Traveling the Path of Compassion

His Holiness the Gyalwang Karmapa

A Commentary on
The Thirty-Seven Practices of a Bodhisattva
by Ngülchu Thogme

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THE VERSES

The Thirty-Seven Practices of a Bodhisattva

by Ngülchu Thogme Zangpo

a Namo Lokeshvaraya.
Seeing that all phenomena neither come nor go
Yet seeking only to benefit living beings,
The supreme master and the Protector Chenrezik
I honor continually with body, speech, and mind.

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

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

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

3 By leaving harmful places, afflictions gradually decline.
With no distractions, virtuous activity naturally grows.
With a clear mind, certainty in the Dharma arises.
To rely on solitude is the practice of a bodhisattva.

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

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

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

7 Captive themselves in the prison of samsara,
Whom could the worldly gods protect?
Therefore, when seeking protection, to go for refuge
To the unfailing Three Jewels is the practice of a bodhisattva.

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

9 Happiness in the three realms is like dew on a
blade of grass—
Its nature is to evaporate in an instant.
To strive for the supreme state of liberation
That never changes is the practice of a bodhisattva.

10 From time beyond time, our mothers have cared for us;
If they suffer, what good is our own happiness?
Thus, to liberate living beings beyond number,
To engender bodhichitta is the practice of a bodhisattva.

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

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

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

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

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

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

17 If people who are our equal or less
Through pride would put us down,
With respect as for a teacher
To place them above us is the practice of a bodhisattva.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

29 Knowing that deep insight fully endowed with calm abiding
Completely conquers all afflictions,
To cultivate a concentration that transcends
The four formless states is the practice of a bodhisattva.

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

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

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

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

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

35 Once they've become a habit, afflictions resist their remedies.
Alert attention, the noble being, seizes the weapon of an antidote
And slays in a flash its enemy, every affliction—
Excessive desire and all the others; such is the practice of a bodhisattva.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

❁❁། །རྒྱལ་བའི་སྲས་ཀྱི་ལག་ལེན་སྒོམ་རྩེ་བདུན་མ་བཞུགས་སོ།

❁❁། །ན་མོ་ལོ་ཀེ་ཤྭ་རྱ་ཡ།
གང་གིས་ཆོས་ཀུན་འགྲོ་འདོད་མེད་གཟིགས་ཀྱང་། །
འགྲོ་བའི་དོན་ལ་གཅིག་ཏུ་བརྩོན་མཛད་བའི། །
བླ་མ་མཆོག་དང་སྦྱན་རས་གཟིགས་མགོན་ལ། །
རྟག་ཏུ་ཞྭོ་གསུམ་གྱས་བས་ཕྱག་འཚལ་ལོ། །

ཐན་བདེའི་འབྱུང་གནས་རྫོགས་པའི་སངས་རྒྱས་རྣམས། །
དམ་ཆོས་བསྟན་བས་ལས་བྱུང་སྡེ་དེ་ཡང་ནི། །
དེ་ཡི་ལག་ལེན་ཤེས་ལ་རག་ལས་པས། །
རྒྱལ་སྲས་རྣམས་ཀྱི་ལག་ལེན་བཤད་པར་བྱ། །

དལ་འབྱོར་གྱ་ཆེན་རྟེད་དཀའ་ཐོབ་དུས་འདི་ར། །
བདག་གཞན་ལ་ཕན་བའི་མཆོ་ལས་བསྟལ་བྱའི་ཕྱིར། །
ཉིན་དང་མཚན་དུ་གཡེལ་བ་མེད་པར་ནི། །
ཉན་ཐོས་སྟོམ་པ་རྒྱལ་སྲས་ལག་ལེན་ཡིན། ། ༡

གཉེན་གྱི་ཕྱོགས་ལ་འདོད་ཆགས་རྒུ་ལྟར་གཡོ། །
དགྲ་ཡི་ཕྱོགས་ལ་ཞེ་སྡང་མེ་ལྟར་འབར། །
བླང་དོར་བརྟེད་པའི་གཏི་མུག་མྱན་ནག་ཅན། །
ཐ་ཡུལ་སྟོང་བ་རྒྱལ་སྲས་ལག་ལེན་ཡིན། ། ༢

ཡུལ་བན་སྤངས་པས་ཉོན་མོངས་རིམ་གྱིས་འགྲིབ། །
རྣམ་གཡེང་མེད་པས་དགེ་སྦྱོར་བང་ཞེས་འཕེལ། །
རིག་པ་དྲངས་པས་ཚོས་ལ་དེས་ཤེས་སྐྱེ། །
དབེན་པ་བསྟེན་པ་རྒྱལ་སྲས་ལགས་ལེན་ཡིན། ། ༣

ཡུན་རིང་འགྲོགས་པའི་མཛའ་བཤེས་སོ་སོར་འབྲལ། །
འབད་པས་བསྒྲུབས་པའི་ནོར་རྫས་ཤུལ་དུ་ལུས། །
ལུས་ཀྱི་མགོན་ཁང་རྣམ་ཤེས་མགྲོན་པོས་བོར། །
ཚེ་འདི་བློས་བཏང་རྒྱལ་སྲས་ལགས་ལེན་ཡིན། ། ༤

གང་དང་འགྲོགས་ན་དུག་གསུམ་འཕེལ་འགྱུར་ཤིང་། །
ཐོས་བསམ་བསྒོམ་པའི་བྱ་བ་ཉམས་འགྱུར་ལ། །
བྱམས་དང་སྙིང་རྗེ་མེད་པར་བསྒྱུར་བྱེད་པའི། །
གྲོགས་དན་སྦྱོང་བ་རྒྱལ་སྲས་ལགས་ལེན་ཡིན། ། ༥

གང་ཞེག་བསྟེན་ན་ཉེས་པ་ཟད་འགྱུར་ཞིང་། །
ཡོན་ཏན་ཡར་ངོའི་བླ་ལྟར་འཕེལ་འགྱུར་བའི། །
བཤེས་གཉེན་དམ་པ་རང་གི་ལུས་བས་ཀྱང་། །
གཅེས་པར་འཛིན་པ་རྒྱལ་སྲས་ལགས་ལེན་ཡིན། ། ༦

རང་ཡང་འགོར་བའི་བཙོན་རར་བཅིངས་པ་ཡི། །
འཇིག་རྟེན་ལྷ་ཡིས་སུ་ཞིག་བསྐྱབ་པར་ནུས། །
དེ་ཕྱིར་གང་ལ་སྐྱབས་ན་མི་བསྐྱབ་བའི། །
དཀོན་མཆོག་སྐྱབས་འགྲོ་རྒྱལ་སྲས་ལགས་ལེན་ཡིན། ། ༧

ཤིན་ཏུ་བཟོད་དཀའི་ངན་སོང་སྡུག་བསྔལ་རྣམས། །
སྲིག་ཅའི་ལས་ཀྱི་འབྲས་བུར་ཐུབ་པས་གསུངས། །
དེ་ཕྱིར་སྡིག་ལ་བབ་ཀྱང་སྲིག་ཅའི་ལས། །
ནམ་ཡང་མི་བྱེད་རྒྱལ་སྲས་ལགས་ལེན་ཡིན། །།

སྲིད་གསུམ་བདེ་བ་རྟ་རྩེའི་ཟིལ་པ་བཞིན། །
ཡུད་ཙམ་ཞིག་གིས་འཇིག་ཅའི་ཚོས་ཅན་ཡིན། །
ནམ་ཡང་མི་འགྱུར་ཐར་པའི་གོ་འཕང་མཆོག །
དོན་དུ་གཉེར་བ་རྒྱལ་སྲས་ལགས་ལེན་ཡིན། །།

ཐོག་མེད་དུས་ནས་བདག་ལ་བརྩེ་བ་ཅན། །
མ་རྟོགས་སྡུག་ན་རང་བདེས་ཅི་ཞིག་བྱ། །
དེ་ཕྱིར་མཐའ་ཡས་སེམས་ཅན་བསྒྲལ་བྱའི་ཕྱིར། །
བྱང་ཆུབ་སེམས་བསྐྱེད་རྒྱལ་སྲས་ལགས་ལེན་ཡིན། །།

སྡུག་བསྔལ་མ་ལུས་བདག་བདེ་འདོད་ལས་བྱུང་། །
རྩོགས་བའི་སངས་རྒྱས་གཞན་ཕན་སེམས་ལས་འཁྲུངས། །
དེ་ཕྱིར་བདག་བདེ་གཞན་ཅི་སྡུག་བསྔལ་དག །
ཡང་དག་བརྟེ་བ་རྒྱལ་སྲས་ལགས་ལེན་ཡིན། །།

སྣ་དག་འདོད་ཆེན་དབང་གིས་བདག་གི་ཞོར། །
ཐམས་ཅད་འཕྲོག་གམ་འཕྲོག་ཀྱང་འདྲག་ན་ཡང་། །
ལུས་དང་ལོངས་སྤྱོད་དུས་གསུམ་དག་བ་རྣམས། །
དེ་ལ་བསྟོ་བ་རྒྱལ་སྲས་ལགས་ལེན་ཡིན། །།

བདག་ལ་ཉེས་པ་རྒྱང་ཟད་མེད་བཞིན་དུ། །
གང་དག་བདག་གིས་མཐོ་བོ་གཅོད་བྱེད་ནའང་། །
སྙིང་རྗེའི་དབང་གིས་དེ་ཡི་སྡིག་པ་རྣམས། །
བདག་ལ་ལེན་པ་རྒྱལ་སྲས་ལག་ལེན་ཡིན། །१३

འགའ་ཞིག་བདག་ལ་མི་སྐན་སྨ་ཚོགས་པ། །
སྐྱོང་གསུམ་ཞུབ་པར་སྒྲོག་བར་བྱེད་ན་ཡང་། །
བྱམས་པའི་སེམས་ཀྱིས་སྐྱར་ཡང་དེ་ཉིད་ཀྱི། །
ཡོན་ཏན་བརྗོད་པ་རྒྱལ་སྲས་ལག་ལེན་ཡིན། །१९

འགྲོ་མང་འདུས་པའི་དབུས་སུ་འགའ་ཞིག་གིས། །
མཚང་ཆས་བླུས་ཤིང་ཚིག་བན་སྨྲ་ན་ཡང་། །
དེ་ལ་དགེ་བའི་བཤེས་ཀྱི་འདུ་ཤེས་ཀྱིས། །
གུས་པར་འདུད་པ་རྒྱལ་སྲས་ལག་ལེན་ཡིན། །१५

བདག་གི་ཟུག་བཞིན་གཅེས་པར་བསྐྱངས་པའི་མིས། །
བདག་ལ་དགྲ་བཞིན་བལྟ་བར་བྱེད་ན་ཡང་། །
ནད་ཀྱི་བཏྱབ་པའི་ཟུ་ལ་མ་བཞིན་དུ། །
ལྷག་པར་བརྩེ་བ་རྒྱལ་སྲས་ལག་ལེན་ཡིན། །१৮

རང་དང་མཉམ་པའམ་དམན་པའི་སྐྱེ་བོ་ཡིས། །
ང་རྒྱལ་དབང་གིས་བརྣས་ཐབས་བྱེད་ན་ཡང་། །
བླ་མ་བཞིན་དུ་གུས་པས་བདག་ཉིད་ཀྱི། །
སྤྱི་བོར་ལེན་པ་རྒྱལ་སྲས་ལག་ལེན་ཡིན། །१৯

འཚོ་བས་ཕོངས་ཤིང་རྟག་ཏུ་མི་ཡིས་བརྙས། །
ཚབས་ཆེན་ནད་དང་གདོན་གྱིས་བཏབ་ཀྱང་སྣར། །
འགྲོ་ཀུན་སྡིག་སྦུག་བདག་ལ་ལེན་བྱེད་ཅིང་། །
ཞུམ་པ་མེད་པ་རྒྱལ་སྲས་ལགཱ་ལེན་ཡིན། ། ༡༧

སྐན་པར་གཐས་ཤིང་འགྲོ་མང་སྡུག་བོས་བཏུབ། །
རྣམ་ཐོས་བྱ་ཡི་ནོར་འདྲ་ཐོབ་ཀྱང་ཀྱང་། །
སྤྱིད་བའི་དཔལ་འབྱོར་སྐྱིང་པོ་མེད་གཟིགས་ནས།
ཞེངས་པ་མེད་པ་རྒྱལ་སྲས་ལགཱ་ལེན་ཡིན། ། ༡༨

རང་གི་ཞེ་སྡང་དགྲ་བོ་མ་ཐུལ་ན། །
ཕྱི་རོལ་དགྲ་བོ་བཏུལ་ཞིང་འཕེལ་བར་འགྱུར། །
དེ་ཕྱིར་བྱམས་དང་སྙིང་རྗེའི་དམག་དཔུང་གིས། །
རང་རྒྱུད་འདུལ་བ་རྒྱལ་སྲས་ལགཱ་ལེན་ཡིན། ། ༡༩

འདོད་པའི་ཡོན་ཏན་ལན་ཚྭའི་རྒྱུད་འདྲ། །
ཇི་ཙམ་སྤྱད་ཀྱང་སྲེད་པ་འཕེལ་འགྱུར་བས། །
གང་ལ་ཞེན་ཆགས་སྐྱེ་བའི་དངོས་པོ་རྣམས། །
འཕྲལ་དུ་སྤོང་བ་རྒྱལ་སྲས་ལགཱ་ལེན་ཡིན། ། ༢༠

ཇི་ལྟར་སྣང་བ་འདི་དག་རང་གི་སེམས། །
སེམས་ཉིད་གདོད་ནས་སྤྲོས་པའི་མཐའ་དང་བྲལ། །
དེ་ཉིད་ཤེས་ནས་གཟུང་འཛིན་མཚན་མ་རྣམས། །
ཡིད་ལ་མི་བྱེད་རྒྱལ་སྲས་ལགཱ་ལེན་ཡིན། ། ༢༡

ཡིད་དུ་འོང་བའི་ཡུལ་དང་འཕྲད་པ་ན། །
དབྱར་གྱི་དུས་ཀྱི་འཇའ་ཚོན་ཇི་བཞིན་དུ། །
མཛེས་པར་སྣང་ཡང་བདེན་པར་མི་ལྟ་ཞིང་། །
ཞེན་ཆགས་སྤོང་བ་རྒྱལ་སྲས་ལག་ལེན་ཡིན། ། ༢༨

སྐུག་བསྔལ་སྣ་ཚོགས་རྨི་ལམ་ཟུ་ཤི་ལྟར། །
འཁྲུལ་སྣང་བདེན་པར་བཟུང་བས་ཡ་ཐང་ཆད། །
དེ་ཕྱིར་མི་མཐུན་ཆུན་དང་འཕྲད་པའི་ཚེ། །
འཁྲུལ་པར་ལྟ་བ་རྒྱལ་སྲས་ལག་ལེན་ཡིན། ། ༢༩

བྱང་ཆུབ་འདོད་པས་ལུས་ཀྱང་བཏང་དགོས་ན། །
ཕྱི་རོལ་དངོས་པོ་རྣམས་ལ་སྨྲས་ཅི་དགོས། །
དེ་ཕྱིར་ལན་དང་རྣམ་སྨིན་མི་རེ་བའི། །
སྨྲིན་པ་གཏོང་བ་རྒྱལ་སྲས་ལག་ལེན་ཡིན། ། ༣༠

ཚུལ་ཁྲིམས་མེད་པར་རང་དོན་མི་འགྲུབ་ན། །
གཞན་དོན་སྒྲུབ་པར་འདོད་པ་གད་རྨོའི་གནས། །
དེ་ཕྱིར་སྡིང་པའི་འདུན་པ་མེད་པ་ཡི། །
ཚུལ་ཁྲིམས་བསྲུང་བ་རྒྱལ་སྲས་ལག་ལེན་ཡིན། ། ༣༡

དགེ་བའི་ལོངས་སྤྱོད་འདོད་པའི་རྒྱལ་སྲས་ལ། །
གནོད་བྱེད་ཐམས་ཅད་རིན་ཆེན་གཏེར་དང་མཚུངས། །
དེ་ཕྱིར་ཀུན་ལ་ཞེ་འཐས་མེད་པ་ཡི། །
བཟོད་པ་སྒོམ་པ་རྒྱལ་སྲས་ལག་ལེན་ཡིན། ། ༣༢

རང་དོན་འབའ་ཞིག་བསྒྲུབ་པའི་ཉན་རང་ཡང་། །
མགོ་ལ་མེ་ཤོར་བཟློག་ལྟར་བརྩོན་མཐོང་ན། །
འགྲོ་ཀུན་དོན་དུ་ཡོན་ཏན་འཛུང་གནས་ཀྱི། །
འཇོག་འཕྲུས་རྩོམ་པ་རྒྱལ་སྲས་ལགས་ལེན་ཡིན། ། ༢༧

ཞི་གནས་རབ་ཏུ་ལྡན་པའི་ལྷག་མཐོང་གིས།
ཉོན་མོངས་རྣམ་པར་འཇོམས་པར་ཤེས་བྱས་ནས། །
གཟུགས་མེད་བཞི་ལས་ཡང་དག་འདས་པ་ཡི། །
བསམ་གཏན་སྒོམ་པ་རྒྱལ་སྲས་ལགས་ལེན་ཡིན། ། ༢༨

ཤེས་རབ་མེད་ན་ཐ་རོལ་ཕྱིན་ལྡུ་ཡིས། །
རྟོགས་པའི་བྱང་རྩྭ་ཐོབ་པར་མི་རྩུས་པས། །
ཐབས་དང་ལྡན་ཞིང་ལོངས་གསུམ་མི་རྟོག་པའི། །
ཤེས་རབ་སྒོམ་པ་རྒྱལ་སྲས་ལགས་ལེན་ཡིན། ། ༢༩

རང་གི་འཁྲུལ་པ་རང་གིས་མ་བརྟགས་ན། །
ཆོས་པའི་གཟུགས་ཀྱིས་ཆོས་མིན་བྱེད་སྨིད་པས། །
དེ་ཕྱིར་རྒྱུན་དུ་རང་གི་འཁྲུལ་པ་ལ། །
བརྟགས་ནས་སྤོང་བ་རྒྱལ་སྲས་ལགས་ལེན་ཡིན། ། ༣༠

ཉོན་མོངས་དབང་གིས་རྒྱལ་སྲས་གཞན་དག་གི།
ཉེས་པ་གློང་ན་བདག་ཉིད་ཉམས་འགྱུར་བས། །
ཐེག་པ་ཆེ་ལ་ཞུགས་པའི་གང་ཟག་གི །
ཉེས་པ་མི་སྨྲ་རྒྱལ་སྲས་ལགས་ལེན་ཡིན། ། ༣༡

རྣེད་བཀུར་དབང་གིས་ཁན་ཚུན་རྩོད་འགྱུར་ཞིང་། །
ཐོས་བསམ་སྒོམ་བའི་བྱ་བ་ཉམས་འགྱུར་བས། །
མཛའ་བཤེས་ཉེམ་དང་སྤྱིན་བདག་ཉེམ་རྣམས་ལ། །
ཚགས་པ་སྨོང་བ་རྒྱལ་སྲས་ལགཿལེན་ཡིན། ། ༣༣

རྒྱབ་མོའི་ཚོགཿགིས་གཞན་སེམས་འཁྲུགཿའགྱུར་ཞིང་།
རྒྱལ་བའི་སྲས་ཀྱི་སྤྱོད་རྩལ་ཉམས་འགྱུར་བས། །
དེ་ཕྱིར་གཞན་གྱི་ཡིད་དུ་མི་འོང་བའི། །
ཚོགཿརྒྱབ་སྨོང་བ་རྒྱལ་སྲས་ལགཿལེན་ཡིན། ། ༣༤

ཉོན་མོངས་གོམས་ན་གཉེན་པོས་བཟློག་དཀའ་བས། །
དྲན་ཤེས་སྐྱེས་བུས་གཉེན་པོའི་མཚོན་བཟུང་ནས།
ཚགས་སོགས་ཉོན་མོངས་དང་པོ་སྐྱེས་མ་ཐག །
འབྱུང་འཇོམས་བྱེད་པ་རྒྱལ་སྲས་ལགཿལེན་ཡིན། ། ༣༥

མདོར་ན་གང་དུ་སྐྱོད་ལམ་ཅི་བྱེད་ཀྱང་། །
རང་གི་སེམས་ཀྱི་གནས་སྐབས་ཅི་འདྲ་ཞེས། །
རྒྱུན་དུ་དྲན་དང་ཤེས་བཞིན་ལྡན་པ་ཡིས། །
གཞན་དོན་སྒྲུབ་པ་རྒྱལ་སྲས་ལགཿལེན་ཡིན། ། ༣༦

དེ་ལྟར་བཙོན་བས་བསྒྲུབ་པའི་དགེ་བ་རྣམས། །
མཐའ་ཡས་འགྲོ་བའི་སྨན་བླ་ལྟ་བས་ལུའི་ཕྱིར། །
འགོར་གསུམ་རྣམ་པར་དག་པའི་ཤེས་རབ་ཀྱིས། །
བྱང་ཆུབ་བསྟོ་བ་རྒྱལ་སྲས་ལགཿལེན་ཡིན། ། ༣༧

མདོ་རྒྱུད་བསྟན་བཅོས་རྣམས་ལས་གསུངས་པའི་དོན། །
དམ་པ་རྣམས་ཀྱི་གསུང་གི་རྗེས་འབྲང་ནས། །
རྒྱལ་སྲས་རྣམས་ཀྱི་ལག་ལེན་སྣམ་རྩུ་བདུན། །
རྒྱལ་སྲས་ལམ་ལ་སློབ་འདོད་དོན་དུ་བཀོད། །

བློ་གྲོས་དམན་ཞིང་སྐྱང་པ་རྣུང་བའི་ཕྱིར། །
མཁས་པ་དགེའི་ཚེ་སྐྱོར་མ་མཆིས་ཀྱང་། །
མདོ་དང་དམ་པའི་གསུང་ལ་བརྟེན་པའི་ཕྱིར། །
རྒྱལ་སྲས་ལག་ལེན་འཁྲུལ་མེད་ལགས་པར་བསམ། །

འོན་ཀྱང་རྒྱལ་སྲས་སྤྱོད་པ་རྣབས་ཆེན་རྣམས། །
བློ་དམན་བདག་འདྲས་གཏིང་དཔགས་ཀའ་བའི་ཕྱིར། །
འགལ་དང་མ་འབྲེལ་ལ་སོགས་ཉེས་པའི་ཚོགས། །
དམ་པ་རྣམས་ཀྱིས་བཟོད་པར་མཛད་དུ་གསོལ། །

དེ་ལས་བྱུང་བའི་དགེ་བས་འགྲོ་བ་ཀུན། །
དོན་དམ་ཀུན་རྫོབ་ཐུང་རྒྱུ་སེམས་མཆོག་གིས། །
སྤེད་དང་ཞི་བའི་མཐའ་ལ་མི་གནས་བའི། །
སྤྱན་རས་གཟིགས་མགོན་དེ་དང་མཚུངས་པར་ཤོག །

ཅེས་པ་འདི་རང་གཞན་ལ་ཕན་པའི་དོན་དུ་ལྷང་དང་རིགས་ཡབ་བའི་བརྩེ་པ་ཐོགས་མེད་ཀྱིས་དཔལ་རྩའི་རིན་ཆེན་ཕུག་ཏུ་སྦྱར་བའོ། ། ། །

CHAPTER 6

What Is Genuine Practice?

1

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

THE FIRST INSTRUCTION in *The Thirty-Seven Practices of a Bodhisattva* is about how to practice Dharma. In the beginning, we must have the desire to practice, and then we listen or study in order to develop our understanding. Yet understanding is not enough. We also need confidence, a kind of certainty, and for this, reflection is necessary. Gaining confidence in the teachings and the practice of Dharma is also not enough. We have to blend it with our way of experiencing, and to do that, meditation is necessary. Therefore to practice the Dharma, we need to do three things: study, reflect, and meditate.

The text states that since we have a very precious human body, now is the time we can practice Dharma. And to do this well, we need to know what to cultivate and what to eliminate from among all the things we usually do. Without the capacity to do certain things and abstain from others, we are not free to practice. But human beings do have this capacity and that is why a human life is the most suitable one for the practice of Dharma. We can see that some animals have very special qualities and some can do unusual things. But it may not be possible for them consciously and consistently to engage one thing and abstain from another as human beings can, so animals are not really free to practice. As human beings, we have this special chance, a special freedom, so we need to work diligently and wholeheartedly, both day and night.

It is not enough to listen to the teachings with interest and attention. Even when we are not listening to teachings, we should keep our mind on the Dharma so that whatever arises in our mind blends together with it. When we can do this, we are truly practicing. The text states that we should practice day and night without becoming distracted. How do we do that? How to practice so that our mind doesn't stray? To answer this, we need to know what constitutes the unmistaken practice of Dharma.

The Kadampas have a story about someone who wanted to practice the Dharma. He did not know how to practice, so at first he tried in a mistaken way, and only later did he find out what real practice is all about. The young man started by circumambulating a stupa. Not looking here and there, he very diligently went around and around many times. He did this earnestly for a long while. Eventually, along came a great Kadampa master, who saw him and asked, "What are you doing here?"

The young man said, "I'm practicing Dharma. I'm circumambulating the stupa."

The Kadampa master replied, "You're circumambulating.

That's very good. But wouldn't it be better to do genuine Dharma practice?" The Kadampa master then went away, leaving the young man perplexed.

He said to himself, "I thought I was practicing Dharma, but maybe this is not it. What, then, is Dharma practice?" He decided that reading scriptures must be the way. He went to the library, took out some books, and began reading. He was reading with great dedication and reciting the scriptures, when again he met the Kadampa master.

Once more the master asked, "What are you doing?"

The practitioner said, "I'm reading scriptures and practicing Dharma."

The master replied, "That's very good. But wouldn't it be better for you to engage in genuine Dharma practice?"

Now the young man was quite confused, and he did not know what to do. So he thought about it and finally exclaimed, "That's it! Meditation! It's nothing more than that." So he went to a quiet corner and sat with his legs crossed, closed his eyes, and meditated, thinking that he was doing great practice.

But again the Kadampa master appeared and asked, "What are you doing here?"

"I'm practicing Dharma and meditating."

The master said, "It is very good to do some meditation. But wouldn't it be better if you really practiced the Dharma free of error?"

Now the practitioner was totally confounded, and asked, "What is real Dharma practice, then? It's not circumambulating the stupa. It's not reading scriptures. It's not meditating. What is it?"

The Kadampa master replied, "Cut through your attachment. That is the practice of Dharma."

Like the person in this story, many people want to practice, and they take up the preliminary practices of the ngondro. If we

ask people what they did and what was the result of their practice, some will say, "Oh, it was very difficult when I did the prostrations. I sweated off a few pounds." These people will talk about how much effort they made and what difficulties and problems they had. If the result of their practice was even better, they might say, "Oh, it was great! It was so beautiful!" and they will talk about all the good feelings they had.

Then there are people who want to talk about an even higher attainment. They will say, "Oh, I had an incredible experience! I saw Vajrayogini dancing in front of me!" These people will claim to see deities and have other special experiences. As a result, we may think that these signs are the results of practice, and since they happen to some people, they will happen for us as well. But these are not really the important results.

We all know that when we practice a lot and become a bit tired or upset, we can become unbalanced, and then all sorts of seemingly positive or negative things can appear in our mind. These are not necessarily the real signs of practice. The real sign of our practice should be how we work with our afflicting emotions. For example, we could recall, "Yesterday at nine o'clock someone did something awful to me and I was about to get angry, but then I reflected on it and didn't get angry." This kind of result shows whether or not our practice has actually become the antidote to our negative feelings and thoughts. This is very important, because sometimes we do not see what Dharma practice actually is and what it is really for. We do some practice, but we take another kind of outcome as the real result. This is a mistake we should not make.

Beyond Separation

Sometimes we talk about practicing the Dharma as if it were something to be done. We see our mind as one thing and Dharma practice as another: our mind is here while Dharma

practice is over there. This is not true Dharma practice. When we talk about love and compassion, for example, we could think, "I have to generate love and compassion," as if we have to bring them in from someplace else, as if our mind as it is cannot be love at that very moment. If we want to generate bodhichitta, it is this mind that we have right now that we should allow to arise as love and compassion. Compassion is not somewhere else: it is our present mind that is compassionate. Dharma practice is not something we do while our mind is elsewhere. If that were the case, our practice could not have a transformative effect on our mind. So this separation is the problem, whether we are trying to generate love and compassion or trying to work on our negative emotions. It is the same in every case: it has to happen in our mind, which, as it arises, is inseparable from love and compassion. When this happens, we are truly practicing Dharma.

It is important to distinguish between a meditation session and the time afterward. During the session, we completely concentrate on what we are doing, whether it is analyzing something or letting our mind settle into a meditative state. There is a saying in Tibetan that flesh and bones get mixed together; in other words, we become completely one with the practice. When the session finishes and the postsession period begins, the practice no longer occupies our mind completely. Nevertheless, we try to maintain some beneficial effect from the meditative state. Before we stop the session, we should make this intention: "After I finish this session, throughout the rest of the day I will try to retain the flavor of this experience and state of mind."

In this way, although our mind is not as intently focused as it is during a session of practice, we are still living within the effect. These two phases reinforce each other. The practice session influences our whole day, and the way we live the entire

day also helps to make the actual practice session more powerful and meaningful.

How do we practice at night? Obviously, we cannot have a session and then move into postsession. If we think too much before we sleep, we might not get to sleep at all. It is said that the sleep turns into whatever our state of our mind was just before we fell asleep. If our mental state was positive, sleep becomes positive; if it was negative, sleep becomes negative. When we are lying in bed at night, before we actually fall asleep, many of us think about what we have done during the day and plan what we are going to do tomorrow. We could take this time to sort out what we did during the day. What was virtuous and what was not? When we have separated one from the other, we can make a commitment that the next day we will try to increase positive actions and decrease negative ones. With that motivation, the whole night can turn into a positive practice. If we can go to sleep in this way, our sleep will not be useless or without purpose; it will turn into a positive state of mind, and thereby the power of what is virtuous will increase.

This ends the first stanza of the thirty-seven practices, and now we need to move along. This is the twenty-first century and we should not get stuck in one place. We should go forward like a nice big car.

CHAPTER 7

Exploring the Familiar

2

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

WHEN PEOPLE ARE CLOSE to us and material things are nearby, what often appear are attachment and its opposite, aversion. When we become familiar with something that seems nice and agreeable, suited to our way of thinking, we become attached to it. If something bad happens to people or things connected with us, our mind becomes disturbed. This is easy to understand; however, it is also true that familiarity is also needed for aversion to arise. We cannot consider someone an enemy if we know nothing about her or him, because to say someone is bad, we need to know why. We count up all the negative things about someone before we see this person as our

enemy, and therefore, even to have an enemy, we need a certain familiarity. When we conclude that something is not nice or does not suit us, we see it as an enemy, setting it apart and developing an aversion to it. So both attachment and aversion stem from being familiar with their objects.

It is usually understood that familiarity happens when we are in the same place for a long time, and that is the way the Tibetan word *pha yul*, or "homeland," is used in this text. For example, I have left Tibet, but that does not mean that I have no aversion or attachment. When we talk about "homeland" as it is used here, we are not just talking about a home or a land; we are talking about a situation that serves to increase our aversion or attachment. Therefore, the main instruction is to lighten the strong attachment and aversion that weigh on our mind.

However close we may be to a friend or however much we may think we know about a person, it is possible that we will find out something—a secret, a problem, or a mistake—that we did not know before. However good this friend may seem, he or she may have concealed faults and problems. By contrast, we may see nothing good in our enemy and think this person is just a heap of faults. Yet however great our dislike may be, we could discover something we did not know. There may be some reason for being like that; for example, a situation, over which a person had no control, could have led him or her to behave badly. After all, if there was no reason for the person to be so negative, he or she would not have become our enemy.

It is better, therefore, not to look at friends or enemies from an extreme point of view—seeing a friend as completely good and an enemy as completely evil. Even though it may not be possible right now to view enemies and friends as equals, we should try to understand and react in a way that is not excessive: our friend is not one hundred percent right and our enemy not one hundred percent wrong. This is the real subject of this

second instruction. It is not about abandoning our country; our place of residence is not what primarily determines the way we react. Even Thogme Zangpo would say he is from Tibet. The instructions are not about getting rid of our home or leaving our land; they concern avoiding extremes of attachment and aversion when relating to our "friends" and "enemies."

CHAPTER 8

Letting Go of Worldly Concerns

3

By leaving harmful places, afflictions gradually decline.
With no distractions, virtuous activity naturally grows.
With a clear mind, certainty in the Dharma arises.
To rely on solitude is the practice of a bodhisattva.

SOLITUDE IS EXTREMELY IMPORTANT, especially for calm abiding or shamatha meditation. It is usually said that if we find a nice solitary place and practice well for about three to five months, we will achieve calm abiding. It is sometimes even said that if we do not attain it within this time, we will not attain it at all, but that may not be completely true. For me personally, this kind of outer solitude is over with. The most solitude that I have is my own room, and even then there is not so much.

What is real solitude? It can be divided into inner and outer solitude. Whatever our personal situation may be, whether we

live alone or with others, outer solitude is not enough, because it is something external, "out there," like a time when there is no crowd around us. But actually, outer solitude is not as important as inner solitude, since all disturbances come from within. Therefore, it is more difficult to find inner solitude. We create our own crowd of thoughts that jostle our mind. Since they are within us, these distractions are not easily banished. Though difficult to find, inner solitude is the most important thing; outer solitude alone is not enough. Please try to find real solitude.

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

It is said that whether our Dharma practice is effective or not depends on whether we can give up our concern for this life, which is often described in terms of the eight worldly dharmas, (concerns about gain and loss, pleasure and pain, fame and oblivion, praise and blame). And it is during this life that we have the opportunity to work with them. We should not procrastinate and think that we will do it later in this or another life. In a key text of the Sakya tradition, *Cutting Free of the Four Attachments,* it is said that if we are attached to this life, we are not a genuine Dharma practitioner. The true Dharma practitioner is free of clinging to this existence.

When we talk about this life's concerns (summarized by the eight worldly dharmas), we should understand why we need to work on giving them up. The reason is that they represent our attachments, the various ways we cling to all the things of this world. It does not matter whether these things seem to be nice

or unpleasant, good or bad, beneficial or harmful. It is just our clinging to them—blindly without understanding or thinking—that disturbs our mind and fills us with apprehension.

Many of us like the Dharma and want to practice it. But often we practice seriously when we are unhappy and have some problems, so actually we are just trying to make ourselves happier. When we have back pain, we apply gels and get a massage, and then we feel a bit better. Our Dharma practice is a little like this. We think that it is something to do when there is a problem, but our main attraction is to this life, to the world and all of its entertainments. We consider our worldly possessions crucial to our lives, the very source of our happiness. Even if we do not think like this consciously, in the background of our mind, our unconscious attitude holds on to all these worldly things as if our happiness truly depended on them.

When we have this attitude, our Dharma practice starts to resemble the treatment of AIDS. I've been told that when one has AIDS, the food one eats first feeds the AIDS virus and only afterward, when the virus is satiated, does it go to the parts of our body that are healthy. Something like this happens when we practice Dharma with too much attachment to the eight worldly concerns. Like the AIDS virus, they receive most of our attention, while the Dharma is second in line. Another example is that of our mind as a screen. When we project a movie on the worldly side of the screen, we get a bright array of attractive images, but the Dharma side of the screen has nothing much on it. This is how we practice Dharma if our mind is preoccupied with mundane affairs.

Death Is Not the End

When looking at our lives, we need to see a continuum, a linkage from childhood to the present and on into the future. If we did not see any continuation from this life into the next, we

would have no reason not to regard this life's interests as the most important. There are numerous discussions about whether there is an afterlife or not. Reasonable arguments can be made on both sides and no one can say definitively that it is this way or that. But one thing we have found. Suppose we have a friend or someone we love deeply and that person dies or disappears. Because of our love for this person, it is very difficult, in fact almost impossible, to feel that this person is totally gone and never present in some way.

Most people have a feeling that the loved one who has passed away is somehow still available. We talk to them in our mind, we visit the place where they were cremated or buried, and we offer flowers while praying for their well-being. We dream that he or she is still alive; some may even see or feel the presence of a person who has passed away. It is a natural thing. This feeling is not something that comes from religion. It is our love that leads us to believe that there is something naturally inborn that is not finished when we die. Whether we are thinking about ourselves or about others, we have a very strong feeling that there is something that does not end. We do not see ourselves as a candle that is finished when the last flame goes out, but as a torch, a light shining everywhere that can be transferred one bright flame to the next. I believe that this way of thinking is very important.

If we think that death is the end, we are filled with remorse and fear. But, to turn briefly to logic, if death is an end, then its cause must be birth, for we cannot have one without the other. In that case we should take birth to be as unfortunate as death and we would have to put a stop to all birthday celebrations. Seriously, however, we need not see death as the end, because death is a continuation of birth. Death is not nothingness or a blank state; it is the time when we transfer our light to another way of being. With this understanding, we can see that it is

possible to dedicate our lives toward bringing light into the world for future generations as well as for our own future. If we can understand this, then death does not become an end, nor is it something to fear.

CHAPTER 9

Negative and Positive Friends

5

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

AS WE GO THROUGH LIFE, we depend on our friends, and these friends can be positive or negative. When a friend is negative, it means that when we associate with this person, some of our more positive and subtle habitual tendencies may be changed or destroyed. But this does not mean that through this friend, we become something completely different or that we are affected in an obviously negative way.

Further, when we talk about giving up negative friends, we are not necessarily talking about individual people; we can also be pointing to influences. On a deeper level, this verse is actually about our own mind and whether it is focused on positive

things or turned toward negative ones. When our mind is involved with the three poisons (ignorance, aversion, and excessive desire), all our negative emotions expand, and their influence over us increases. Therefore, though we may try to avoid negative people, if our mind is unable to disconnect from our own poisons and inner negative influences, our practice will not go well.

6

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

This verse speaks of a "good" friend, or positive influence, which we call a "spiritual friend." The literature of Buddhism discusses the many different qualities of a spiritual friend or teacher. From the Vinaya to the Vajrayana, a variety of spiritual characteristics are recommended, and it may not be easy to find someone who has them all. In fact, it is very difficult to find such a person. Nevertheless, we have to try to find someone who has fewer faults and weaknesses and more positive qualities.

The last two lines of this stanza tell us how to relate to this person, which is to "cherish a genuine spiritual friend more than our own body." It is important, however, that we do not make a mistake here but relate to our spiritual friend in a correct way. When we are searching for the right guide, it is said that we should not choose too soon and that we should stay focused on our purpose, not accepting just anyone we meet who is called a teacher. It is not necessary to take someone as a spiritual friend immediately. Nevertheless, once we have decided to relate to someone as our teacher, we should not continue to look around. In brief, we should search first and be very clear about our decision, and only then relate to someone as our spiritual friend.

Not choosing a spiritual friend too soon means that when we start searching, we consider whether a person has all, or most of, the qualities of a teacher. This is the focus of our investigation, not whether we like the person or not. If we are preoccupied with our likes and dislikes and do not examine someone's qualifications as a spiritual friend, we will not know whether we are attracted to a good person or a bad person, to someone who has the necessary qualities or not. We could like someone who does not measure up, and without knowing it, we could be relating to an unqualified person. For that reason, we should not be too hasty in choosing a spiritual friend.

Once we have accepted someone as our spiritual friend, however, we search no more. We should already have done whatever tests were necessary to find out whether the qualities of this potential teacher were greater than his or her faults, and at that point we should have made our decision. Having done this, we stop evaluating the teacher. At this point, there is no benefit in continuing to test, because now we have to relate to that person as our guide. How do we do this? We do not think, "The Buddha said it is good to have a spiritual friend, so I must have one." Here, it is not just our head but our feelings that come into play. This connection with a teacher has to come from our heart in a living way and to spring from our deepest aspiration. We relate with our whole being to discover how our practice can benefit from this relationship. "What do I have to learn?" "What is my real interest?" It is our experience that will give us the answer, not endless examination.

It is a little like loving someone. We do not love a person because we have been told that we must love them. We love someone because it flows from our heart. In the same way, relating to the spiritual friend has to come from our heart and resonate with our deepest purpose in life. When this happens, we receive the benefits of an authentic relationship with a spiritual

friend. Otherwise, if we keep on examining, we will create a distance between ourselves and our teacher.

Further, since every human being has a positive side and a negative side, both qualities and faults, we will certainly find some faults; there is no human being who is free of every fault. If we find some faults in our new spiritual friend, we might seek out another teacher and begin anew with another chapter. Again we will go through the whole process of investigation and testing, and again we will find faults, so the process will just keep on repeating itself. We could spend our whole life trying to find the right spiritual friend and never receive any of the benefits this relationship has to offer.

CHAPTER 10

Going for Refuge

7

Captive themselves in the prison of samsara,
Whom could the worldly gods protect?
Therefore, when seeking protection, to go for refuge
To the unfailing Three Jewels is the practice of a
bodhisattva.

IN SOME COUNTRIES, there are ancient ways that are not necessarily part of an established religious or philosophical tradition, but belong to a kind of animism. If people see an impressive rock, they think there is something special there. An outstanding tree several hundred years old is thought to be extraordinary. This kind of worship relies on worldly gods, elemental spirits, and so forth, which people see as being external to themselves and at the same time very powerful. Not taking responsibility for their own future, people make prayers to these spirits or beings, putting their whole life in another's hands.

To a certain extent, these practices can have a positive effect.

In Tibet people point to a mountain and say, "This mountain is such-and-such a god." The benefit of this is that it helps to protect the environment. If the mountain is sacred, it cannot be destroyed or harmed. In this way not only is the environment protected, but many animals living on the mountain are saved as well. When I was young, we children were told that there were deities and spirits in the mountains. When we went near these special places, we felt that we had to behave ourselves and not make too much noise. We had learned a certain principle or code that was beneficial to the land where we lived.

In Buddhism, however, our approach to seeking protection is different. We can understand what protection or refuge essentially is through the example of our daily lives. We can see that for the most part our parents have protected us from the time we were born. In Buddhism, we take this a step further and say that we ourselves are our own protectors. We are the ones who give ourselves refuge, for example, from suffering. When we die, we are the ones who must make the effort to maintain clarity and awareness without depending on anyone else. However, this is quite difficult, so in the beginning we rely on others.

What should this "other" be like? It should be someone who desires to benefit us and does not deceive. The Three Jewels—the Buddha (the teacher), the Dharma (the teachings), and the Sangha (the community)—are like this: they are stable and trustworthy. In taking refuge, we enter into a reciprocal relationship: the Three Jewels give us the protection of being a refuge, and we in turn give them our trust. When we go for refuge, we think of all Three Jewels, understanding that the Buddha is like a doctor, the Dharma is like his medicine, and the Sangha is like a nurse.

In general, there are four reasons to take refuge. One is to free ourselves from samsara; the second is to free others from

their fears; the third is to develop compassion that is not attached to those who are close (friends and relatives) and so avoid feeling a separation from those who are far (enemies); and the fourth reason is that our compassion will grow and extend beyond the world that we know to all living beings. Seeing how the Buddha embodied all these qualities, we understand by implication that his teachings and those who follow them are precious, so we go for refuge to all three—the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha.

Of the Three Jewels, however, the Dharma is considered most important. Sometimes, we have strange ideas about the Buddha. We go to him for refuge and then think that he will extend his large hand down from the sky and lift us out of samsara. Actually, the Buddha came into the world, taught the path to liberation, and then passed away. Since we cannot go looking for him now, what should we do? We can rely on the Dharma he bequeathed to us and practice as much as possible this path to full awakening. The Dharma is the Buddha's representative. If we put into practice the meaning of his words, it is the same as if the Buddha were present and we could see him and hear him teaching us. This is why the Dharma is so important.

The community of practitioners (*sangha* in Sanskrit) is known in Tibetan as *gendun*, which literally means "those who aspire to virtue." In the strict sense of the term, it refers to those who abide on the bodhisattva levels. In another sense, it refers to a gathering of a minimum of four monastics, because the Buddha has stated that when four are assembled, it is as if he himself were present. However, the term can also refer to our friends on the path. Friends are important, both in the mundane world and in the world of Dharma. I have heard that people make close connections on the battlefield and have war buddies. But our goals are different. Lifetime after lifetime, we are seeking the level of full awakening, and our friends are those

who share our interests, who are involved in the deep questions of life just as we are. However, even if our excellent friends abide on bodhisattva levels, they will not benefit us if we do not know how to rely on our own deeper thoughts. Further, if we happen to have negative friends, through our kindness and intelligence, we can lead them to develop positive qualities without being affected by their faults.

Ultimately, we are our own refuge. This means that we are responsible for protecting ourselves, that no one else can do this. We ourselves must clearly understand what to take up and what to give up and then actually do it. This is the true practice of Dharma. It creates the causes and conditions for our happiness and, further, for attaining wisdom, compassion, and the ability to help others.

So we examine and then broaden our comprehension, cultivating within ourselves our own ways of being compassionate and wise. With method and wisdom in harmony, we develop the ability to work for the benefit of both ourselves and others. In this way, through our own effort we can protect ourselves and transcend suffering. As we have seen, we also depend on the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. But in the end, full awakening depends on us, because in the main, we are the ones responsible. Focused inward on our own minds, we watch carefully, learning what to discard and what to develop. This understanding is the root, the essence, of refuge.

CHAPTER 11

The Karma of Happiness and Suffering

8

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

THIS STANZA IS ABOUT KARMA, or cause and effect. If our action is positive, its result will be positive. If our action is harmful, the result will be harmful. All actions produce their corresponding results in a similar way, because karma is action and reaction. Like water flowing down or smoke floating up, it is something natural, and we cannot argue about it or change the way it functions. Therefore, we should find out which causes are beneficial and which are harmful, and act accordingly.

The lower realms have been described as deep underneath us or far away from the earth. But we can find smaller versions

of these realms in this very world, right before our eyes. It is not necessary to look below the earth or anywhere else, because war and famine are happening right now, and they are exactly what has been described as the misery of the lower realms. All of this suffering and pain comes from the terrible situations we know through personal experience or through the media. This is a fact. It is not something that I am saying to scare people or claiming to be true because it fits my way of thinking. Karma, or cause and effect, is a natural process, and it is one we should understand in depth.

For our own good, we learn what causes joy or pain and then follow this understanding into action. Practicing like this is not just for our own future benefit but also for the future of our children and all the generations to come. We must make a serious effort not to do anything that brings suffering and pain to ourselves or others, such as killing and war.

If we will refrain from negative actions—for example, the ten negative actions taught in Buddhism (killing, stealing, lying, and so forth)—we will naturally create an environment that will bring more happiness and more peace into each individual's life as well as to entire countries and then the whole world.

9

Happiness in the three realms is like dew on a
blade of grass—
Its nature is to evaporate in an instant.
To strive for the supreme state of liberation
That never changes is the practice of a bodhisattva.

Understanding the impermanence of all phenomena in the three realms (the desire realm, the form realm, and the formless realm) impels us toward liberation. It is crucial for us to understand that liberation has everything to do with our mind. External things—outer happiness and suffering or the conditions

that bring them about—cannot be easily changed. Our body and external things are always limited. For example, we could train in a sport such as the long jump, and we could get better and better at it, but there is a boundary: we cannot go beyond the physical limits of the body. The mind, however, is free from such limitations, and its power can develop continuously. If we are trying to make this life better, but limit the progress that we can make within our mind, that would be very sad, even depressing. Our perspective and our vision should be limitless so that our mind can evolve and attain liberation, which is vast and beyond measure.

10

From time beyond time, our mothers have cared for us;
If they suffer, what good is our own happiness?
Thus, to liberate living beings beyond number,
To engender bodhichitta is the practice of a bodhisattva.

Sometimes we think that if we had lots of money, we would be perfectly happy. But we all know that this is not the case. Even when we have money, happiness and satisfaction do not come so easily. Once I saw a documentary about a small girl who needed to have blood transfusions, but her family did not have the money to pay for them. So all of her school friends, who were young children, helped by selling their toys. Whatever precious ones they had—teddy bears, dolls, or stuffed animals—they sold and gave all the money to help her.

Now, children have very strong feelings about their toys. I even heard that once, when a family's house was collapsing, a child ran back in to get his favorite toy. When these schoolchildren sacrificed their own toys to collect money for their friend, it was not a small thing. Although materially it might not have amounted to much, for them it was huge. As I watched this film, I was thinking that I could give a donation. But if I

did, I would feel ashamed, for even if I gave many millions, compared to the gifts that the children gave from their heart with so much love and sacrifice, my gift would not amount to anything.

This verse underlines the importance of knowing that real satisfaction does not come from having an easy life and plenty of money. These days I have a fairly comfortable life, even peace of mind, but that alone does not give me the greatest satisfaction. Real satisfaction comes when I can do something that really helps someone else without any hope of getting something in return, such as fame or a good reputation. The chance to give people something that truly benefits them does bring the greatest satisfaction.

CHAPTER 12

Exchanging Self for Other

11

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

THIS STANZA IS ABOUT exchanging whatever we have that is positive for whatever others have that is not. Why is it true that all the suffering in the world comes from wishing happiness for ourselves alone? If we concentrate only on our own comfort and happiness, we become self-centered and arrogant, and sooner or later this leads to suffering. This much is clear to us all.

But when we say that wishing happiness for others brings us happiness, what do we mean by "other"? An obvious answer is all living beings who are not ourselves. We can also observe that life cannot possibly go on without the flow of giving and taking among all these forms of life. Our own breathing is an example of this. What we exhale is good for some other living things, and in turn what they exhale is good for us. There are numerous ways that

living beings depend on one another. We know this intellectually, but do not understand it in a practical, experiential way. And when we do not actually live our lives with this expansive sense of give and take, our practice becomes the opposite of what we think we believe; for example, it runs counter to our ideas of interdependence or benefiting others. Furthermore, our holding back from giving keeps us from receiving.

We may talk about the equality of ourselves and others, or exchanging ourselves with others, but we do not understand that this happens in everyday life. We think that it is something special or extraordinary, yet it is happening in our lives on a daily basis. We give something, and that opens the possibility of receiving: we naturally receive something when we give. This is how we live, whether it is in the business world, in our social lives, or in any other context. Giving and taking is happening all the time. Living is dependent on giving: we give and therefore we receive. This interdependence is natural; however, it takes a special effort to train our mind to know this well enough so that our understanding is clear and strong.

It is cherishing ourselves that blocks this knowing. When something good occurs, we may think, "This is happening because of me. It's all due to my talent and energy." This makes "me" way too important. This is not to say that we should not do something for ourselves or that we do not have to care for ourselves. Of course, we have to take care of ourselves, but it should not be in an extreme way—caring for ourselves alone and attaching too much importance to our own aims and desires. If we think, "I'm the top priority. They are farther down the line," that is a problem. We need to practice letting others come to the fore and letting ourselves melt into the background.

The Actual Practice

The meditation practice of sending and receiving (*tonglen*) is a

way to reverse cherishing ourselves. The practice of giving and taking puts less emphasis on our own interests and gives greater priority to the interests of others. As we meditate, we exhale, giving out everything positive we have, and inhale, taking on everything negative from others. For example, to start this practice, we might visualize others who are in difficult situations or place a photograph of people who are sick in front of us. A common way of practicing tonglen is to take in the disease, pain, or problems of a person who is in difficulty. Through our two nostrils we breathe in these negative aspects as a black cloud or a very dark and murky solution.

Some of us might think that if we are taking from someone who has a knee pain, for example, we would almost feel that pain in our knee. If we are taking from someone who has a headache or problem in their brain, we would feel a little uneasiness in our own head. This is often considered to be authentic tonglen practice. However, this is not necessarily the right kind of practice, because the exchange of our happiness for other's suffering is not about giving pain to our body or problems to ourselves. The point of the practice is to diminish clinging to ourselves. So it is not that we attack or harm our own well-being—this is not really tonglen practice.

We might say that the actual practice starts with viewing our mind as if it had two parts. One part thinks, "I want to be happy and want others to be happy, too." This is the reasonable part of our mind. But there is another part that thinks, "I'm the only one. It's just me that needs happiness and well-being." This part is all about "I," "me," and "myself alone." It is the part of our mind that we need to work on.

There are many other ways to do this visualization. One is to imagine a candle as the negative aspects of our mind, such as being self-centered. Everything negative is absorbed into the flame. Through practicing over time, this self-cherishing state of

mind is diminished and eventually eliminated. This process will not affect us in a negative way; it only affects our self-absorption, the mistaken way of grasping on to ourselves. The self-cherishing "I" that we visualized as a candle was created by our imagination, so we are not actually harming ourselves but still working on reducing our ego-fixation.

Furthermore, according to traditional logic, this self-centered, autonomous "I" does not truly exist, because an "I" can only exist in relationship to something else, for example, another person or an object, so this "I" is not independent and unitary. It is impossible for an isolated "I" to truly exist; it is only present in dependence on something else.

Through this practice of exchange, we come to see that self and other are equal; our interest and that of others are equal. We make a strong aspiration prayer that others receive everything positive that we have, whatever it may be—long life, riches, power, and so forth. We wish all of this for others and feel that they receive it. This kind of meditative training benefits both ourselves and others. It is important to understand that it is not the case that our positive qualities, such as the length of our life or our positive energy, are carried over like some object and given to others, nor are these positive qualities ever exhausted, because they belong to who we truly are.

Wishing something good for others and making dedications for their benefit come from a powerful wish that is based on a positive motivation. This is why others might receive something while we do not lose anything. Indeed, there are many reasons to believe that others do get some benefit out of this, and that is why tonglen is a very important practice. However, the main reason for this practice is to reduce our own selfish concerns and to increase our intention to wish others well. This is the real focus of the practice.

CHAPTER 13

Dealing with Adversity

12

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

IF ALL OUR POSSESSIONS WERE STOLEN, we would naturally call the police. Nothing else would come to mind. But there is another way to deal with it, as this story about a robbery in Tibet shows. It comes from Lhathok, the area of my home in Eastern Tibet.

A man from Lhathok was traveling in his home territory when robbers fell upon him and stole everything he had, including his horse. There was nothing left but a cup with a silver lining, which he kept in his inner pouch. As the robbers were about to leave, the man took out this cup and said to the robbers, "Precious robbers please take this also. I know that we people from Lhathok are always traveling and you might need a cup

on the road." So he gave it to them, even though they had overlooked it at first.

The point here is that we usually think we own the things we have. It is true that they are our possessions but eventually they go here and there. Things are passed around, so clinging to our possessions does not make sense. If we place too much importance on possessions and people want to rob us, we could fight them and in the process lose not only our possessions but also our very life.

We should know what has a greater value. We should not risk our lives for something, such as the various things we have accumulated, that is not as significant as life itself. Possessions are only relatively important. The point here is that, even if we lose our possessions, we should not be too affected by it and dedicate them to the people who have taken them away. This is the practice of a bodhisattva.

13

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

This is extremely difficult to do, so let us leave this practice to very highly realized beings. There is no need to explain it.

14

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

This is also difficult. Being insulted and slandered throughout a billion worlds would probably be too hard for us to handle. Even when someone right in front of us says bad things about us, our expression changes and our face turns red. Yet, if a per-

son were to say something bad about us while they were not in our presence, we would not hear it and therefore not be bothered by these words. So it is best not to listen to insults. If we cannot avoid it and someone puts us down right to our face, it is better to turn our attention elsewhere and not heed what they say. If we pay attention to them, we could become angry, and once anger arises it is very difficult to subdue. Therefore, the best thing for beginners is to avoid listening to negative talk about themselves. If we do hear something unpleasant, we can ignore it and concentrate on something else.

15

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

If a person is straightforward and says something true that we do not like to hear, we could become quite upset. Later, however, when we think it over and look honestly at our mind, we realize that he or she was actually right and we did make a mistake. When that happens, we can revise our stance and shift our way of thinking. We do not necessarily take that person as a teacher, but we can learn from him or her and find some useful instruction in what was said.

16

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

It is very difficult when someone we have trusted completely

turns on us. It is one of the most painful things that can happen to anyone. However, as we discussed earlier, it is always possible that hidden, in even the people closest to us are secrets or feelings that we do not know about. There may be some reason the person changed, some justification for their action. We do not know, but we should seek an explanation, because people have their own reasons for acting as they do.

17

If people who are our equal or less
Through pride would put us down,
With respect as for a teacher
To place them above us is the practice of a bodhisattva.

This is not to say that we have to bear any insult like a cow. No matter how much they are put down, cows cannot reply or do anything else, so they do not react. We do not have to be passive like that. What this stanza means is that when someone insults us, we should not react with anger. If we are overpowered by our negative emotions, we become unbalanced and lose control, and this should not happen. It is better to be stable and centered within ourselves so that we can respond in a good way, based on who we actually are. Some people with a mild nature have a way of saying "I'm sorry" that is nicely done, and other people have a more direct way of talking. Whatever our character may be, we do not have to keep on enduring insults and doing nothing at all. We can respond to an insult without losing our balance or letting negative emotions take over.

Of course, we have to respect others, but before we show someone the same respect that we would give to a teacher, we should respect ourselves. If we do not regard ourselves as worthwhile, if we put ourselves down, we will not be able to value and respect others. Therefore, we begin by showing respect to ourselves, and then we will be able to do the same for others.

18

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

This stanza is about not getting discouraged even if we are very poor and have no possessions; even if people scorn us and we are sick; and even if terrible things happen to us all at once. We can relate to these situations by knowing that Dharma practitioners need experiences, even when they are all negative, because they give us knowledge. Through experience we learn what to do and not to do, as well as what behavior needs improvement for the next time. Planning for our future is filtered through the experience we have gained.

Whatever our negative situation may be, we need to take a long-term view and sustain our hope with an aspiration, which could be a goal that we seek or a way that we want to be. Our aspiration is like a spy keeping an eye out for opportunities. In the olden days, a spy would sit on a high mountain and survey everything that was happening. Looking down the road into the future and maintaining our hope is like that watcher. When an opportunity arises that fits our plan, we can call on our experience to take advantage of it. When experience and hope join together, whatever difficult, negative, or tragic situations occur in our life, we can always pull ourselves together and start anew.

19

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

Sometimes we can become arrogant, so here is an example of what we could do about it. Suppose there is a big ocean that has a whole variety of things in it and a small child is playing at the edge of the water. One day the child finds some colorful pebbles. Another day it finds different kinds of shells. On still another day it comes upon some precious stones. Whatever the child finds makes it happy—pebble, shell, or gem. It is very excited about all its discoveries, but nonetheless the child does not think that it has found all the riches in the whole ocean.

This is a good way to be, for even though we may have and know a lot, we should not think, "I have everything." "I know everything." Obviously, this is not the case. If we know something and become too proud of it, we become arrogant and that always closes doors and blocks opportunities. Furthermore, even when we know something and we know that we know it, we will find that when we discuss it with others, they might have another opinion. They might have an unusual way of describing something or a different way of presenting it, and we can learn from these differences. We will have a new experience and expand our understanding.

Although the text says that we should not be arrogant, that does not mean that we have to be timid. If we do not know, we can say that we do not know and do so with a sense of confidence.

CHAPTER 14

Taming Our Mind

20

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

OUR ANGER IS OUR ACTUAL ENEMY. It is an obstacle that cuts us off from the cause of higher states of rebirth and the definitive excellence that is liberation. If we do not tame it, then outer enemies will simply multiply. They will increase to the same extent that we try to overpower them. And they could present a danger to our lives and to our ability to keep any of the three sets of vows (individual liberation, bodhisattva, and tantric) we may have taken.

Since we are the ones who make one another into enemies, they can proliferate without limit. By creating such projections, we are engaging in actions that are detrimental. Why is this so? Because there is not one living being who has not been our

mother or father, and therefore they should all be the objects of our compassion. On the other hand, there is not one living being who has not been our enemy. In this way, all living beings are equally our friends and enemies, so being attached to some and feeling hatred for others makes no sense. Through a mind that sees this equality, we should tame the enemy of our own anger with an army of great compassion. This is the practice of a true bodhisattva.

21

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

Pleasurable objects are usually listed as falling into five different categories: attractive forms, pleasant sounds, fragrant smells, delicious tastes, and pleasing objects of touch. Like salty water, they cannot satisfy our desires. To the extent that we enjoy these objects, to that same extent will we be tormented by our desiring. Not only are we not satisfied, but our desires increase. For example, if someone suffering from thirst drinks salt water, their thirst will not be quenched and, further, they will want to drink even more. This is how craving expands.

The verse continues: "to give up instantly everything that arouses attachment...." Giving up attachment to our enjoyment of pleasurable objects can be illustrated with the following example. As we move through our daily lives, we experience a variety of objects that engage our senses. When we are focused on one of these and feel attachment to it, we should quickly abandon it. Why so? Because eliminating any object that causes afflictions to appear is an effective way of suppressing these negative emotions. In my own experience, for example, when I receive something that I like very much, I immediately try to

pass it on to someone else. Holding on to things we strongly desire will just cause problems.

22

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

If, with valid reasoning, we were to look for an inherent nature in the whole range of phenomena that appear as objects for our sensory experience, we would not find a single one that has its own essence. This is because these objects are all imputed by our conceptual mind, or, following the first line of the verse, we could say these objects are just an appearance of our mind. And the mind itself, the true nature of mind, is "forever free of fabrications." Analyzing with reasonings found in the Abhidharma or the Mahayana, we will find that no phenomenon can be established as having an essence through any kind of mental construct or fabrication. These are often summarized into what are called "the four extremes": arising from itself, arising from something other, arising from a combination of the two, or arising from neither.

By engaging in such an analysis, we can look into how we grasp on to the attributes, or characteristics, of a subject and an object. Over time, we will come to see that the outer apprehended object and the inner apprehending mind are the result of habitual patterns that cling to phenomena as real. If we can bring to an end the mental activity, or conceptualizing, that results from these habitual patterns, we can rest in meditative concentration with a one-pointed focus on reality itself. This is the profound practice of a bodhisattva.

23

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

When a beautiful and pleasing form is experienced by ordinary individuals, it appears differently to each one. Further, what is pleasing and what is not pleasing arise in connection with one another: it is not possible for them to arise separately. When a desired object appears along with its characteristics and habitual patterns, the danger arises that in becoming attached to it, we will create a state of mind convinced of something that is not true: we think that the object is real. To curb this tendency, we should realize that just like a rainbow in summer, these appearing objects have no essence.

When we speak of a summer rainbow, almost anyone will know that it is like an illusion and not truly existent. As we have seen in looking at dependent arising, when something pleasant appears to our mind, what is unpleasant is not far away. However, it is especially the case that when something attractive starts to appear, we direct powerful thoughts toward it and take an illusory phenomenon to be real. Therefore, bodhisattvas practice giving up attachment.

24

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

There are times we are so completely absorbed in a pleasant object that if something unpleasant comes along, we do not

experience that unpleasantness or any negative feeling. More commonly, however, due to our habitual patterns, anger and other negative emotions do arise, and then we need to rely on a variety of antidotes. By the mere fact of being alive, we will experience suffering, such as not getting what we want and getting what we do not want. When we meet up with suffering, we need to orient ourselves in a direct and useful way. In brief, when suffering arises, this is as illusory as a beloved child dying in a dream. From time immemorial, habitual patterns that take things to be real have surfaced in our mind, and these confused appearances are arising without a break. Since all the appearances we meet are like this, the potential for suffering is unlimited.

It is this clinging to things that creates an ongoing current of suffering, which, however, is not necessary. It arises due to the fact that although we perceive separate appearances, these perceptions happen so swiftly that they seem to be flowing together in a single stream, and this we take to be truly existent. However, if we turn and look from the perspective of the appearance itself, we can see that it is not truly established; it is neither stable nor enduring. Therefore, when our mind reaches out and grasps things as real, we are the ones who are creating the conditions for our own suffering. For all these good reasons, to see all appearances as illusion-like, not taking them to be real, is the practice of a bodhisattva.

CHAPTER 15

The Six Perfections

25

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

THE NEXT STANZAS DESCRIBE the six perfections, or the six paramitas, the first of which is generosity. Many religions and spiritual paths agree on the importance of giving, because we can all see that this benefits others directly. For Buddhism, in particular, being generous is important because it directly counteracts our attachments.

When we help others, we should do so with an intelligence that is able to analyze the situation. True generosity requires some wisdom—a clear understanding of ourselves who are giving, what we are giving, and to whom we are giving. If we give using our intelligence, then generosity benefits both ourselves

and others. We should not give just for the sake of giving or from an old habit. Further, in the process of giving, we should not become distracted, for losing our focus diminishes the scope and effect of our activity. When we are generous and wise, our giving benefits others and also helps us to deepen our practice as we move along the path.

26

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

When misunderstood, the perfections can have a darker side, which is metaphorically called a "demon." The downside of the perfection of discipline is called "the demon of austerity"—taking on discipline as a hardship and making it into a struggle. Done right, discipline is taken on joyfully and with a clear understanding of why engaging in it is good. For example, many people nowadays have given up eating meat. Why would we do that? We should not become vegetarian just because someone says we should, or because the Buddha taught that we should not eat meat, or because it is the custom where we live, or because giving up meat would give us a good reputation. If we give up eating meat for these reasons, it might be better not to do it at all, because our decision is not sincerely motivated.

In the beginning, we have a certain feeling about not eating meat. Then we can ask ourselves questions, such as what are the real benefits? After careful consideration, we become certain that this is the right thing to do. Our answer has to come from within, inspired by real conviction, so that when we do give up eating meat, it does not become a hardship or a struggle but something we do with joy and intelligence. It is the same with

any discipline in the Vinaya, the Mahayana, or the Vajrayana. Whatever we give up or whatever we do, we should first feel a connection to the practice and then be very clear why we are doing this and not something else. When we act this way, our discipline becomes very inspiring.

27

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

The third perfection is patience, which also has an obstacle, called "the demon of too much struggling" or "too much forbearance." Patience, like generosity and discipline, should not be too extreme, but should arise freely through our understanding. When we have love and compassion, we naturally understand why the afflictions occur and do not struggle to be patient.

For example, when sick, some people keep on struggling with the illness and refuse to take any treatment. That is excessive forbearance. In general, we should not put up with everything or do everything that anyone asks us to do. Enduring too much has the drawback of giving others the opportunity to do negative things. We could also be too patient with our own afflictions. Excessive forbearance is also a problem because we must clearly know the reasons for what we are doing and not just blindly continue without reflection, especially if it concerns something we find objectionable. Otherwise, if without reason a person told us to eat something obnoxious, we would do it without thinking. It might not be easy fo us, but we can immediately say, "I will not do that." This is not a problem but the proper way of practicing patience. It must be a response that comes from deep within.

28

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

The demon of diligence is struggling or pushing too hard. This is a problem, for true diligence means taking joy in doing positive things. Whatever practices we do should be done in a spontaneous and natural way. Essentially, meditation practice is about entering into the nature of suchness. It is not about beating ourselves up and forcing ourselves to do something. There is no need to strain and think, "I don't want to do this, but I have to." It should be a natural reaction, as if a fire were burning on our head. (This example in the verse refers to practitioners from the Foundational Vehicle, who are thought to have the more limited aim of freeing only themselves from samsara.) If our hair catches fire, we do not say, "I should probably get rid of this fire, but I don't want to." Nor do we turn it over in our minds, consult our teachers, conduct research, or send off a stream of letters. Without thinking, we immediately jump up and extinguish the fire effortlessly. True diligence happens with a lively interest and joyful spontaneity. We do something because we see clearly that it is important and essential.

A while ago, the BBC broadcast a program about birth, old age, sickness, and death. Watching it, I saw many people who were suffering and thought how much they could be helped by Dharma if they really understood it. When I see millions of people suffering, I feel completely energized to do something about it. It is not a struggle or a matter of coercing myself to do something I don't want to. Diligence is really about our motivation: we feel totally absorbed and joyful in wanting to do something.

There is a lot to say, but time flies by. It is like the poet who

was inspired and writing furiously. He had to break for lunch, but he was so immersed in his poetry that he continued to write while eating his bread. Later he discovered that he had been dunking his bread in the ink.

29

Knowing that deep insight fully endowed with calm abiding
Completely conquers all afflictions,
To cultivate a concentration that transcends
The four formless states is the practice of a bodhisattva.

Meditation, the fifth perfection, has a demon called "attachment to experience." It is not easy to fully understand meditative experience. The verse refers to formless states of meditation, which are categorized as follows: limitless space, limitless consciousness, nothing whatsoever, and neither existence nor nonexistence. Much has been written about these, but they lie outside the main point here. What we need to know is that when we meditate, all sorts of experiences will come, both good and not so good. These experiences, however, are not important. Here, the key is the extent to which our meditation serves as an antidote to our afflictions. How many obscurations and how many afflictions have been subdued or cleared away? This is the true test of meditation, not what wonderful or special experiences we might have. In fact, if we become attached to these experiences, that is a problem.

30

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

Wisdom is the sixth perfection and its demon is the obstacle called "the demon of increasing poison." This obstacle is very serious, even monstrous, like an immense beast with nine heads. It comes up after studying, reflecting, and analyzing, when we reach a certain conceptual understanding and our afflictions are not too active. We find something our conceptualizing mind can seize upon and take pride in. One way our mind does this is through "concepts in the three domains," which relate to the three aspects of any activity: a subject, an object, and an action. When our mind conceptualizes like this in a very solid and concrete manner, our view becomes extreme. We are convinced that we have found the "right" way and we are proud of it. This process resembles how the rigid views of people caught in the mundane world are developed. Nowadays, these stubborn positions are a great problem. And they also contradict progress as it is understood in the Dharma: As we move along the path, inferior views are gradually surpassed by superior ones, until finally there is no view at all, nothing to be seized upon. Therefore, we should not go to an extreme and cling to one position as the truth. Our view of how things are is not something to grasp with a tight fist.

We might think, "I'm a Buddhist, and my Buddhism is the best. I can look down on others." When our intelligence takes this form, instead of reducing aversion and attachment, it increases them. We should not relate to others in such a way that we put them down and raise ourselves up; rather, we focus on developing our wisdom through listening, reflecting, and meditating. If it causes our afflictions to increase, wisdom turns into a demon. When our view or practice harms others, they run contrary to Buddhist teachings, for their very basis is to cherish all living beings in our heart. Developing wisdom through listening, reflecting, and meditating is central to Buddhism, but more important are living beings.

CHAPTER 16

Avoiding Pitfalls

31

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

THIS STANZA ADDRESSES those of us who call ourselves Dharma practitioners. What is the definition of practice? Taming our mind. Those of us who are supposed to be practicing Dharma should carefully examine ourselves—our body, speech, and mind—and become mindful of what we are doing. Otherwise, it is quite possible that although we have the form of a practitioner, we are not really practicing Dharma.

Watching carefully to find our own faults, however, does not mean that we have to look down on ourselves or feel that we are worse than others. We do not have to throw ourselves into the river. This is too extreme. What it does mean is that practicing the Dharma is like learning how to dance. When we are

learning how to move our arms and legs, we can practice in a room full of mirrors. Seeing our reflection directly, we observe how we are doing even before someone else tells us what is wrong. We all have faults—that is natural and not surprising. We also know how to improve, because we know, or can learn, what to correct and change. Further, we realize that what we are doing is for our own benefit. So if we find some faults or mistakes that we need to change, there is nothing wrong with us; these are just what we need to work on. This is what is meant by "taming our mind."

Then we might ask, "How do I examine my confusion?" Among the many different ways of investigating, there is one we do all the time: We are always on the lookout for the faults of others—what problems they have or what is wrong with what they do or think. Our mind is turned outward to judge others and not inward to see what we ourselves are doing wrong or what problems we might have. In this case, everything is reversed. For the wrong reasons, we think others are more important, and further, we do not consider ourselves to be the center of concern when we should. We should be looking inward at ourselves to see what to give up and what to change. If we do not try to do this, improving ourselves will be a distant dream.

Most important is to be mindful of what transpires within us. For example, when we do not want anything bad to happen to us, we are very cautious in what we do. We are careful to avoid even a pinprick. In the same way, when we are working with our mind, we should be alert and conscientious, examining carefully what we are doing. Gradually, we will come to understand how we are and who we are, and with this knowledge as a basis, we can look within and see what is confused or mistaken and what is not.

One simple way to examine ourselves is to look at photographs or videos that show how we talk and behave. Sometimes,

before watching a video of myself speaking, I would feel that I had said something really significant. But later, when I actually saw the film, I was a little ashamed, because what it showed was not exactly what I had imagined. When we watch ourselves like this, we can find the things that need improvement. In sum, whether we are looking inward at our mind or outward at a reflection, we should observe ourselves with clear attention.

32

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

This instruction is not limited to bodhisattvas. We should not say bad things about anyone, whether or not they are bodhisattvas. It is not the same thing, however, if we know that pointing out someone's mistakes will help them to change. Generally speaking, since it is not easy to change another person, we should avoid criticism. Other people do not like to hear it and, further, laying out their faults will create problems and troubles for us. We who are supposed to be practicing the Dharma should be trying to do whatever brings happiness to ourselves and others. Since faultfinding does not bring any benefit, we should carefully avoid it.

In my own case, people tell me negative things about others and describe numerous faults. In a way, this is normal and not surprising. However, enumerating faults is not an effective way to bring about change. Even if we point out someone's faults all the time, it will rarely alter the person or make anything better. If we really want to help someone, perhaps we can say something once in a pleasant way so that the person can readily understand, "Oh yes, this is something I need to

change." However, it is better not to repeat our comments, because if we keep mentioning faults, not only will it not truly help, it will disturb others to no good effect. Therefore not mentioning the faults of others is the practice of bodhisattvas.

33

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

All we really need to do for practice is to study, reflect, and meditate. However, these days it is common in the East and West that desire for honor and gain creates problems. Imitation monks, phony lamas, fake tulkus, and false gods turn up, and because of this, it is difficult to find the right kind of study, reflection, and meditation. It is very important for everyone to be careful about this and try to see clearly what is genuine and what is false. If someone says, "I am a lama," or "I am a tulku," or "I am a god," we do not have to immediately follow them. First, investigate to see whether they are genuine or not and whether we should make a connection with them. It is important to use our critical faculties along with giving up attachments.

34

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

This instruction is similar to what was said in stanza 32. Sometimes harsh words must be said in order to help someone, but generally when we speak harshly, it is because we are angry, and

it does not help. It is difficult to speak harsh words with love and compassion. In these situations, we can take ourselves as an example. Putting ourselves in someone else's place, we ask, "If someone said these words to me in that way, how would I feel?" When we truly think of others, we will find some part of them that resembles us, because every one of us experiences pleasure and pain. Before we act or speak, thinking of others as similar to us is quite useful.

35

Once they've become a habit, afflictions resist their remedies.
Alert attention, the noble being, seizes the weapon of an antidote
And slays in a flash its enemy, every affliction—
Excessive desire and all the others; such is the practice of a bodhisattva.

In general, we may find it easy to read these verses, but not so easy to follow their instructions. Cutting through afflictions is difficult, especially once they have come up, because we are so habituated to them. What we can do is recognize that anger is about to arise and then take action. We can use a method or remedy that will deter the anger from becoming a full-blown negative emotion.

One way I have found effective is to recall a particular lama whom I trust and like and whose speech is pleasing. For example, one lama may have taught me why anger or aversion undermines practice and how negative its effects are, so I bring to mind that lama's advice: "Don't be influenced by the afflictions. Be careful!"

Whenever I sense that anger is about to arise, I just remember that lama and his instructions. When I do this, it helps me not to be overpowered by the negative emotion. My closeness to

that lama and my respect for him makes me think, "This is not right. It goes against my lama's words." Another way of using this method is to remember a book we really like that deals with the afflictions, and bring these passages to mind. Then, like a sound becoming ever louder, when we sense that an affliction is on the rise, we can turn the volume back down before it fully manifests. This, too, can be useful.

CHAPTER 17

Key Points and Dedication

36

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

WHEN WE TALK about examining our actions, it does not mean that we have to examine ourselves nonstop, twenty-four hours a day. We could lighten up. For example, when we watch very long movies or work on a computer, we are told not to look at the screen continuously. After a while, it will help our eyes if we get up and look around a little bit, to gaze at the greenery, for example. We give our eyes a break. Similarly, although we should thoroughly examine our mind, after a while, we may need to take a break, otherwise we become too tired. To look after ourselves means that we should care for ourselves. Just as we look after our body, we should also look after our mind. Our mind is key and usually we are quite fond of it, so we should take good care of it.

We are advised to benefit others, and we may want to do something for them, but that could be difficult if we do not know what to do. It may even seem that there is nothing we can do. As we move around in our lives, people appear isolated, sitting in their own space, or maybe they seem too solemn. We just want to give them something sweet or helpful, but that does not seem to be the appropriate thing to do. So there are times when we feel frustrated, because there is no way we can help that feels right. When this happens, what we can do is just a small action right where we are, such as picking up a little garbage and putting it in the place where it belongs. Even if we do that and nothing else, we can say, "I've done something good." It is not a big deal, but it is a start.

This is exactly how we should accumulate merit. We cannot do something great all at once. We may want to, but it is quite difficult. This is why it is said that we accumulate merit ounce by ounce—just like that, little by little. We accomplish something small that makes our mind happy and then we feel that we could do a little more. In this way, the small, positive things we do will accumulate over time.

37

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

This dedication is the last of the thirty-seven practices of a bodhisattva. It is an excellent one, too, for it gathers all the merit accumulated from these practices and dedicates it to all living beings throughout space that they may attain happiness and be free of suffering.

[redacted]

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

These thirty-seven verses interweave the key points of practice with explanations of their meaning. They are given for those on the bodhisattva path to practice and blend with their experience. The text is based on several sources that provide the basis for a bodhisattva's training: practices found in the sutras of the Hinayana and Mahayana taught by our guide, the perfect Buddha; the four tantras of the Vajrayana; and all the treatises that elucidate the systems of thought in these texts. Also connected to the practice of a bodhisattva are the oral instructions of the previous genuine masters and the advice of spiritual friends. All of these were put into thirty-seven verses for the sake of those fortunate ones who wish to study and engage in the training of a bodhisattva.

[redacted]

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

The author Thogme Zangpo claims that his wisdom is inferior and that his practice has produced only a few positive qualities. Since these verses are not like the major treatises from India and Tibet based on reasonings, this text has none of the perfect artistry that weaves together words with their meaning and pleases the experts. Nevertheless, the meaning of the verses and the stages of practice are presented just as they are in the sutras,

tantras, and treatises. The explanations are given following the writings and oral instructions transmitted from the Buddha down to Thogme Zangpo's own root lama; he has not added anything of his own. Therefore, he trusts that these practices of a bodhisattva are trustworthy and free of confusion.

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

The vast activity of a bodhisattva is so profound that it is difficult to fathom, and so it belongs to the realm experienced by advanced bodhisattvas. For those of us with inferior intellects, such as the author claims to have, it is quite impossible to measure. Alleging that he is not an expert, Thogme Zangpo notes that defects could appear in his writing, such as contradictions or a lack of coherence between what was said earlier and later. Recognizing these faults, he confesses his mistakes in the presence of bodhisattvas and those with the wisdom eye of Dharma, supplicating them to have patience with him.

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

With this verse, the bodhisattva Ngülchu Thogme Zangpo brings to a close his treatise on the practices of a bodhisattva, presented in thirty-seven verses that are easy to understand. All the utterly pure virtue, whether great or small, that has arisen from com-

posing this text he dedicates so that all living beings, equal to the extent of space, through the power of great compassion do not remain in the extreme of peace, and through the power of great wisdom do not remain in the extreme of existence. He prays that freed in this way from the delusions of nirvana and samsara, all living beings become equal to Chenrezik, who resides in neither of these two extremes. With this all-embracing aspiration, Thogme Zangpo concludes his text on the practices of a bodhisattva.