

# Forum: The *Lojong* Mind Training Practices



JUDITH LIEF IS THE EDITOR OF TRAINING THE MIND AND CULTIVATING LOVING-KINDNESS, CHÖGYAM TRUNGPA'S COMMENTARY ON THE SEVEN POINTS OF MIND TRAINING. SHE IS AN ACHARYA, OR SENIOR TEACHER, IN THE SHAMBHALA BUDDHIST TRADITION.

KEN MCLEOD TRANSLATED THE GREAT PATH OF AWAKENING, JAMGÖN KONGTRÜL'S COMMENTARY ON LOJONG, AND IS THE AUTHOR OF WAKE UP TO YOUR LIFE. HE IS THE FOUNDER OF UNFETTERED MIND IN LOS ANGELES, WHERE HE TEACHES BUDDHIST MEDITATION AND PRACTICE USING A CONSULTANT-CLIENT APPROACH.

B. ALAN WALLACE WROTE A COMMENTARY ON LOJONG ENTITLED THE SEVEN-POINT MIND TRAINING AND IS A TEACHER AND TRANSLATOR OF TIBETAN BUDDHISM. A FORMER MONK ORDAINED BY THE DALAI LAMA, HE RECENTLY FOUNDED THE SANTA BARBARA INSTITUTE FOR THE INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDY OF CONSCIOUSNESS.

COMPASSION, IT WOULD APPEAR, is easier said than done. All the world's great spiritual traditions exhort us to be kind, and yet judging by the state of our world, genuine compassion is rare. We have plenty of great thoughts about compassion, but how much are we actually doing about it moment by moment, day by day?

A system of practices that would upset our usual way of doing things and encourage compassion would seem to be in order. In fact, without such practices, a tradition like Buddhism, committed as it is to meditation, might easily lead to a private striving for peace, and many of us who practice Buddhism might easily fall into the trap of self-perfection.

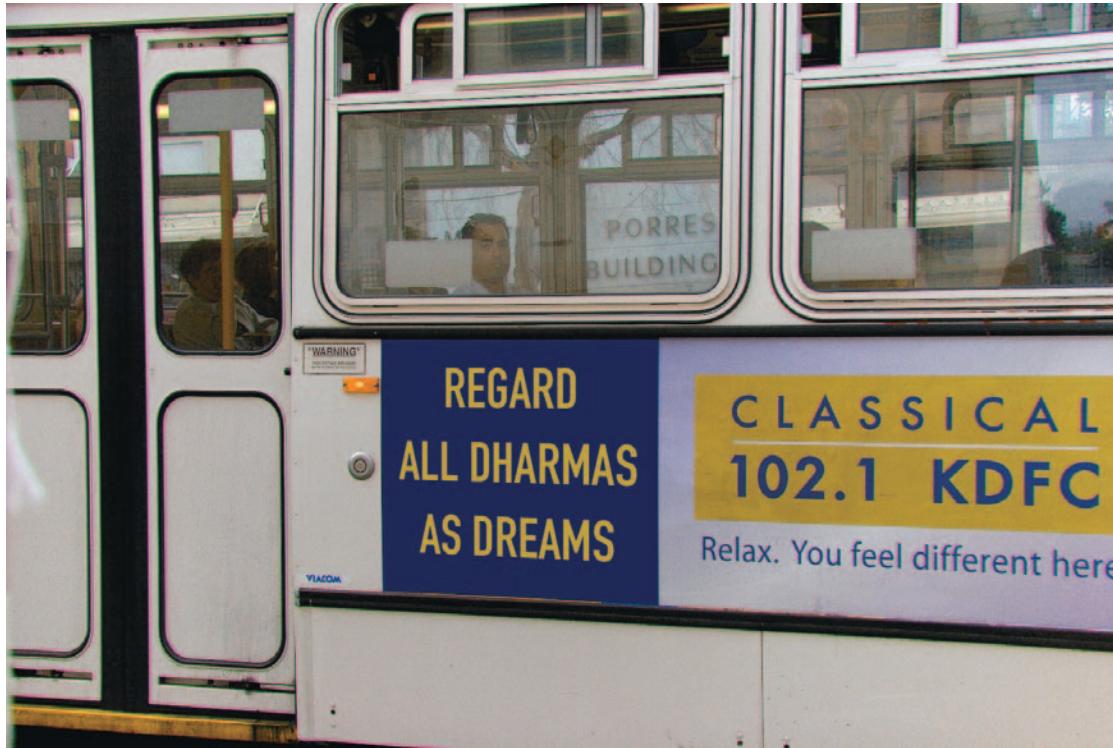
Apparently Buddhist practitioners from long ago experienced this very problem, and at some point, a system developed within the Mahayana tradition to counteract ego's tendency to convert whatever it encounters into its own territory. Like a family of viruses, this system of teachings, known in Tibetan as *lojong*, or mind training, attacks ego's immune system and the myriad defenses it throws up to prevent us from experiencing a moment of openness and warmth.

There are many different kinds of *lojong*, but in this forum, the panelists discuss the form of *lojong* best-known in the West, as laid out in *The Seven Points of Mind Training*. There are several theories about who exactly was responsible for these teachings, but it is widely believed that they were brought to Tibet when the great Indian yogi and scholar Atisha Dipankara traveled there in 1042 at the invitation of the Tibetan rulers. One of Atisha's poems describes an arduous sea journey he made to Sumatra and Java to receive *lojong* training from the renowned teacher Serlingpa (Dharmakirti), who is said to have resided at Borobudur. These teachings on developing enlightened attitude were passed on to many students and were eventually written down in the twelfth century by Chekawa as a series of aphorisms, the form that survives to this day. In the nineteenth century, Jamgön Kongtrül the Great wrote a concise commentary that has become one of the primary sources for *lojong* teachings.

The mind training teachings have two main components. The first focuses on recognizing absolute, or ultimate, bodhicitta (literally, "awakened heart or mind," or, emphasizing its aspirational quality, "the thought of enlightenment"). Ultimate bodhicitta is our basic nature, which is pure awareness. Through contemplative practice, the practitioner lets go of attachment to phenomena as being solid and unchanging, as expressed in the injunction "Regard all dharmas as dreams." This series of contemplations ends with the prescription "In post-meditation, be a child of illusion." In other words, we are asked to have a childlike faith in the quality of ultimate bodhicitta and to rest in the illusory phenomenal display we encounter in all of our undertakings. Softened by such naiveté, we act freshly, rather than seeking to recreate a familiar home for ourselves.

The second part of the mind training involves the cultivation of relative bodhicitta. This practice recognizes that in all our interactions we draw on an arsenal of means to solidify our position: blaming, self-congratulation, false modesty, competitiveness, possessiveness, and a host of others. Yet each time we seek to secure our position, we are also vulnerable, which leaves the possibility of openness. This is where mind training operates.

For example, if we are about to denigrate someone for all the problems they have caused us, the phrase "Be grateful to everyone" may arise in our mind. As a result, a moment of bodhicitta could emerge. For a moment, ego dissolves and



compassion takes up the space that is left. Rather than simply telling ourselves that we need to be a good boy or a good girl, the teaching embodied in the slogan can counteract our tendency to cling, right on the spot, where the rubber meets the road. The archetypal practice of cultivating relative bodhicitta is *tonglen*, the practice of sending and taking, where we take in all negativity and send out all that is nourishing and life-giving. It reverses the basic direction of energy that supports ego.

No English term adequately captures the nature of the “sayings” that form the backbone of the seven-point mind training. Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche chose the term “slogan” to describe these pithy phrases that enjoin us to act, but others find the association with advertising and commercialism misleading. Whatever we call these aphorisms, they have a power to arouse compassion on the spot in a way that no amount of good intention has been able to accomplish. Perhaps these teachings and practices can even reach beyond the community of committed Buddhist practitioners to help a troubled world, or perhaps they require a Buddhist context to function. Our panelists differ on this question.

—Barry Boyce

**BUDDHADHARMA:** What does lojong mean?

**KEN MCLEOD:** Although lojong is often translated as “mind training,” the meaning of the term in Tibetan is closer to “refining,” rather than training. That puts a different slant on it.

**ALAN WALLACE:** I would agree. The term most commonly translated as “mind” from Sanskrit is *citta*, which is rendered as *sem* in Tibetan. Here the word for mind is *lo* in Tibetan and *mati* in Sanskrit. It doesn’t refer to mind in general; it refers more to attitude. Lojong, then, is largely a matter of reframing our perspective on the phenomena and events that arise before us. We perceive them from a fresh perspective. So, rather than taking the usual tack of trying to transform our external circumstances, we shift and refine our way of viewing, experiencing, and engaging with whatever reality presents itself to us from moment to moment.

**KEN MCLEOD:** Lojong is counterintuitive in the sense that it’s opposed to our ordinary way of relating to the world. It is intended to create friction between our habitual patterns and the experience of the

present moment. This friction generates heat to burn up our habituated patterns.

**JUDITH LIEF:** Lojong can take us through a three-step process. First, we move from our ancient habit of putting our own interests above everything else to the provocative thought of putting others' interests somewhere on our horizon. Then, we can move to putting others ahead of ourselves. Finally, we can transcend that altogether. It's not simply replacing a this-that orientation with a that-this orientation; it's going beyond this and that altogether.

The real rub, the real friction, is egolessness: ego-of-self and ego-of-other are equally limited views of reality. Ego-of-self is the sense of self-fixation and fascination, clinging to a notion of who we are as something solid that can be separated out from other aspects of reality. Ego-of-other, or ego-of-phenomena, is taking what we perceive, all of our experiences, our particular mood of the moment and every thought, and solidifying that into "other." We estrange ourselves from the basic fabric of reality when we let our mind have a bias in either direction. Lojong is designed to remove that estrangement.

Lojong is a matter of reframing our perspective on the phenomena and events that arise before us. Rather than taking the usual tack of trying to transform our external circumstances, we shift our way of engaging with whatever reality presents itself.

—Alan Wallace

**ALAN WALLACE:** In general, we are driven by self-grasping, so our natural inclination is certainly not to take in the negativity of the world and give away everything good in our lives. Quite the contrary. Lojong runs right in the face of the inclinations that have kept us in samsara for a long time.

**BUDDHADHARMA:** When people are first introduced to lojong, they often have a hard time with the notion that self-interest isn't really the ground of life.

**ALAN WALLACE:** It is said that the dharmakaya is the perfection of the Buddha's self-interest, *rangdön* in Tibetan. The sambhogakaya and the nirmanakaya are the perfection of the Buddha's other-interest, or *shendön*. It is not the case, then, that the buddhadharma entails absolutely turning your back on any of your own aspirations, your own wish to be free of suffering, to achieve enlightenment and focus absolutely only on other people. That would be a weird distortion of the Buddhist teachings. Rather, what we're counteracting is the self-centeredness that prioritizes one's well-being over that of everyone else, especially where one's interests seem to be in conflict with others. But our *rangdön*, our own aspirations, are part and parcel of the buddhadharma all the way to enlightenment.

Mind training may also be rubbing against a very strong tendency in modern civilization, rooted in evolutionary biology and a lot of modern psychology, of reifying the self, promoting the rugged individual notion of the separate, independent self. Buddhadharma does run right into the face of that.

**BUDDHADHARMA:** The mind training tradition seems only to have been carried on in Tibet. Does that mean it is a Vajrayana practice?

**KEN MCLEOD:** Jamgön Kongtrül says that lojong stands firmly in the sutra tradition and has some links to the Vajrayana tradition. In my own work with students, I sometimes use it as a bridge into Vajrayana because it does have an element of transformation of experience. But philosophically it's solidly rooted in the Mahayana tradition.

**BUDDHADHARMA:** Can it also be a practice that can work for a broad spectrum of practitioners?

**JUDITH LIEF:** One of the reasons that mind training is such a marvelous body of teachings is that it can work for people at all sorts of levels of understanding and familiarity with buddhadharma. A danger can arise, though, if you don't have some understanding of emptiness. The lojong sayings can be perverted into moral credos, and tonglen can become a kind of martyrdom, like your stereotypical long-suffering mother figure: "Oh, don't worry about me, darling. I'll take it on." It is important to present the background carefully, so that people understand that the point is that the flow of energy is not being held anywhere by anyone. Rather, one is working with an energetic reversal that goes beyond our usual sense of virtue, of who's good and who's bad.

Once we overcome that misapprehension, we find that the practice is very earthy, practical, and relevant. One can work with even one of the slogans in many different ways, and at many different levels of understanding, and find it helpful across the entire spectrum.

**BUDDHADHARMA:** Do you need a teacher to guide your practice of lojong?

**ALAN WALLACE:** As a Hindu yoga teacher once told me, "It's better to have a good book than a bad teacher." If one can find a qualified teacher of lojong, there's no question that's best, as it is for learning virtually any other skill. But if there are no teachers around, I would say it would be better



to pick up a good text on mind training and follow that as carefully as one can.

Whether you have a teacher or not, I feel one important element is required. Just as Vajrayana has its root system deeply embedded in the Mahayana, so does the Mahayana tradition have its root system deeply embedded in the early teachings of the Buddha. Mind training is not an introductory teaching, or at the very least, it would be a very steep step to be making at the outset. For the lojong teachings to make much sense, they need to rest on the fundamental framework of the four noble truths and the basic constituents of the practice: *sila*, *samadhi*, and *prajna*; that is, ethics, meditation, and wisdom.

**JUDITH LIEF:** I never present lojong without presenting at least some preliminary ground of shamatha-vipashyana. You need to let the mind settle and rest with uncertainty—get down to the bare bones. It helps to have a sense of the logic of the sutrayana, and without a basic meditation practice, lojong can easily become just a way to be goody-goody.

**KEN MCLEOD:** I'd like to offer a little different perspective from what Alan and Judy just said. What I've found in talking about lojong, and particularly taking and sending, is that for many people it is an

immediate way to get in touch with compassion. Therefore, I'm not so sure that it can't be used as an introduction. If it is presented as a natural expression of innate compassion, people can connect with it quite easily and quite deeply. Lojong can take them right to the heart of bodhicitta, the intention to be awake. It can allow one to be completely awake to all aspects of one's experience in order to correct our basic imbalances, imbalances that involve the whole world. The practice of tonglen, sending and taking, has that kind of power.

**ALAN WALLACE:** Putting tonglen into a secular context can be helpful, but certainly lojong is more than the practice of tonglen. I don't see how one could properly work with the meaning of bodhicitta—the achievement of perfect enlightenment of a buddha for the sake of all sentient beings—without having a sense of who the Buddha is, what the four noble truths are, and so forth. These are not isolated meditative practices. They come to us as very theory-laden, textured, multifaceted disciplines of practice. I don't see how they really make any sense without the whole package.

**JUDITH LIEF:** I've certainly presented tonglen as a very practical thing to do, separated out from the context of lojong. For example, it's very helpful



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—Ken McLeod

as an applied practice in working with health care professionals, who are dealing with death and dying on a regular basis. They don't need much background, and it opens up an incredibly awakened, tender experience for people. It's very useful, but I agree that it isn't the same as doing the full lojong practice.

**ALAN WALLACE:** Just the same, one can teach shamatha outside of the whole framework of the buddhadharma. People of all different types of belief systems find these decontextualized meditative practices very helpful. Yet, I remember someone asking the Dalai Lama years ago about the legitimacy of taking some Buddhist meditative practices out of the context of Buddhism and using them to reduce stress, without really acknowledging to the people who practiced them that these were Buddhist practices. The Dalai Lama's response was that since the whole point of buddhadharma is to alleviate suffering, if you decontextualize some of the practices and they alleviate suffering, that's wonderful. But then he added, "Don't confuse that with buddhadharma."

In my experience, you need the view, the meditation practices, and then a whole way of life that goes along with that. Those three facets are profoundly interrelated, and integrating all three constitutes the practice of buddhadharma.

**KEN MCLEOD:** I have to confess, I balk a little bit at the phrase, "Don't confuse that with buddhadharma," as if there is some thing which is buddhadharma. Rather than saying to people, "This is the path," I've come to help them discover their own path by using the tools and perspectives and the context that I've been fortunate enough to receive. We may simply have a different orientation toward teaching and training, rather than a substantive difference about what the dharma is.

**BUDDHADHARMA:** You all have said that these teachings have a certain direct appeal, and yet there's quite a lot of depth and profundity here. The ultimate bodhicitta slogans at the beginning of the seven-point mind training, for example, can be quite challenging. Investigating "the nature of

unborn awareness” qualifies as more than a trick to help you get through the day.

**KEN MCLEOD:** Dealing with ultimate bodhicitta is where things get interesting. Frequently when you say things like “Regard everything as a dream” and “Be a child of illusion,” there’s usually at least one person in the room who resists this strongly. That person is usually expressing the fears of everybody in the group. They fear openness, the lack of reference points, particularly social reference points and connections. Taking the perspective of ultimate bodhicitta, trusting in an awareness which is *no thing*—that can be very intimidating.

**ALAN WALLACE:** If one does start to get it, it challenges your very sense of personal identity, which you may very well have been cherishing as the most precious thing in the universe. Suddenly this is being challenged right at the very core.

**JUDITH LIEF:** That’s when the lojong practice starts to bite. This is the heart of the practice that underlies the more relative benefits of cultivating kindness. However, if one simply lapses into philosophical musing about the nature of reality and not paying attention to what is going on day by day, the relative slogans can offer their own bite, lest one should become pretentious about one’s view of reality while meanwhile treating everyone around you like dirt.

**KEN MCLEOD:** A very old metaphor is that compassion and emptiness, or compassion and wisdom, are like the two wings of a bird—without both, the bird goes nowhere. One has to keep in mind that the aim here isn’t really to make the world a better place; the aim is to know one’s own experience completely. What arises out of that, from a Buddhist point of view, is universal good. But to know one’s own experience completely is to know its nature, which is emptiness. To relate to it as it is, is compassion. The two are inextricably bound together.

**ALAN WALLACE:** I just wonder about the phrasing “the point of buddhadharma is not to make the world a better place.” It was compassion that aroused the Buddha from his seat of enlightenment, to come out into the world to be of service.

## WHAT DOES AWARENESS LOOK LIKE?

*Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche on the meaning of the ultimate bodhicitta slogan  
“Analyze the unborn nature of awareness.”*

WHEN ANGER ARISES in what we think of as our minds, we become oblivious even to the dangers that might threaten us. Our faces flushed with rage, we seize our weapons and could even kill a lot of people. But this anger is an illusion; it is not at all some great force that comes rushing into us. It achieves one thing only and that is to send us to hell, and yet it is nothing but thought, insubstantial thought. It is only thought, and yet...

Take another example, that of a wealthy person. He is rich and happy and is deeply pleased with himself, thinking, “I am rich.” But then if all his property is confiscated by an official or some such person, his happiness evaporates and he falls into depression and misery. That joy is mind. That sadness is mind. And that mind is thought.

What shall we say about these so-called thoughts? At this moment, while I am teaching dharma, let us consider the mental experience, or thought, which you have, of listening carefully to me. Does this have a form or color? Is it to be found in the upper or lower part of the body, in the eyes or the ears? What we call the mind is not really there at all. If it is truly something, it must have characteristics, such as color. It must be white, yellow, etc. Or it must have shape like a pillar or a vase. It must be big or small, old or young, and so on. You can find out whether the mind exists or not by just turning inwards and reflecting carefully. You will see that the mind does not begin or end or stay anywhere; that it has no color or form and is to be found neither inside nor outside the body. And when you see that it does not exist as any thing, you should stay in that experience without an attempt to label or define it.

When you have truly attained the realization of this emptiness, you will be like the venerable Milarepa or Guru Rinpoche, who were unaffected by the heat of summer or the cold of winter, and who could not be burned by fire or drowned in water. In emptiness there is neither pain nor suffering. We, on the other hand, have not understood the empty nature of the mind, and so, when bitten by even a small insect, we think, “Ouch! I’ve been bitten. It hurts!” Or, when someone says something unkind, we get angry. That is the sign that we have not realized the mind’s empty nature.

From *Enlightened Courage: An Explanation of Atisha's Seven Point Mind Training*,  
by Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche. Translated by the Padmakara Translation Group.  
Published by Snow Lion Publications.

# REVERSING MIND'S HABITUAL TENDENCIES

*Jamgön Kongtrül comments on several of the sayings that deal with common pitfalls on the spiritual path.*

## *Work on your strongest reactions first.*

Examine your personality to determine which disturbing emotions are strongest. Concentrate all dharma practice on them in the beginning, and subdue and clear them away.

## *Give up any hope for results.*

Give up the hope of subduing gods and demons by meditating on mind training, or the hope that you will be considered a good person when you try to help someone who has hurt you. These are hypocritical attitudes. In a word, give up all hope for any result that concerns your own welfare, such as the desire for fame, respect, happiness, and comfort in this life, the happiness experienced in the human or god realms in future lives, or the attainment of nirvana for yourself.

## *Give up poisoned food.*

Since all virtuous thoughts and actions motivated by clinging to a concrete reality or to a self-cherishing attitude are like poisoned food, give them up. Learn not to cling, but to know that phantomlike nature of experience.

## *Don't rely on a sense of duty.*

A person who has a sense of duty in his affairs doesn't forget the people who concern him, no matter where he is or how much time has gone by. When someone causes you trouble and has made you angry you might never let go of that resentment. Stop it. Take a helpful attitude or action in response to someone who causes trouble.

## *Don't lash out.*

In general, don't take joy in provoking others. In particular, when another person says something bad about you, don't respond by talking maliciously about him to others. In fact, even if some injury has resulted, strive always to praise the good qualities of others without blaming this or that person.

## *Don't wait in ambush.*

When someone has caused you trouble, the tendency is to fix it in mind and never forget it though many years go by. When there is an opportunity to ambush the person and to return the injury, revenge is taken. Give up this approach and be as helpful as you can in your response to troublesome situations. For the kind of trouble caused by demons, don't cling to the problem, but work on only love and compassion.

## *Don't go for the throat.*

Don't speak in a way that causes pain for others, either by making pointed remarks and exposing their faults or, in the case of nonhuman beings, by using mantras that drain their life.

## *Don't put an ox's load on a cow.*

To give someone else an unpleasant job that is your responsibility or, by resorting to trickery, to shift a problem you have encountered to someone else is like putting a horse's load on a pony. Don't do this.

From *The Great Path of Awakening: The Classic Guide to Lojong, a Tibetan Buddhist Practice for Cultivating the Heart of Compassion*, by Jamgön Kongtrül.  
Translated by Ken McLeod. Published by Shambhala Publications, 2005.

**BUDDHADHARMA:** The distinction here may be between conceptual compassion, which relies on the world changing as a result of our efforts, and self-existing compassion, which arises without reference to results.

**KEN MCLEOD:** Yes, I would say that expresses my point precisely.

**ALAN WALLACE:** This gets us back to the two wings of the bird. Conceptual compassion lacks wisdom. Wisdom without compassion is bondage; compassion without wisdom is bondage.

**JUDITH LIEF:** Trungpa Rinpoche said that compassion is the atmosphere that allows wisdom to arise.

**BUDDHADHARMA:** The relative bodhicitta sayings provide an interesting interplay between prajna and compassion. Perhaps we could take up some of the more prominent relative bodhicitta slogans to unpack their meaning and illustrate how they work in practice. Certainly one that blatantly challenges conventional logic is "Drive all blames into one." What is that "one"?

**KEN MCLEOD:** The tendency to attach to a sense of self, which in Buddhism is understood as the source of all suffering. Suffering is the reaction to experience. Experience just arises. It can be pleasant, unpleasant, neutral, physical, mental, what have you. But we react to it, and it is the reaction to it that is suffering. Our reaction to it is always based on a sense of self. We drive all blaming into that tendency to attach to a sense of self, because that's where our suffering comes from. And when we react based on preserving self, we create suffering for others, so the suffering of others comes from attachment to a sense of self, too.

**ALAN WALLACE:** I would just add that the Buddha never stated there is no self at all. In this saying, what's referred to is the sense of the self as being independent, separate from all other beings and the environment. But it is important to recognize that there are also authentic ways of conceiving of the self where we do arise, just like tables and chairs and airplanes, like all other phenomena, but in profound interrelatedness with others.

**JUDITH LIEF:** This is one of those slogans that is easily misunderstood. It is in some ways more difficult for women, in that there is this more superficial sense of taking on the blame that is very much a belittling of one's self relative to others, which is merely a cultural pattern.

Like most of the slogans, this one can work at so many levels. It can work at the profound level of dissolving ego, that which separates us from the

fabric of reality, but it can also simply counteract our tendency to always seek some reason outside of ourselves for why things go wrong. Dropping that habit can provide tremendous relief.

**ALAN WALLACE:** The import of this saying is not looking at all the disasters in the world, earthquakes and so forth, and saying all of those are my fault. Rather, wherever there is suffering, since each sentient being is the center of their own universe, the suffering they are experiencing is stemming from their attachment to the self. But it is not saying that everything is blamed on one's own self. That would just be flat-out silly. That notion is kind of hilarious.

**KEN MCLEOD:** I am not sure that it is flat-out silly. When teaching lojong, I have said that straight on. I tell people, "Everything that is wrong with the world, everything that is wrong in your life, everything that is wrong in your town, everything that is wrong in your family and country, everything is because of your grasping and sense of self." What happens is that people feel totally overwhelmed. Completely overwhelmed. And in that opening compassion can arise.

**ALAN WALLACE:** It was Thich Nhat Hanh who commented, when he was looking at some terrible, terrible genocide that was taking place in Africa years ago, "I am the torturer, and I am the tortured one." He was exhibiting this very spacious sense of his own personal presence in the world, such that he could see both the torturer and the tortured as part of his own presence here, transcending the limitations of any conventional self that is a certain number of years old and has an ethnicity and all of that.

**JUDITH LIEF:** I think one thing that's interesting about this slogan is that there is a sense that there is no other reality; there is nothing from which we are totally separate. Taking the blame onto oneself is not structurally all that different from the bodhisattva vow to save all sentient beings. If you can take all blames onto yourself, then you can actually generate compassion for all beings. It's the same sense of no separation.

**BUDDHADHARMA:** Since Buddhist practice clearly has goals, what is the importance of the injunction "Abandon all hope of results"?

**KEN MCLEOD:** I've always thought that "Abandon all hope, ye who enter here" could be the inscription on the doors to awakening, not the doors to hell.

**ALAN WALLACE:** When I was on retreat some years ago, my teacher kind of scolded me at one point,

saying, "Alan, you are practicing with too much desire." I was surprised. I told him I wasn't thinking about sex or money or fame or any of that. He said, "No, I'm not talking about those things. You're practicing with too much desire for the practice itself." He reminded me that one must do the practice with no anticipation of it turning out this way or that way, but still I wondered about the countless prayers in Tibetan Buddhism where one aspires to enlightenment. Bodhicitta itself is an aspiration.

He kind of chuckled and said, "Those prayers are to be done between sessions." While practicing, we just let the mind settle. It is important to have great aspirations, but the clinging kind of hope is what we need to abandon.

**JUDITH LIEF:** To me, this encapsulates the dilemma we see throughout all the Buddhist teachings I have ever heard. One moment you will be told, "Practice hard, hold your discipline, and maintain strong posture," and the next moment you are told, "Relax and just let things hang loose." You are told, "Try to be enlightened, but don't be attached to gaining anything." It's Buddhist humor.

If you have ever had to do something hard and geared yourself up to try to do it, you find that the gearing up begins to get in the way. At a certain point, when you actually end up fully engaged in something—manual work, writing, whatever—you do abandon all hope of results, because you just do what you are doing. The hope seems intimately connected with fears of goofing up and not achieving results. All that gets in the way, so why not abandon it?

This slogan kind of rattles around in our mind and makes it abundantly clear how we always cook up hopes for results before we have hardly even done anything at all. Over and over again, our hope for results immediately transforms into our fantasies of ourselves having achieved the results. This slogan puts a mirror to that. It is a tool for our mindfulness that lets us know how, in the slightest little thing we do, we start fixating on the goal and miss out on what is actually going on moment to moment.

**ALAN WALLACE:** From an ultimate perspective, there is nothing to be transformed, nothing to be thrown off, and nothing to be acquired. The essential nature of awareness is primordially pure and all that needs to be done is to unveil it and to be perfectly present with it in the present moment. On the other hand, we have thousands of skillful means and teachings about transforming ourselves, and we can apply criteria to determine whether we are getting any result, such as the saying "All dharma is included in one purpose."

It's important not to view any slogan in isolation, as if it's an eternal truth.

The slogans work as a system. They balance one another.

—Judith Lief

That purpose is to free ourselves of self-grasping, and we are asked to investigate to what degree that is happening. On a relative level, then, we are on the path of developing toward enlightenment. On the ultimate level, it is all simply a matter of being present with the perfection that is already there.

At the end of Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche's commentary on *The Seven-Point Mind Training*, he says that when you come to the very end of the path, you lose even the preference for nirvana over samsara. You relinquish even the desire to achieve enlightenment. But you don't want to lose that too soon. Otherwise, you end up mucking about in samsara, like we all have been for countless lifetimes in the past.

**KEN MCLEOD:** When you are talking about just being simply present from the Dzogchen or Mahamudra point of view, that's a very profound way to be, whether on the mat or in your life. How to do that is where the skillful means comes in, which of course doesn't mean just doing nothing. There has to be a maturation. One of the challenges we face in the West is that with so much information available, people are coming at Buddhism from all different perspectives—elementary, middle, and advanced. People may embark on something without the maturation required. Sorting out what works for someone on the path can become very confusing, at which point a teacher can be extremely helpful.

**JUDITH LIEF:** It's also important to be careful not to view any slogan purely in isolation, as if it is an eternal truth. The slogans work as a system. They balance one another. If you become too generous, so to speak, perhaps you need to sharpen up. If you are too sharp, perhaps you need to soften. If you take the slogans personally and you let them be mirrors, they expose the obstacles, shortfalls,

pretenses, and mistaken views of all sorts that we need to bring to the path.

**BUDDHADHARMA:** Some of these sayings are rather obscure. What does "Of the two witnesses, hold to the principal one" mean?

**KEN MCLEOD:** I think it can be understood quite simply. If you find yourself in a situation where you know absolutely what is the right thing to do, and you know it is going to cost you something—inconvenience, embarrassment, a friendship, a job—but you do it anyway, how long do you think about it afterwards? But if you don't do the right thing, then how long do you think about it afterwards? That's the internal witness, and it is more important than the other witness, which is people's opinion of your behavior.

**BUDDHADHARMA:** What about deluding yourself?

**ALAN WALLACE:** Certainly, self-delusion is very easy. One could pick up a book or take a short program and try to incorporate whatever meager understanding one has gleaned into one's pre-existing understanding. If one then tries practicing on one's own with only intermittent contact with a teacher, or none at all, the possibilities of self-delusion are pretty enormous. People start thinking they have realized something profound.

However, when one makes a genuine relationship with the dharma, there arises the possibility of depending on the teacher or the teachings to answer everything for you: "Shucks, what do I know? I can't evaluate myself. You tell me. You tell me." That's an infantile approach that won't take one very far on the path. Right from the start, one needs to be cultivating a clear awareness of the quality of one's mental tendencies and one's engagement with reality and then be in dialogue with a teacher. But in the final analysis, we have to be our own teachers.



**JUDITH LIEF:** There is a lot of pretense when one gets involved in the spiritual path. We are such a conceptually advanced culture, literate and well-read, and we are at this historic point where great varieties of teachings of all sorts and traditions are available at the touch of a computer button. It's so easy for the conceptual mind to take over. Because conceptually we understand something, we think we have realized something. We are strong on concept and not so strong on seasoned practice. But if we actually hold to the principal witness, it will let us know that.

**BUDDHADHARMA:** People often wonder whether they practice sending and taking to really help others or simply to cultivate their own bodhicitta. If you do sending and taking, thinking of a person who is ill, do you actually have an effect on their health?

**ALAN WALLACE:** It can happen. I just received an e-mail not long ago from a friend of mine in Thailand who has been working for years there with people who are dying from AIDS. She was with a woman whose daughter had just died, and the woman was experiencing inconceivable grief. Suddenly the thought occurred, "Why don't I practice tonglen?" As soon as she started, the woman visibly experienced a sense of relief. Immediately there seemed

to be some effect. But one doesn't bank on that. The primary reason for engaging in the tonglen practice is to overcome your own tendencies for prioritizing your own well-being over that of others. Nevertheless, one hears many anecdotes about people being able to affect others with whom they have a strong karmic connection.

**KEN MCLEOD:** To look at doing tonglen as actually having an effect on others is right in the area of hoping for results. Regarding the anecdotes about magical occurrences, was it the practice, the quality of the person, or the karmic connection that brought about the result? It is very difficult to attribute a given result to a given cause; doing so is a kind of magical thinking. I do not encourage people to approach things that way at all. This is a practice that refines your attitude to the world and not something you use to heal people. Jamgön Kongtrül is very clear about that in his commentary.

**JUDITH LIEF:** I think the practice of tonglen does help to connect you with another person sometimes, especially in the context of health and healing. Simply being present with another person doing tonglen has an immediate effect on the connectedness of self and other. Beyond that, though, I

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definitely agree with Ken. One shouldn't view oneself as the great tonglen healer.

**KEN MCLEOD:** The essence of compassion is being present with suffering, as Judy was just saying. What comes out of that presence no one can predict. Very wonderful things may happen, but approaching this with the intention of getting a certain result contradicts the spirit of the lojong teachings.

**BUDDHADHARMA:** Many people have said that since it started as a monastic tradition, Buddhism focuses on solitary meditation and has little means to deal with relationships. Is lojong just such a means?

**KEN MCLEOD:** Absolutely. Let's say you are having a fight with your wife, and in the middle of the fight, you are able to move to taking and sending. You take in the pain your wife is experiencing in the fight, and you give her your love and affection and the value you place in the relationship. That is going to have an immediate effect on the dynamics between the two of you. It will result in an immediate stepping out of one's reactions to things and right back into the situation as it is, not as you want it to be. That is what these teachings are about.

I find that if people start with these kind of practices, they will come to appreciate that the stability of attention developed through shamatha-vipashyana helps them to apply these practices even more powerfully. They will look at meditation practice as a means to deepen their own ability to practice mind training.

**BUDDHADHARMA:** So what would cause me to break the momentum of anger in the argument with my wife?

**ALAN WALLACE:** You would be invited to take a fresh look at reality. We get so locked in to our habitual ways of framing issues—"This is good for me; this is bad for me."—that we need something to break that up. As a result of the lojong, one can ask, "What am I really angry with?" The first answer will usually be "Her!" But you would be focusing on the person as an independent ego and as the source of your problems. If you look at

it again, you can ask whether it really is this independent ego out there or, rather, some mode of behavior. You then can ask, "What behavior did I find so disagreeable? Do I ever display that kind of behavior, that kind of mental affliction?" As Shantideva says, if you are going to get angry at something, get angry at mental afflictions, because people are just puppets on the end of the string of their own mental afflictions. If you are going to get angry, direct your wrath towards mental afflictions. This is what you could be inspired to do.

**JUDITH LIEF:** The way I see the slogan practice working in that regard is not a laborious, stop-in-the-middle, let's-consider-what's-going-on-here process. I find that if you if you memorize the slogans and study them on a regular basis, they are rattling around in your mind and they just pop up.

Slogans just pop up at the most embarrassing times. When you've really blown it and you've lost your mind and you're completely freaked out, a slogan pops up in a provocative way. In that way, they are almost effortless, annoyingly so. They pop up whether you like it or not. And when they arise for me, it's not as if I have unraveled all the sources of my multitude of neuroses, but somehow the neuroses at least get pricked a little bit. The slogans are almost like mosquitoes buzzing around your ears, frustrating your neurotic patterns.

**BUDDHADHARMA:** So it is necessary to memorize them?

**ALAN WALLACE:** Yes, the traditional practice is to memorize them. Tibetans would memorize all of these and then recite them frequently.

**KEN MCLEOD:** Alan's quite right. This is training, refining the mind. You learn the stuff, you memorize it, and you learn how to apply it skillfully to every situation and to every person in your life.

**ALAN WALLACE:** Tibetan teachers will often laugh when a person says of a particular teaching, "Oh, I know that very well. It's in a book in my library." In that case, the book can achieve enlightenment, but good luck to the person whose knowledge is left in the book, rather than in

their own heart and mind. Lojong can take the teachings out of the library and put them into your life.

**BUDDHADHARMA:** They are stored in the alaya?

**KEN MCLEOD:** The sayings become part of the way you think and the way you approach the world. I don't think one needs to be too technical about it. This is just a matter of learning something. Do it. **BD**

## Recommended Resources on Mind Training

### BOOKS

*Advice from a Spiritual Friend*,  
by Geshe Rabten and Ngawang Dhargyey, Wisdom Publications.

*Enlightened Courage: An Explanation of Atisha's Seven Point Mind Training*,  
by Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche,  
Snow Lion Publications.

*The Great Path of Awakening*,  
by Jamgön Kongtrül,  
translated by Ken McLeod,  
Shambhala Publications.

*Mind Training: The Great Collection*,  
translated and edited by Geshe Thupten Jinpa, Wisdom Publications.

*Training the Mind and Cultivating Loving-Kindness*,  
by Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche,  
Shambhala Publications.

*The Seven-Point Mind Training*,  
by B. Alan Wallace,  
Snow Lion Publications.

*Start Where You Are: A Guide to Compassionate Living*,  
by Pema Chödrön,  
Shambhala Publications.

### WEBSITES

[loj Jongmindtraining.com](http://loj Jongmindtraining.com) enables visitors to easily compare a variety of translations and commentaries and offers many other helpful learning aids.

[unfetteredmind.org](http://unfetteredmind.org) offers a map of the sayings of the seven points of mind training and a variety of related resources.

[berzinarchives.com](http://berzinarchives.com) is a comprehensive collection of teachings and source texts on many topics from the Tibetan canon, which puts the lojong teachings in context.