

37 BODHISATTAVA PRACTICES

NAMO LOKITESHVARA - I pay homage to Lokiteshvara, the Lord of Compassion.

I always pay homage with my three doors,
To the supreme guru and Avalokiteswara,
Who although seeing all phenomena have no coming and going,
Still wholeheartedly serve all migrating beings.

Buddhas, who are the source of benefit and happiness,
Arose from the practice of holy Dharma.
Moreover since it is dependent on the knowledge of Dharma practice,
I shall explain the Bodhisattva practices.

1. This time when one has encountered this great ship of opportunity and gifts, so rare to find,
It is the practice of the Bodhisattva to listen, think and meditate
Day and night without distraction,
To free the self and others from the ocean of Samsara.
2. In your homeland, attachment towards friends and relatives flows like water,
Animosity towards enemies flares up like fire,
And there is the darkness of ignorance that makes you forget what to adopt
and what to abandon.
Therefore, relinquishing one's homeland is a Bodhisattva practice.
3. By abandoning the bad place your afflictions will gradually diminish,
Due to the lack of distraction your virtuous activities naturally increase,
Because of mental clarity, your conviction in Dharma grows.
Hence, seeking seclusion is a Bodhisattva practice.

4. Old friends with long association get separated;
Material wealth amassed with much hardship remains behind.
The guesthouse-like body is left by the guest consciousness:
Relinquishing this life is a Bodhisattva practice.
5. It is a practice of a Bodhisattva to abandon bad friends
In whose association one's three poisons increase.
The activities of listening, contemplation and meditation decline,
You are changed into a person without kindness and compassion.
6. It is the practice of a Bodhisattva
To cherish a noble or sublime spiritual friend more than one's own body.
By relying on which your faults cease,
And your good qualities increase like a waxing moon.
7. The worldly gods who are themselves imprisoned in Samsara –
How can they protect anyone else?
Hence, relying on the Three Jewels which are infallible
And taking refuge in them is a Bodhisattva practice.
8. The Buddha said the extremely unbearable sufferings in the lower realms
Are the results of negative karma.
Therefore, even at the cost of one's own life,
Not to commit any negative karma is a Bodhisattva practice.
9. The pleasures of the three worlds are like dew drops on blades of grass,
Subject to instant disintegration.
What is unchanging is the supreme state of Nirvana,
Thence, to aspire to this is a Bodhisattva practice.
10. The mothers who have been kind to me since beginningless time –
If they suffer, then what is the use of my happiness?
So, in order to liberate infinite sentient beings
Generating Bodhicitta is a practice of Bodhisattvas.

11. All suffering results from a craving for personal happiness.
The completely enlightened state is born from the wish to help others.
So, perfect exchange of one's happiness with others' sufferings
Is a practice of Bodhisattvas.

12. Even if someone due to greed
Either steals all your possessions or instigates others to do so,
Dedicating one's body, wealth and all the virtues of the three times to that
person
Is a Bodhisattva practice.

13. While one does not have even the slightest fault
If someone were to cut one's head off,
Still, receiving upon oneself their negative deeds out of compassion
Is a Bodhisattva practice.

14. Even if some people were to say all kinds of unpleasant things about you
And announce them throughout three thousands realms –
To praise the person in return with loving kindness
Is a practice of Bodhisattvas.

15. Amidst a large gathering of people
If someone finds out your faults and uses harsh words –
Even then to regard that person as your spiritual friend and show respect
Is a Bodhisattva practice.

16. Even if a person whom you have nurtured like your own child
Sees you as his enemy,
Showing special love like a mother to her sick child
Is a practice of Bodhisattvas.

17. If a person who is equal to you or beneath you
Out of arrogance tries to bully you,
Taking him with respect to the crown of one's head like a lama (spiritual teacher)
Is a practice of Bodhisattvas.
18. Even if you are deprived of resources, constantly looked down upon by others,
Suffering from severe disease and haunted by evil spirits,
To take upon oneself all the negative deeds and sufferings of all beings
without being discouraged
Is a Bodhisattva practice.
19. You may be highly popular, many people bowing down to you in respect,
And your material fortunes may be equal to the god of wealth.
Realising that worldly fortunes have no substance
And thus remaining free of arrogance is a Bodhisattva practice.
20. Unless you destroy the internal enemy, hatred,
Your external enemies will increase even as you destroy them.
Therefore, controlling your own mind with the forces of kindness and compassion
Is a Bodhisattva practice.
21. Sensual objects are like salty water:
The more you enjoy them, the more craving increases.
Hence, abandoning immediately those things towards which you develop craving and attachment
Is a Bodhisattva practice.
22. The way things appear are just perceptions of the mind.
The mind itself is, from beginningless time, free of fabrications.
Understanding this and not mentally clinging to the subject and object traces
Is a Bodhisattva practice.

23. When one encounters attractive objects
Even though they appear beautiful, like a colourful rainbow in the summer,
Seeing them as not truly existing and abandoning attachment
Is a Bodhisattva practice.
24. All kinds of sufferings are similar to the death of a child in a dream:
Grasping the mistaken perceptions as true exhausts you.
Hence, when you encounter unfavourable conditions
Seeing them as misperceptions is a Bodhisattva practice.
25. Those desiring enlightenment have to give up even their bodies
Hence, what need is there to talk about material wealth?
So, engaging in generosity without expecting any reward or return
Is a practice of Bodhisattvas.
26. In the absence of morality even one's own interests will not be fulfilled
So desiring to serve others' interests is laughable.
Therefore, observing moral ethics without any worldly aspiration
Is a Bodhisattva practice.
27. To a Bodhisattva desiring a wealth of virtues
All obstructing forces are similar to treasures of precious jewels.
Therefore, to meditate on patience without any feeling of resentment to all
Is a practice of Bodhisattvas.
28. Even Sarvakas and Pratyekabuddhas who are solely involved in their own
personal interests
Persevere as if they were extinguishing a fire on their heads.
Hence, engaging in effort, the source of virtue, for the benefit of all sentient
beings
Is a practice of Bodhisattvas.

29. By understanding that afflictive emotions can be destroyed
By a special insight, thoroughly incorporating calm abiding,
And meditating on a mental stability which transcends the four formless states
Is a Bodhisattva practice.
30. In the absence of the perfection of wisdom
It is not possible to achieve complete enlightenment by the five perfections.
Therefore, meditating on wisdom that has no conception of the three cycles
(subject, object, action) with skilful means
Is a Bodhisattva practice.
31. Unless you examine your own mistakes
In the guise of a religious person, you might engage in irreligious acts.
Therefore, to constantly examine your own mistakes and to abandon them
Is a Bodhisattva practice.
32. Due to afflictive emotions, if you highlight the faults of other Bodhisattvas
You yourself will degenerate.
Therefore, not to talk about the faults of a person who has entered the
Mahayana Path
Is a Bodhisattva practice.
33. Due to material possessions and fame, there will be disagreements
And your acts of listening, contemplation and meditation will decline.
Therefore, to abandon attachment to the homes of friends and benefactors
Is a Bodhisattva practice.
34. Harsh words disturb others' minds,
And your Bodhisattva way of life will decline.
So to abandon harsh words which are unpleasant to others
Is a Bodhisattva practice.

35. When accustomed to afflictive emotions it will be difficult to stop them through antidotes.
Therefore, the person of mindfulness and vigilance, by wielding the weapons of antidotes
Should immediately destroy the afflictive emotions, such as attachment, as soon as they pop up:
This is a practice of Bodhisattvas.

36. In short, whatever you do, in whatever place, asking
“What is the state of my mind?”
And always fulfilling the interests of others with mindfulness and vigilance
Is a Bodhisattva practice.

37. It is the practice of a Bodhisattva
To dedicate the virtues accomplished in this way to dispel the sufferings
Of infinite sentient beings
With the wisdom which is free of the three cycles.

By following the teachings of the sublime masters
Taking into account the meaning taught in Sutric and Tantric treatises
I have thus written the thirty-seven Bodhisattva practices
For those interested in practising the Bodhisattva path.

Due to my small intellect and limited learning
I have no beautiful poetic composition that would please the scholars!
However, since I have relied on the Sutra and the words of the sublime masters,
I do feel that these are the unmistakable practices of Bodhisattvas.

However, as far as the Bodhisattva's vast deeds are concerned
They are difficult to fathom by someone with my inferior intelligence.
So I ask the sublime beings for their forgiveness
For contradictions, incoherence and a host of other faults.

By the virtues that result from this
And through the supreme ultimate and relative Bodhichitta
May all sentient beings become similar to Avalokiteshwara
Who does not abide in the extremes of Samsara and Nirvana.

This is composed by monk Thokme, a propounder of scripture and reason, in the
Ngulchu Rinchen Cave, to benefit myself and others.

*The text was translated into English by Lhakdor and edited by Jane Rasch in Zurich,
Switzerland, February 2000. The root text was later supplemented with subtitles and
the entire text was again edited by Kerry Wright and Patricia Wood in Dharamsala,
India, July 2013.*