that realizes the selflessness of all phenomena. How does superior knowledge manifest? When vipashyana (analytic or insight meditation) arises from shamatha (peaceful abiding meditation), the two become one. This union, known as samten, or stable meditation, activates superior knowledge within our samadhi. This fifth paramita, samten, is the key to unlocking the wisdom that realizes emptiness. Through samten, one completely conquers affliction and suffering, goes beyond the four states of samadhi, and transcends all existence. One is liberated from samsara. Therefore, stable meditation is the practice of a Bodhisattva. Stable meditation also has Maitreya's four qualities:

Stable meditation decreases its opposite.

It is embraced by nonconceptual primordial wisdom.

One can perfectly fulfill all beings' wishes.

And one ripens sentient beings along the three vehicles.

How does meditative stability decrease its opposites? Agitation and dullness, the opposites of samten, are faults that in equal measure hinder meditation. The greater the meditative stability, the less these faults will operate. With regard to meditation, the quality of nonconceptual primordial wisdom refers to not taking the meditator, the object of meditation, and the act of meditating to be truly existent. They are not conceptualized. >From meditative stability arises the third quality, that of fulfilling all wishes. The meditator now develops special qualities and all-seeing knowledge through which he or she can accomplish miracles that please others and make them happy. These miracles inspire others to trust in the Dharma, arouse their interest in practice, and give a Bodhisattva the opportunity to ripen them on the three vehicles—ripening being the fourth quality.

Milarepa perfected meditative stability. He could fulfill all wishes and ripen sentient beings along the three vehicles. At one point in his life, three high scholars from a university who had disdain for Milarepa and thought he lacked any accomplishment challenged the yogi to a debate. Through having accomplished the fifth paramita, meditative stability, Milarepa could work miracles. He demonstrated this ability, astounding the scholars so much that they realized Milarepa's qualities and became very happy and joyous. Through Milarepa, they learned what the genuine Dharma was, developed trust in him, and later became disciples whom Milarepa ripened on the path. In the end, they became some of Mila's best disciples. Thus, by demonstrating miracles, he fulfilled the third quality of pleasing sentient beings and making them happy; and the fourth quality by ripening them on the path.

Here is my song about the three scholars:

Milarepa pleased with knowledge and miracles Even the scholars who wanted to defeat him in debate. Then he ripened them with genuine Mahamudra and the Six Yogas. Thus they became principal disciples. How very wonderful!

Practice 30: The Sixth Paramita

Cultivating nonconceptual superior knowledge

Without superior knowledge,

It is not possible to attain perfect enlightenment through the first five paramitas alone.

Therefore, joining it with skillful means and not conceptualizing about the three spheres

Is the practice of a Bodhisattva

Generally, when one thinks of knowledge, what comes to mind is worldly knowledge, the sort that enables us to manufacture cars, make computers, or cure sickness. Here the text speaks of a different kind of knowledge, superior knowledge that transcends the world. Superior knowledge recognizes the selflessness of the individual and of phenomena, and it is united with skillful means-loving kindness and compassion. For knowledge to be superior, it must transcend conceptualizing the three spheres--that is, of there being someone performing an action, an action itself, and an object of the action. If we have perfected the first five paramitas, but lack nonconceptual wisdom united with bodhichitta, it will be impossible to attain enlightenment. Applying this sixth paramita to Maitreya's four qualities:

*Superior knowledge decreases all opposite sides.
One possesses nonconceptual primordial wisdom.
One can perfectly fulfill all wishes,
And one ripens sentient beings along the three vehicles*

The first quality is that superior knowledge decreases false or mistaken views, such as denying absolute and relative levels of reality, disputing previous and future lives, or trying to disprove karma, cause, and result. These are examples of mistaken views or wrong knowledge. Another type of wrong view is using scientific knowledge to harm beings. If we perfect superior knowledge, we realize the true nature of mind itself. Milarepa said, "There is no other superior knowledge than to realize the true nature." In other words, if you realize the true nature, then you have realized the paramita of superior knowledge.

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Practice 31

Analyzing delusion

***If you have not analyzed your own confusion,
You might put on a Dharmic façade
While behaving in a non-Dharmic way.
Therefore, to continuously analyze your delusion and discard it
Is the practice of a Bodhisattva.***

If you wish to practice correctly, it is necessary to analyze your confusion, your delusions. Otherwise, your practice becomes no more than a façade, a mask behind which you behave counter to the Teachings.

Here is an episode in Milarepa's life that is pertinent: Yet another university geshe (this one named Dalo) tried to discredit Milarepa by challenging him to a public debate. When Dalo failed to defeat the Jetsun, the scholar became so enraged that he took a handful of dirt and flung it in Milarepa's face. Seeing this affront, his disciple Rechungpa lost his temper. "The Dharma must be properly maintained. Such behavior isn't Dharmic. I must defend teacher, my guru," Rechungpa rashly concluded. He picked up a stick and was about to thrash Dalo when Milarepa called out, "Wait a minute! Calm down and meditate on patience!" And then he sang this song:

Rechungpa, please practice patience. Otherwise you will violate the Dharma

When he heard his guru's song, Rechungpa realized he was acting from anger and violating his Bodhisattva vow. You can see that both the scholar and the disciple had deluded themselves into thinking they were practicing Dharma when, in fact, they were violating its teachings. The scholar was a monk, yet he became angry and threw dirt at Milarepa. Rechungpa was a practicing yogi, yet anger had him ready to beat the scholar with a stick. Both men presented the faces of Dharma practitioners when, through self-delusion, they were violating its precepts.

This story shows how important it is to continuously analyze your body, speech, and mind for signs of confusion. And having analyzed your delusion, you must give it up. This is the true practice of a Bodhisattva. In their delusion, Dalo and Rechungpa failed to analyze their behavior or see that they were at fault. Perhaps most practitioners who act against the Dharma as a result of anger do so because they cannot recognize or analyze their behavior. Under the sway of delusion, they violate the Teachings.

When the debate between Dalo and Rechungpa took place, all the inhabitants of the valley, along with the sponsors who had been invited for a great feast and puja, witnessed the scene. They witnessed Dalo become enraged, Rechungpa lose

his temper, and Milarepa remain peaceful, even smiling, when Dalo threw dirt in his face. So their faith and trust in Milarepa grew, and their respect for Dalo and Rechungpa declined.

Gampopa was Milarepa's sun disciple and Rechungpa, as foretold by the yidam Dorje Phago (Vajrayogini), was his moon disciple. Yet even such a close disciple as Rechungpa could not control his anger. In the same way, when we get angry we should be very careful. Anger will of course arise, but when it does we have to be very careful about how we view and handle it.

Another story about the consequences of anger concerns a main disciple of Patrul Rinpoche, Nyoksho Longtok. One day, Nyoksho Longtok and Patrul Rinpoche set out on a journey. They had not proceeded very far when thieves attacked them and seized everything they had brought with them. Being a person of great physical strength, Nyoksho Longtok began to assault the men with his walking stick. Patrul Rinpoche cried, "Stop! Stop! Meditate on patience, meditate on patience!" In his anger, the disciple turned a deaf ear to his guru's entreaties.

Again Patrul Rinpoche called out, "Be patient, meditate on patience!" But Nyoksho Longtok continued to flail the robbers as hard as he could. So overpowered was he by rage that he had thoroughly beaten and routed the thieves before even noticing that Patrul Rinpoche had gone away and left him behind.

When he came to his senses, he began searching for his master. After a long time, the disciple found Patrul Rinpoche, who refused to see him. When Nyoksho Longtok asked why, Rinpoche replied, "I told you to meditate on patience, but you didn't listen, you were too angry." And for many months afterwards, Nyoksho Longtok was not allowed to see Patrul Rinpoche because in the grip of delusion he had not attended to the words of his teacher. He had not been able to analyze his delusion and see through it. The same can happen to any of us if we are not careful and do not analyze our anger when it arises.

When the robbers stole Patrul Rinpoche's and Nyoksho Longtok's possessions, Rinpoche intended that he and his student mentally dedicate all their goods to the thieves and pray that the stolen items might benefit them and all sentient beings. The incident would then have been an opportunity to practice the paramitas of generosity and patience. Blinded by delusion, Nyoksho Longtok could not listen to his teacher and therefore lost this opportunity.

One Mahayana prayer for the perfection of patience says, "I pray that in this and all my lifetimes I will be able to make no mistakes arising from anger, but instead be patient."

Practice 32

Not criticizing other Bodhisattvas

***If, compelled by your own afflictions,
You speak of the faults of other Bodhisattvas,
You, yourself, will degenerate.
Therefore, never to mention the faults of those
Who have entered the Mahayana path
Is the practice of a Bodhisattva.***

One stanza in *The Seven Points of Mind Training* directs the reader to think that all positive qualities belong to other sentient beings and that all faults are one's own. This is the correct attitude. Generally, most people think just the opposite: someone else is always wrong, while they are always right. This attitude is to be given up. Patrul Rinpoche advises students to acknowledge their own deficiency first; and then, when they recognize it in someone else, to pray that the guru grants blessings to them both. It is always beneficial to see that the perceived fault in yourself is greater than it is in the other. Then you know that person is no different from you.

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Practice 33

Relinquishing attachment to households

***Desire for gain and honor leads to argument,
And activities of listening, reflecting and meditating decline.
Therefore, to relinquish attachment to the households
of friends, relatives, and sponsors
Is the practice of a Bodhisattva.***

Under the influence of desire for gain and recognition, even a Bodhisattva may end up arguing over possessions and demanding special considerations. Preoccupied with such desires, the ordinary Bodhisattva's activities of listening, analyzing, and meditating will decrease. These are good reasons for giving up attachment to the households of relatives, friends, and sponsors.

Practice 34

Abandoning harsh speech

***Harsh speech disturbs the minds of others
And compromises a Bodhisattva's right conduct.
Therefore, to give up harsh and unpleasant speech
Is the practice of a Bodhisattva.***

We are advised for two reasons to give up harsh words that displease others. First, our conduct disturbs the minds of others. You may recall situations when someone spoke to you sharply or unkindly, or unfairly laid blame on you. You became disturbed, frustrated, depressed. Perhaps the harshness even made you cry. This is why it is wise to remember that harsh or unpleasant speech causes others pain. The second reason to give up harsh speech is because it compromises a Bodhisattva's right conduct, which is to benefit others. Disturbing someone's mind accomplishes just the opposite: it causes harm. Therefore, harsh and unpleasant speech violates the Bodhisattva vow.

Practice 35

Eliminating mental afflictions

***Once you become accustomed to the mental afflictions,
They are hard to cure with antidotes.
Therefore, with the remedies of mindfulness and awareness
To eliminate afflictions the moment they arise
Is the practice of a Bodhisattva.***

As long as we take things to be true, then mental afflictions like attachment, anger, and jealousy will continue to arise. As soon as they do, a Bodhisattva must eradicate them. Why is it so difficult to fight mental afflictions with antidotes? It is because of habit. We have reacted a certain way for so long and have become so accustomed to our mental afflictions that we do not notice when they arise. Even if we know what antidote to apply, we may not be sufficiently mindful and aware to apply it. But a mindful and fully aware person holds an armful of remedies. "Mindfulness" is remembering at all times what conduct to abandon and what conduct to adopt. "Fully aware" means being constantly alert to afflictions the moment they arise in our mind. Mindfulness and awareness are the weapons that cut afflictions and work as antidotes to habit. For example, you are mindful that patience must be adopted and anger abandoned. Then, if you are alert and notice that anger is arising in your mind, you can remedy it immediately by applying the antidote of patience. An analogy is the Tibetan verb "to even out". This term is often used in road construction: If you are building a road and notice rocks jutting up, you take a jackhammer and break them up to make the road smooth and even. In the same way, you have to "even out" each mental affliction as it arises.

Practice 36

Remaining mindful and aware

***In brief, wherever you are and whatever you do,
Always examine the state of your mind.
Cultivating mindfulness and awareness continuously
To benefit others is the practice of a Bodhisattva.***

Whether you are in a remote monastery or in a city, whether you are a monastic or a householder, you must be continuously mindful and aware of the state of your mind. This means knowing your real intention at all times, finding out why you are doing something and for whose benefit. Always investigate your true motivation.

To cultivate continuous mindfulness and awareness means to accomplish the benefit of others as well as yourself. Even if you are helping others, still check your motivation: it is possible to work for others' benefit for the wrong reasons. Therefore, this verse summarizes all thirty-five practices that have preceded it.

Practice Thirty-seven

Dedicating merit

***To clear away the suffering of all infinite beings,
With superior knowledge free of concepts of the three spheres,
To dedicate to enlightenment the merit accumulated through these efforts
Is the practice of a Bodhisattva***

How does a Bodhisattva dedicate merit? The Bodhisattva applies the superior knowledge of emptiness to the three spheres. This means that he or she purifies the dedication process by realizing that there is no one to dedicate merit, no merit to be dedicated, and no one to receive the merit. Subject, action, object do not truly exist. This is the meaning of "_free of concepts of the three spheres", and it cannot be separated from the superior knowledge with which it is suffused: the wisdom that realizes emptiness. Without understanding that the three spheres do not truly exist, it is quite difficult to comprehend how to dedicate merit in this way. Imagine a dream in which you are sitting before a shrine. In the exact moment of dedication, you awaken and instantly realize that no one has been dedicating merit, no merit has been dedicated, and no one has received any merit. It was all a dream. This is how to understand the practice of dedicating merit

Epilogue A

Relying on scripture and oral teachings

***Relying on what is taught in the sutras, tantras, treatises,
And the words of the genuine masters,
I have composed these thirty-seven Bodhisattva practices
To benefit those who wish to train on the Bodhisattva's path.***

In this verse, Ngulchu Thogme explains what he has composed and why he has composed it. He refers to his reliance on the teachings of the sutras, tantras, treatises, and on the instructions of genuine masters. It is a traditional requirement to mention these precedents so that everyone understands Thogme did not personally make up the practices. He has based them on the teachings of the great masters who have preceded him.

His purpose in composing these verses has been to summarize the vast number of Bodhisattva practices into a manageable thirty-seven to benefit those who have entered the Mahayana path and wish to train in it. Thus, Thogme has made the practices easy for everyone to apply.

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Epilogue B

Confidence in basis of the practices

***Because my intelligence is small and my studies few,
I cannot compose poetry to please the scholars.
Yet since they are based on sutras and teachings
of the genuine masters, I believe these practices of a Bodhisattva are not mistaken.***

These lines are included because Tibetan tradition also requires a verse in which the author, to counteract pride, belittles himself. Here, Thogme minimizes his intelligence and learning and states that his verses cannot possibly please scholars.

Nevertheless, because he has based his work on authentic teachings, he has confidence that the verses are free of mistakes and confusion.

Epilogue C

Supplication to the genuine masters

*Nevertheless, since the vast conduct of a Bodhisattva is difficult to fathom
For one with an inferior intellect such as mine,
I pray to the genuine masters to consider with patience
All my mistakes such as contradictions, incoherence, and so on.*

Thogme has previously stated that because he has relied on unmistakable sources, he is confident his practices are also unmistakable. Now he acknowledges that contradictions and incoherence still may have crept in due to his limited intellectual capacities. If he has made mistakes like these, he prays the genuine masters will be patient with them. By "contradictions", Thogme means teaching patience toward enemies in one place and advising fighting them in another. "Incoherence" refers to the possibility that his sentences may not flow logically or smoothly because a line has discussed one topic and the next line has jumped to another, unrelated one.

Epilogue D

Final dedication and aspiration

*By virtue of the merit gathered here,
By the power of relative and ultimate bodhichitta,
May all sentient beings become like the Protector Chenrezig
Who dwells neither in the extreme of existence nor in that of peace.*

Chenrezig does not abide in cyclic existence, nor is he attached to the state of peace. Why doesn't he dwell in samsara? Chenrezig realizes the emptiness that cuts to the root of existence. Therefore, he does not abide in samsara. And what is the cause that frees Chenrezig from attachment to peace? His great compassion uproots his wish for nirvana for himself only. Therefore, Thogme prays that all beings become equal to Chenrezig.

The author dedicates to all beings the merit of having composed these practices. He prays that, like the Protector Chenrezig, who dwells on the Bodhisattva bhūmis, they develop absolute bodhichitta freeing them from the bonds of existence, and relative bodhichitta freeing them from attachment to peace.

Epilogue E

Place of composition

*The monk Thogme,
A proponent of scriptures and logic,
Has composed these verses
In a cave known as Ngulchu Rinchen Puk
To benefit himself and others.*

Whenever he speaks about Dharma, the author reminds us that his words accord with scripture and logic. By composing these verses, Thogme has benefited himself, as well as others, because the work has increased his wisdom and helped him perfect the two accumulations. Finally, he tells us that he composed this text at *Ngulchu Rinchen Puk*, The Jewel Cave of Silver Water.