

The Thirty Seven-Fold Practice of a Bodhisattva

By Gyalse Ngulchu Thogme

NAMO LOKESHVARAYA

Though he sees that in all phenomena there is no coming or going,
He strives solely for the sake of beings.
To the sublime Teacher and the protector of beings, Avalokiteshvara,
I submit perpetual obeisance with respect from the three doors.

The perfect buddhas—source of happiness and ultimate peace—
Exist through having accomplished the sacred Dharma,
And that, in turn, depends on knowing how to practice it;
This practice of the bodhisattvas I shall therefore now explain.

1. Now that I have obtained this great boat, the precious human life, so hard to find,
I must carry myself and others across the ocean of samsara.
To that end, to listen, reflect and meditate,
Day and night without distraction, is the practice of a bodhisattva.

2. In your native land, waves of attachment to friends and kin surge,
Hatred for enemies rages like fire,
The darkness of stupidity prevails, oblivious to right and wrong;
To abandon one's native land is the practice of a bodhisattva.

3. When unfavorable places are abandoned, the kleshas gradually fade away;
When there are no distractions, positive activities naturally increase;
As awareness becomes clearer, confidence in the Dharma grows;
To rely on solitude is the practice of a bodhisattva.

4. Close friends who have long been together will separate;
Wealth and possessions gained with much effort will be left behind;
My consciousness, a guest, will leave the hotel of the body;
To give up the concerns of this life is the practice of a bodhisattva.

5. In bad company the three poisons grow stronger,
Listening, reflection and meditation decline,
And loving-kindness and compassion vanish;
To avoid unsuitable friends is the practice of a bodhisattva.

6. Through reliance on a true spiritual friend, your faults will fade away
And qualities will grow like the waxing moon.

To consider him even more precious
Than your own body is the practice of a bodhisattva.

7 - Whom can worldly gods protect,
Themselves imprisoned in samsara?
To take refuge in the Three Jewels
Who never fail those they protect is the practice of a bodhisattva.

8. The Buddha taught that the unending suffering of the lower realms
Is the fruit of negative actions.
Therefore, never to act unvirtuously,
Even at the cost of your life, is the practice of a bodhisattva.

9. The pleasures of the three worlds, like dew on the grass,
By their very nature evaporate in an instant.
To strive for the supreme level of liberation
Which never changes is the practice of a bodhisattva.

10. If all the mothers who have loved me since beginningless time are suffering,
What is the use of my own happiness?
So, with the aim of liberating limitless sentient beings,
To generate bodhicitta is the practice of a bodhisattva.

11. All suffering without exception arises from desiring happiness for oneself;
Perfect buddhahood is born from the thought of benefiting others.
Therefore, to really exchange my own happiness
For others' suffering is the practice of a bodhisattva.

12. If someone driven by great desire
Seizes all my wealth, or induces others to do so,
To dedicate to him my body, possessions
And past, present and future merit is the practice of a bodhisattva.

13. Even if someone cuts off my head
When I am not the least at fault,
To take all their negative actions
Compassionately upon myself is the practice of a bodhisattva.

14. Even if someone says all sorts of unpleasant things about me,
And proclaims them throughout a thousand million worlds,
To speak of his good qualities in return,
With thoughts of loving-kindness, is the practice of a bodhisattva.

15. Even if, amidst a large gathering of people,
Someone insults me, pointing out my hidden faults,

To bow to him respectfully,
Thinking of him as a spiritual friend, is the practice of a bodhisattva.

16. Even if one I've lovingly cared for like my own child
Regards me as an enemy,
To love him even more,
As a mother loves a child fallen ill, is the practice of a bodhisattva.

17. Even if my equals or inferiors,
Driven by pride, treat me contemptuously,
Respectfully to consider them like my teachers
On the crown of my head is the practice of a bodhisattva.

18. Even when utterly destitute and constantly maligned by others,
Afflicted by terrible illness and prey to negative forces,
To still take upon myself the negative actions and suffering of all beings,
And not lose heart, is the practice of a bodhisattva.

19. Though I may be famous, and revered by many,
Though I become rich as Vaishravana,
To see that the wealth and splendor of the world is without essence, I
And be free from arrogance, is the practice of a bodhisattva.

20. If we do not conquer our own hatred
The more we fight outer enemies, the more they will increase.
Therefore, with the armies of loving kindness and compassion,
To tame our own mind is the practice of a bodhisattva.

21. The pleasures of the senses are like salt water—
The more you take, the more your thirst increases.
To promptly abandon all objects which arouse attachment
Is the practice of a bodhisattva.

22. Whatever you perceive depends on your own mind;
The nature of mind is free from conceptualized extremes from the very beginning.
Recognizing that, to remain without mental fabrication,
Free from the concepts of subject and object, is the practice of a bodhisattva.

23. When encountering objects which please us,
To view them like rainbows in summertime,
Not ultimately real, however beautiful they appear,
And to give up grasping attachment, is the practice of a bodhisattva.

24. The various forms of suffering are like dreaming of having a child and of its death:
By clinging to deluded perceptions as real we exhaust ourselves.

Therefore, when we encounter unfavorable circumstances,
To view them as delusions is the practice of a bodhisattva.

25. If those who wish for enlightenment must give away even their own bodies,
How much more should it be true of material objects?
Therefore, without expectation of result or reward,
To give with *generosity* is the practice of a bodhisattva.

26. If, lacking discipline, you cannot accomplish your own good,
It is laughable to think of accomplishing the good of others.
Therefore, to observe *discipline*
Without samsaric motives is the practice of a bodhisattva.

27. For a bodhisattva who desires the joys of virtue,
All who harm him are like a precious treasure.
Therefore, to cultivate *patience* towards all,
Without inner feelings of resentment, is the practice of a bodhisattva.

28. Merely for their own sake, even shravakas and pratyekabuddhas
Make efforts like one whose hair is on fire trying to put it out.
Seeing this, for the sake of all beings,
To practice *diligence*, the source of excellent qualities, is the practice of a bodhisattva.

29. Knowing that through vipashyana thoroughly grounded in shamata
The kleshas are completely conquered,
To practice the *concentration* which utterly transcends
The four formless states is the practice of a bodhisattva.

30. Without wisdom, perfect enlightenment cannot be attained
Through the other five paramitas alone.
To cultivate *wisdom* allied with skillful means
And free from the concepts of the three wheels is the practice of a bodhisattva.

31. If I do not examine my own defects,
Though outwardly a Dharma practitioner, I may act contrary to the Dharma.
Therefore, continuously to examine my own faults
And give them up is the practice of a bodhisattva.

32. If, influenced by negative emotions, I relate the faults
Of other bodhisattvas, I will myself degenerate.
Therefore, not to talk about the faults of anyone
Who has entered the Mahayana is the practice of a bodhisattva.

33. Since offerings and respect may cause us to squabble,
And listening, reflection and meditation to decline,

To avoid attachment to friends and benefactors
And their homes is the practice of a bodhisattva.

34. Rude and biting remarks disturb others' minds
And spoil your own bodhisattva practice.
Therefore, to give up abusive talk
Which others find unpleasant is the practice of a bodhisattva.

35. When kleshas become habitual they are hard to get rid of with antidotes.
Therefore, with mindfulness and alertness, to seize the weapon of the antidote
And crush attachment and the other kleshas
The moment they arise is the practice of a bodhisattva.

36. In short, wherever I am, whatever I do,
To be continually mindful and alert,
Asking, "What is the state of my mind?"
And thus to accomplish the good of others is the practice of a bodhisattva.

37. To dedicate to enlightenment,
Through wisdom completely free from the concepts of the three wheels,
All the merit gained through these efforts
In order to remove the suffering of numberless beings is the practice of a bodhisattva.

Following the teachings of the holy beings,
I have arranged the points taught in the sutras, tantras and shastras
As the *Thirty Seven-fold Practice of the Bodhisattvas*,
For the benefit of those who wish to train on the bodhisattva path.

Since my understanding is poor, and I have little education,
This is no composition to delight the learned.
But as it is based on the sutras and teachings of holy beings,
I think it is genuinely the practice of the bodhisattvas.

However, it is difficult for someone unintelligent like me
To fathom the great waves of activity of the bodhisattvas.
Therefore, I beg the holy beings to forgive
My contradictions, inconsistencies and other mistakes.

Through the merit arising from this
May all beings become like Lord Avalokiteshvara,
Who through the sublime bodhicitta—relative and absolute,
Does not dwell in the extremes of samsara and nirvana.

For his own benefit and that of others, Thogme, a monk who teaches scripture and logic, composed this at Rinchen Puk in Ngulchu.