

The Thirty-Seven Practices of Bodhisattvas
by Gyalse Tokme Zangpo (1245-1369)

Namo Lokeśvaraye!

One who sees that all phenomena has no coming and going,
Yet still one strives solely for the sake of sentient beings
To you, my sublime guru and Protector Chenrezig,
I offer perpetual homage, respectfully, with body, speech and mind.

The perfect Buddhas, who are the source of all well-being and bliss,
Come into being through accomplishing the sacred Dharma.
And since this in turn depends on knowing how to practice it,
I shall now describe the practices of Bodhisattvas.

1

This time, having gained the vessel of leisuress and endowments of human life,
so difficult to obtain.

In order to free oneself and others from this ocean of samsara,
Tirelessly, both day and night, without ever straying into idleness,
Studying, contemplating and meditating are the practices of Bodhisattvas.

2

One's attachment moves like water towards loved ones,
And hatred burns like fire towards one's enemies,
In the darkness of delusion one forgets what to adopt and discard.
Leaving behind one's homeland is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

3

By avoiding bad influential objects, destructive emotions gradually decrease.
When there are no distractions, virtuous practices spontaneously increase.
As awareness becomes clearer, one's discernment in dharma grows.
Remaining in solitary places is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

4

Loved ones who have long kept company will part.
Wealth created with difficulty will be left behind.
Consciousness, the guest, will leave the guesthouse of the body.
Letting go of (attachments and concerns) of this life is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

5

When you associate with them your three poisons increase,
Your activities of studying, contemplating, and meditating decline,
And they make you lose your love and compassion.
Giving up bad friends is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

6

When you rely on them your faults come to an end,
And your good qualities grow like waxing moon.
As even more important than your own body,
Cherishing genuine spiritual teachers is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

7

They themselves are trapped within the prison of samsara.
How can the worldly gods save anyone?
Since they provide infallible protection for all who call upon them,
Going for refuge in the Three Jewels is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

8

Unbearable sufferings of the lower realms are
The result of evil actions as the Buddha taught.
Therefore, even at cost of one's own life,
Never engaging in non-virtuous action is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

9

The pleasure of the three realms is like dew on grass,
Its very nature is changing in an instant.
In the never changing Enlightenment state,
Aspiring for liberation is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

10

When mother sentient beings, who loved me since time without beginning,
Are suffering then, what use is my own happiness?
Therefore, in order to liberate limitless sentient beings,
Cultivating the mind of enlightenment is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

11

All suffering comes from the desire for one's own happiness.
Perfect Buddhas are born from the altruistic mind.
Therefore, truly exchanging one's own happiness
For other's suffering is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

12

Even if someone driven by great desire
Seizes all my wealth or induces others to do so.
Dedicating my body, possessions, and past, present, and future virtue
To that person is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

13

Even if someone cuts off my head
When I haven't done the slightest thing wrong.
Out of compassion taking all his misdeeds
Upon myself is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

14

Though someone broadcasts all kinds of unpleasant remarks
About me throughout the three thousand worlds,
Yet in return, with a loving mind
Speaking of his good qualities is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

15

Even if someone criticizes and insults me
In front of a gathering of many people.
View that person as a spiritual teacher,
Bowling to him with respect is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

16

Even if a person for whom I've cared
Like my own child regards me as an enemy,
Further loving him as a mother does for her child
Who is stricken with sickness is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

17

If an equal or inferior person
Disparages me out of pride,
Placing him on the crown of my head and respect
Like my spiritual teacher is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

18

Though if I lack subsistence and am always disparaged by others,
Stricken with serious illness, and harmed by evil spirits,
Never be discouraged but still taking the sufferings and misdeeds
Of all beings upon myself is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

19

Though I may be famous, and revered by many,
And gain riches equal to the wealth god's,
Seeing that worldly wealth and glory have no essence,
And having no arrogance is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

20

If I am unable to subdue the enemy of my own anger-hatred,
Subduing external enemies will only increase them more.
Therefore, with the militia of love and compassion
Subduing my own mind is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

21

Desirable things and sense pleasures are like saltwater,
The more I indulge the greater my craving increases.
Whatever things that breed clinging and attachment,
Instantly abandoning them is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

22

However things appear is one's own mind,
Mind itself is primordially beyond conceptual formulations,
Knowing this, not taking into mind the substantiality references
Of subjects and objects is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

23

When one encounters attractive objects,
Like rainbows in the summer time,
Appear beautiful but don't view them as substantial.
Abandoning clinging and attachment is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

24

All kind of sufferings are like death of one's child in a dream,
Clinging to illusory experiences as substantial makes us weary.
Therefore when encountering unfavorable conditions,
Viewing them as illusion is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

25

If those who want enlightenment must give even their body,
It is needless to mention material objects.
Therefore without expectation of return and karmic result,
Giving generously is the practice Bodhisattvas.

26

Since without morality, one cannot accomplish one's own well-being.
Wanting to accomplish benefit of others would be laughable.
Therefore without any interest of samsaric aspiration,
Safeguarding one's morality is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

27

To Bodhisattvas who desire for wealth of virtue,
All those who harm are like a precious treasure.
Therefore without having any hostility towards all,
Cultivating patience is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

28

Even Hearers and Solitary Realizers, working only for their own welfare,
Are seen striving as if they are putting out a fire on their heads.
For the sake of all beings, that the source of all good qualities
Striving with diligence is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

29

Comprehend that afflictive emotions are utterly eliminated
By the insight endowed with calm abiding.
Cultivating the meditative stability which surpasses
The four formless absorptions is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

30

Without wisdom, by the five perfections only
Perfect enlightenment cannot be attained.
Therefore with skillful means and three-fold non-conception
Cultivating wisdom is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

31

If one doesn't examine one's own errors, its possible
A form of dharma practitioner does the contrary to it.
Therefore always examining one's own errors,
And eliminating them is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

32

If one speaks about errors of other Bodhisattvas
Out of one's afflictive emotions, oneself will degenerate.
Thus, not talking about the errors of those who have entered
The Great Vehicle is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

33

Since riches and respect will cause quarrel with one another,
And the activities of studying, contemplating, and meditating will decline,
Giving up attachment to the homes of relatives
And homes of benefactors is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

34

Harsh words will disturb the minds of others
And will degenerate the conduct of Bodhisattvas.
Therefore, giving up harsh words which are unpleasant
To others is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

35

Thus, afflictive emotions become habitual, hard to stop by antidotes.
Armed with antidotes, the guards of mindfulness and awareness,
Destroying afflictive emotions like attachment at once,
As soon as they arise is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

36

In brief, wherever I am, whatever conduct I do,
Ask myself, "What is the condition of my mind?"
By always having mindfulness and awareness
Accomplishing other's benefit is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

37

All the merits achieved by such endeavor,
In order to remove the sufferings of limitless beings,
By the wisdom of three-fold purity
Dedicating to complete enlightenment is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

For all who want to train on the Bodhisattva's path.
I have written The Thirty Seven Practices of Bodhisattvas
Following what has been said by the Excellent ones
On the meaning of the sutras, tantras and treatises.

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

However, as the vast deeds of Bodhisattvas
Are hard to fathom for someone with poor intelligence like me.

Therefore I request the excellent ones to forgive all faults,
Such as contradictions and non sequiturs.

Through the virtue from this may all the sentient beings
Gain the ultimate and relative Bodhi mind
And thereby become like the Protector Chenrezig
Who dwells in neither Samsara nor Nirvana.

Thus it is written for the benefit of others by an exponent of scripture and reasoning, the monk
Togme, in a cave in Ngulchu Rinchen.

Margalam!

Translated by Lama Phurbu Tashi Rinpoche.

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