

The Thirty-seven Practices of Bodhisattvas

by Gyalsay Togme Zangpo (1295 C.E. – 1369 C.E.)

Homage to Lokeśvara.

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

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

- 01** Having gained this rare ship of freedom and fortune,
Hear, think and meditate unwaveringly night and day
In order to free yourself and others
From the ocean of cyclic existence—
This is the practice of bodhisattvas.
- 02** Attached to your loved ones you're stirred up like water.
Hating your enemies you burn like fire.
In the darkness of confusion you forget what to adopt and what to discard.
Give up your homeland—
This is the practice of bodhisattvas.
- 03** By avoiding bad objects, disturbing emotions gradually decrease.
Without distraction, virtuous activities naturally increase.
With clarity of mind, conviction in the teaching arises.
Cultivate seclusion—
This is the practice of bodhisattvas.
- 04** Loved ones who have long kept company will part.
Wealth created with difficulty will be left behind.
Consciousness, the guest, will leave the guest house of the body.
Let go of this life—

This is the practice of bodhisattvas.

- 05** When you keep their company your three poisons increase,
Your activities of hearing, thinking and meditating decline,
And they make you lose your love and compassion.
Give up bad friends—
This is the practice of bodhisattvas.
- 06** When you rely on them your faults come to an end
And your good qualities grow like the waxing moon.
Cherish your spiritual teachers
Even more than your own body—
This is the practice of bodhisattvas.
- 07** Bound himself in the jail of cyclic existence,
What worldly god can give you protection?
Therefore, when you seek refuge,
Take refuge in the Three Jewels which will not betray you—
This is the practice of bodhisattvas.
- 08** The Subduer said all the unbearable suffering
Of bad rebirths is the fruit of wrong-doing.
Therefore, even at the cost of your life,
Never do wrong—
This is the practice of bodhisattvas.
- 09** Like dew on the tip of a blade of grass, pleasures of the three worlds
Last only a while and then vanish.
Aspire to the never-changing
Supreme state of liberation—
This is the practice of bodhisattvas.
- 10** When your mothers, who've loved you since time without beginning,
Are suffering, what use is your own happiness?
Therefore, to free limitless living beings
Develop the altruistic attitude—
This is the practice of bodhisattvas.
- 11** All suffering comes from the wish for your own happiness.

Perfect buddhas are born from the thought to help others.

Therefore exchange your own happiness

For the suffering of others—

This is the practice of bodhisattvas.

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

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

14 Even if someone broadcasts all kinds of unpleasant remarks
About you throughout the three thousands world,
In return, with a loving mind,
Speak of his good qualities—
This is the practice of bodhisattvas.

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

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

17 If an equal or inferior person
Disparages you out of pride,
Place him, as you would place your spiritual teacher,
With respect on the crown of your head—

This is the practice of bodhisattvas.

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

This is the practice of bodhisattvas.

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

This is the practice of bodhisattvas.

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

This is the practice of bodhisattvas.

21 Sensual pleasures are like salt water:
The more you indulge, the more thirst increases.
Abandon at once those things which breed
Clinging attachment—

This is the practice of bodhisattvas.

22 Whatever appears is your own mind.
Your mind from the start was free from fabricated extremes.
Understanding this, do not take to mind
[Inherent] signs of subject and object—

This is the practice of bodhisattvas.

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

This is the practice of bodhisattvas.

24 All forms of suffering are like a child's death in a dream.

Holding illusory appearances to be true makes you weary.
Therefore when you meet with disagreeable circumstances,
See them as illusory—
This is the practice of bodhisattvas.

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

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

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

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

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

30 Since the five perfections without wisdom
Cannot bring perfect enlightenment,
Along with skillful means cultivate the wisdom
Which does not conceive the three spheres [as real] —

This is the practice of bodhisattvas.

- 31** If you don't examine your own errors,
You may look like a practitioner but not act as one.
Therefore, always examining your own errors,
Rid yourself of them—
This is the practice of bodhisattvas.
- 32** If through the influence of disturbing emotions
You point out the faults of another Bodhisattva,
You yourself are diminished, so don't mention the faults
Of those who have entered the Great Vehicle—
This is the practice of bodhisattvas.
- 33** Reward and respect cause us to quarrel
And make hearing, thinking and meditating decline.
For this reason give up attachment to
The households of friends, relations and benefactors—
This is the practice of bodhisattvas.
- 34** Harsh words disturb the minds of others
And cause deterioration in a Bodhisattva's conduct.
Therefore give up harsh words
Which are unpleasant to others—
This is the practice of bodhisattvas.
- 35** Habitual disturbing emotions are hard to stop through counteractions.
Armed with antidotes, the guards of mindfulness and mental alertness
Destroy disturbing emotions like attachment
At once, as soon as they arise—
This is the practice of bodhisattvas.
- 36** In brief, whatever you are doing,
Ask yourself, "What's the state of my mind?"
With constant mindfulness and mental alertness
Accomplish others' good—
This is the practice of bodhisattvas.
- 37** To remove the suffering of limitless beings,

Understand the purity of the three spheres,
Dedicate the virtue from making such effort
To enlightenment—
This is the practice of bodhisattvas.

For all who want to train on the bodhisattva path,
I have written *The Thirty-seven Practices of Bodhisattvas*,
Following what has been said by excellent ones
On the meaning of the sutras, tantras and treatises.

Though not poetically pleasing to scholars
Owing to my poor intelligence and lack of learning,
I've relied on the sutras and words of the excellent,
So I think these Bodhisattva practices are without error.

However, as the great deeds of bodhisattvas
Are hard to fathom for one of my poor intelligence,
I beg the excellent to forgive all faults,
Such as contradictions and non-sequiturs.

Through the virtue from this may all living beings
Gain the ultimate and conventional bodhicittas
And thereby become like the Protector Chenrezig
Who dwells in neither extreme—not in the world nor in peace.

This was written for his own and others' benefit by the monk Togme, an exponent of scripture and reasoning, in a cave in Ngülchi Rinchen.

Outline of *The Thirty-seven Practices of Bodhisattvas*

The text is divided into three parts:

1. The virtue at the beginning—the introduction
2. The virtue in the middle—the main part of the text
3. The virtue at the end—the conclusion

1. *The virtue at the beginning—the introduction*

- 1a. Stating the name of the text
- 1b. Offering of praise
 - 1b1. A brief explanation
 - 1b2. An extensive explanation
- 1c. Promise to compose

2. *The virtue in the middle—the main part of the text*

- 2a. The preliminary practices (verses 1-7)
 - 2a1. The difficulty of gaining a life with freedom and fortune (verse 1)
 - 2a2. Giving up one's native land (verse 2)
 - 2a3. Relying on solitude (verse 3)
 - 2a4. Being mindful of impermanence (verse 4)
 - 2a5. Giving up bad company (verse 5)
 - 2a6. Relying on good friends (verse 6)
 - 2a7. Taking refuge (verse 7)
- 2b. Explanation of the paths of the three levels of practitioner
 - 2b1. How to train in the path of the initial-level practitioner (verse 8)
 - 2b2. How to train in the path of the middle-level practitioner (verse 9)
 - 2b3. How to train in the path of the advanced practitioner (verses 10-24)
 - 2b3a. Generating the altruistic intention (verse 10)
 - 2b3b. Becoming familiar with and applying the altruistic intention
 - 2b3b1. The all-obscured mind: conventional bodhicitta (verses 11-21)
 - 2b3b1a. Meditating on equalizing and exchanging self and others during meditative equipoise (verse 11)
 - 2b3b1b. Transforming unfavorable circumstances into the path during the post-meditation period (verses 12-22)
 - 2b3b1b1. Transforming distressing events into the path (verses 12-15)
 - 2b3b1b1a. Loss (verse 12)
 - 2b3b1b1b. Suffering (verse 13)
 - 2b3b1b1c. Blame (verse 14)
 - 2b3b1b1d. Criticism (verse 15)
 - 2b3b1b2. Transforming difficulties into the path (verses 16-17)
 - 2b3b1b2a. Ingratitude (verse 16)
 - 2b3b1b2b. Derision (verse 17)

- 2b3b1b3. Transforming ruin and wealth into the path (verses 18-19)
 - 2b3b1b3a. Ruin (verse 18)
 - 2b3b1b3b. Wealth (verse 19)
- 2b3b1b4. Transforming the hated and the desired into the path (verses 20-21)
 - 2b3b1b4a. The hated (verse 20)
 - 2b3b1b4b. The desired (verse 21)
- 2b3b2. Ultimate bodhicitta (verses 22-24)
 - 2b3b2a. How to meditate on space-like emptiness during equipoise (verse 22)
 - 2b3b2b. How to overcome the beliefs that the desired and the hated are real between meditation sessions (verses 23-24)
 - 2b3b2b1. Overcoming the belief that objects of attachment are truly existent (verse 23)
 - 2b3b2b2. Overcoming the belief that objects of aversion are truly existent (verse 24)

3. *The virtue at the end—the conclusion*

- 3a. Engaging in the trainings of bodhicitta (verses 25-37)
 - 3a1. The six perfections (verses 25-30)
 - 3a1a. The perfection of generosity (verse 25)
 - 3a1b. The perfection of ethical discipline (verse 26)
 - 3a1c. The perfection of patience (verse 27)
 - 3a1d. The perfection of joyous effort (verse 28)
 - 3a1e. The perfection of concentration (verse 29)
 - 3a1f. The perfection of wisdom (verse 30)
 - 3a2. The four points taught in the sutras (verses 31-34)
 - 3a2a. Check our own faults and give them up (verse 31)
 - 3a2b. Desist from criticizing bodhisattvas (verse 32)
 - 3a2c. Sever attachment to the households of benefactors (verse 33)
 - 3a2d. Refrain from harsh words (verse 34)
 - 3a3. The way to abandon the disturbing attitudes (verse 35)
 - 3a4. Training in mindfulness and alertness (verse 36)
 - 3a5. Dedication of virtue to complete enlightenment (verse 37)
- 3b. Conclusion of the root text

Root text written by Gyelsay Togme Sangpo, translated by Ruth Sonam.

From *The Thirty-seven Practices of Bodhisattvas*, by Geshe Sonam Rinchen (Snow Lion Publications, 1997).

Outline from *Transforming Adversity into Joy and Courage*,
by Geshe Jampa Tegchok (Snow Lion Publications, 2005)