

The Thirty-seven Practices of Bodhisattvas

by the Bodhisattva Togmay Zangpo (translated into English by Ruth Sonam)

I pay constant homage through my three doors,
To my supreme teacher and protector Chenrezig,
Who while seeing all phenomena lack coming and going,
Makes single-minded effort for the good of living beings.

Perfect Buddhas, source of all well-being and happiness,
Arise from accomplishing the excellent teachings,
And this depends on knowing the practices.
So I will explain the practices of bodhisattvas.

1. Having gained this rare ship of freedom and fortune,
Hear, think, and meditate unwaveringly night and day
In order to free yourself and others
From the ocean of cyclic existence—This is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

2. Attached to your loved ones you're stirred up like water.
Hating your enemies you burn like fire.
In the darkness of confusion you forget what to adopt and discard.
Give up your homeland—This is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

3. By avoiding bad objects, disturbing emotions gradually decrease.
Without distraction, virtuous activities naturally increase.
With clarity of mind, conviction in the teaching arises.
Cultivate seclusion—This is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

4. Loved ones who have long kept company will part.
Wealth created with difficulty will be left behind.
Consciousness, the guest, will leave the guesthouse of the body.
Let go of this life—This is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

5. When you keep their company your three poisons increase,
Your activities of hearing, thinking, and meditating decline,
And they make you lose your love and compassion.
Give up bad friends—This is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

6. When you rely on them your faults come to an end
And your good qualities grow like the waxing moon.
Cherish spiritual teachers

Even more than your own body—This is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

7. Bound himself in the jail of cyclic existence,
What worldly god can give you protection?
Therefore when you seek refuge, take refuge in
The Three Jewels which will not betray you—
This is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

8. The Subduer said all the unbearable suffering
Of bad rebirths is the fruit of wrongdoing.
Therefore, even at the cost of your life,
Never do wrong—This is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

9. Like dew on the tip of a blade of grass, pleasures of the three worlds
Last only a while and then vanish.
Aspire to the never-changing Supreme state of liberation—
This is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

10. When your mothers, who've loved you since time without beginning,
Are suffering, what use is your own happiness?
Therefore to free limitless living beings
Develop the altruistic intention—This is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

11. All suffering comes from the wish for your own happiness.
Perfect Buddhas are born from the thought to help others.
Therefore exchange your own happiness
For the suffering of others—This is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

12. Even if someone out of strong desire
Steals all your wealth or has it stolen,
Dedicate to him your body, possessions
And your virtue, past, present and future—This is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

13. Even if someone tries to cut off your head
When you haven't done the slightest thing wrong,
Out of compassion take all her misdeeds
Upon yourself—This is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

14. Even if someone broadcasts all kinds of unpleasant remarks
About you throughout the three thousand worlds,

In return, with a loving mind,
Speak of his good qualities—This is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

15. Though someone may deride and speak bad words
About you in a public gathering,
Looking on her as a spiritual teacher,
Bow to her with respect—This is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

16. Even if a person for whom you're cared
Like your own child regards you as an enemy,
Cherish him specially, like a mother
Does her child who is stricken by sickness—This is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

17. If an equal or inferior person
Disparages you out of pride,
Place her, as you would your spiritual teacher,
With respect on the crown of your head—This is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

18. Though you lack what you need and are constantly disparaged,
Afflicted by dangerous sickness and spirits,
Without discouragement take on the misdeeds
And the pain of all living beings—This is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

19. Though you become famous and many bow to you,
And you gain riches to equal Vaishravana's,
See that worldly fortune is without essence,
And be unconceited—This is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

20. While the enemy of your own anger is unsubdued,
Though you conquer external foes, they will only increase.
Therefore with the militia of love and compassion
Subdue your own mind—This is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

21. Sensual pleasures are like saltwater:
The more you indulge, the more thirst increases.
Abandon at once those things which breed
Clinging attachment—This is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

22. Whatever appears is your own mind.
Your mind from the start was free from fabricated extremes.

Understanding this, do not take to mind [Inherent] signs of subject and object—
This is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

23. When you encounter attractive objects,
Though they seem beautiful Like a rainbow in summer, don't regard them as real
And give up attachment—This is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

24. All forms of suffering are like a child's death in a dream.
Holding illusory appearances to be true makes you weary.
Therefore when you meet with disagreeable circumstances,
See them as illusory—This is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

25. When those who want enlightenment must give even their body,
There's no need to mention external things.
Therefore, without hope for return or any fruition
Give generously—This is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

26. Without ethics you can't accomplish your own well being,
So wanting to accomplish others' is laughable.
Therefore, without worldly aspirations
Safeguard your ethical discipline—This is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

27. To Bodhisattvas who want a wealth of virtue
Those who harm are like a precious treasure.
Therefore, towards all cultivate fortitude
Without hostility—This is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

28. Seeing even Hearers and Solitary Realizers, who accomplish
Only their own good, strive as if to put out a fire on their head,
For the sake of all beings make enthusiastic effort,
The source of all good qualities—This is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

29. Understanding that disturbing emotions are destroyed
By special insight with calm abiding,
Cultivate concentration which surpasses
The four formless absorptions—This is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

30. Since the five perfections without wisdom
Cannot bring perfect enlightenment,
Along with skillful means cultivate the wisdom

Which does not conceive the three spheres [as real]—This is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

31. If you don't examine your own errors,
You may look like a practitioner but not act as one.
Therefore, always examining your own errors,
Rid yourself of them—This is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

32. If through the influence of disturbing emotions
You point out the faults of another Bodhisattva,
You yourself are diminished, so don't mention the faults
Of those who have entered the Great Vehicle—This is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

33. Reward and respect cause us to quarrel
And make hearing, thinking, and meditation decline.
For this reason give up attachment to
The households of friends, relations and benefactors—
This is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

34. Harsh words disturb the minds of others
And cause deterioration in a Bodhisattva's conduct.
Therefore give up harsh words
Which are unpleasant to others—This is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

35. Habitual disturbing emotions are hard to stop through counteractions.
Armed with antidotes, the guards of mindfulness and mental alertness
Destroy disturbing emotions like attachment
At once, as soon as they arise—This is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

36. In brief, whatever you are doing,
Ask yourself "What's the state of my mind?"
With constant mindfulness and mental alertness
Accomplish others' good—This is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

37. To remove the suffering of limitless beings,
Understanding the purity of the three spheres,
Dedicate the virtue from making such effort
To enlightenment—This is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

Eight Verses on Mind Training by Geshe Langri Thangpa
(English translation [revised] by Thupten Jinpa)

1. With the wish to achieve the highest aim,
Which surpasses even a wish-fulfilling gem,
for the benefit of all sentient beings,
may I hold them dear at all times.
2. Whenever I interact with another,
may I view myself as the lowest among all,
and from the depths of my heart,
hold others as superior.
3. In all my activities may I probe my mind,
and as soon as an affliction arises –
since it endangers myself and others -
may I confront it directly and aver it.
4. When I encounter beings of unpleasant character
and those oppressed by intense negativity and suffering,
as though finding a treasure of precious jewels,
may I cherish them, for they are so rarely found.
5. When others out of jealousy
treat me wrongly with abuse and slander,
may I take upon myself the defeat
and offer to others the victory.
6. Even if someone I have helped
or in whom I have placed great hope
gravely mistreats me in hurtful ways,
may I view him as my sublime teacher.
7. In brief, may I offer benefit and joy
to all my mothers, both directly and indirectly,
and may I quietly take upon myself
all the hurts and pains of all my mothers.
8. May all of this remain unsullied
by the stains of the eight mundane concerns,

and, by understanding all things as illusions,
free of clinging, may I be released from bondage.

The Three Principal Aspects of the Path – Je Tsongkhapa
(English translation by Thupten Jinpa)

Homage to the most venerable teachers!

I shall explain here to the best of my ability:
The essential points of all the scriptures of the Conqueror;
The path acclaimed by all excellent bodhisattvas;
The gateway for the fortunate ones aspiring for liberation.

Those who are not attached to the joys of cyclic existence,
Who strive to make meaningful this life of leisure and opportunity,
And who place their trust in the path that pleases the Conquerors -
O fortunate ones, listen with an open heart.

Without pure renunciation there is no means to pacify
The yearning for the joys and fruits of samsaric ocean;
And as craving for existence chain us thoroughly,
At first search for a true renunciation.

By cultivating in mind that this human life is so hard to find
Yet has no time to spare, preoccupations with this life will cease;
By contemplating repeatedly the truth of karma and samsaric suffering,
Preoccupations with next life will come to cease.

As you habituate in this way and when not even an instant
Of admiration arises for the prosperities of cyclic existence,
And when the thought aspiring for liberation arises day and night,
At this point true renunciation has arisen.

Such renunciation too if it is not sustained
By pure awakening mind it will not become a cause
Of the perfect bliss of unexcelled enlightenment;
Therefore O intelligent ones, generate the excellent awakening mind.

They're being swept away constantly by four powerful rivers;
They're bound tightly with fetters of karma most difficult to escape;
They're trapped inside the iron mesh of self-grasping;
They're enveloped from everywhere by thick mists of ignorance;

They take birth within cyclic existence that has no end,
Where they're endlessly tormented by the three sufferings.
By reflecting on all your mothers who suffer such conditions,
Please generate the supreme awakening mind.

If you do not have the wisdom realising the ultimate nature,
Even if you gain familiarity with renunciation and awakening mind,
You will not be able to cut the root of samsaric existence;
So strive in the means of realizing dependent origination.

When with respect to all phenomena of samsara and nirvana,
You see that cause and effects never deceive their laws,
And when you have dismantled the focus of objectification,
At that point you have entered the path that pleases the Buddhas.

So long as the two understandings - of appearance,
Which is undeceiving dependent origination,
And emptiness devoid of all theses - remain separate,
So long you have not realized the intent of the Sage.

However at some point when, without alternation but at once,
The instant you see that dependent origination is undeceiving,
If the entire object of grasping at certitude is dismantled,
At that point your analysis of the view has culminated.

Furthermore when appearance dispels the extreme of existence,
And when emptiness dispels the extreme of non-existence,
And if you understand how emptiness arises as cause and effect,
You will never be captivated by views grasping at extremes.

Thus when you have understood as they are
The essentials of the three principal aspects of the path,
O son, seek solitude and by enhancing the power of perseverance,
Swiftly accomplish your ultimate aspiration.

This advice was given by the monk Lobsang Drakpai Pal to Ngawang Drakpa, a leading person of Tsakho region.