

The Thirty-seven Practices of a Bodhisattva

By Ngulchu Thogme Zangpo

[For the Dharma course study only]

A1. Opening Verses.....	4
B1. Homage.....	4
B2. Promise to Compose.....	4
A2. Main Text.....	5
B1. The Preparation.....	5
C1. The need to give meaning to this human existence of yours, so rare and difficult to obtain.....	5
C2. Abandoning your native land, the source of the three poisons	5
C3. Living in solitary places, the source of all good qualities.....	6
C4. Giving up the concerns of this life by reflecting on impermanence.....	6
C5. Avoiding unsuitable friends, whose company creates conditions unfavorable to your progress.....	6
C6. Relying on a spiritual teacher, whose presence creates conditions favorable to your progress.....	7
C7. Going for refuge, the entrance to the Buddhist teachings	7
B2. The Main Teachings, illuminating the Path.....	7
C1. The path for beings of lesser capacity	7
C2. The path for beings of medium capacity	8
C3. The path for beings of superior capacity	8
D1. The bodhichitta of intention	8
D2. The bodhichitta of application	9
E1. Relative bodhichitta	9
F1. The meditation practice of exchanging oneself and others.....	9
F2. The post meditation practice of using unfavorable circumstances on the path.....	9

G1. Using on the path the four things that you do not want to happen	9
H1. How to use loss on the path	9
H2. How to use suffering on the path	10
H3. How to use disgrace on the path	10
H4. How to use disparagement on the path	10
G2. Using on the path the two things that are difficult to bear	11
H1. How to use on the path being wronged in return for kindness	11
H2. How to use humiliation on the path.....	11
G3. Using deprivation and prosperity on the path.....	11
H1. How to use deprivation on the path.....	11
H2. How to use prosperity on the path.....	12
G4. Using hatred and desire on the path.....	12
H1. How to use objects of hatred on the path.....	12
H2. How to use objects of desire on the path	12
E2. Absolute bodhichitta	13
F1. The meditation practice of remaining in a state free of conceptual elaborations without any clinging	13
F2. The post meditation practice of abandoning any belief in the objects of desire and aversion as truly existing	13
G1. Abandoning any belief in the objects of desire as truly existing.....	13
G2. Abandoning any belief in the objects of aversion as truly existing.....	14
D3. The precepts for training in those practices	14
E1. Training in the six transcendent perfections.....	14
F1. Transcendent generosity	14
F2. Transcendent discipline	15
F3. Transcendent patience	15
F4. Transcendent diligence.....	15
F5. Transcendent concentration	15

F6. Transcendent wisdom.....	16
E2. Training in the four instructions taught in the Sutra.....	16
F1. To examine oneself for one’s own defects and to give them up	16
F2. To give up speaking of a bodhisattvas faults	17
F3. To give up attachment to a sponsor’s property	17
F4. To give up harsh speech	17
E3. Training in how to be rid of the negative emotions	17
E4. Training in accomplishing others’ good with mindfulness and vigilance	18
E5. Dedicating the merit to perfect enlightenment	18
A3. Concluding Verses.....	19
B1. How and for whom this text was composed	19
B2. The unerring nature of these practices.....	19
B3. A humble prayer for forgiveness.....	19
B4. Dedicating the merit of having composed this text.....	20
B5. The colophon.....	20

A1. Opening Verses

B1. Homage

\\Kyabje Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche's version\\

Namo Lokeshvaraya.

Though he sees that in all phenomena there is no coming and going,

He strives solely for the sake of beings:

To the sublime teacher inseparable from Avalokiteshvara, the Protector of Beings,

I pay constant homage with respectful body, speech, and mind.

\\His Holiness the 17th Gyalwang Karmapa's version\\

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.

B2. Promise to Compose

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.

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.

A2. Main Text

B1. The Preparation

C1. The need to give meaning to this human existence of yours, so rare and difficult to obtain

Practice 1

Now that I have this great ship, a precious human life, so hard to obtain,
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.

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.

C2. Abandoning your native land, the source of the three poisons

Practice 2

In my native land waves of attachment to friends and kin surge,
Hatred for enemies rages like fire,
The darkness of stupidity, not caring what to adopt or avoid,
thickens—
To abandon my native land is the practice of a bodhisattva.

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.

C3. Living in solitary places, the source of all good qualities

Practice 3

When unfavorable places are abandoned, disturbing emotions gradually fade;

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.

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.

C4. Giving up the concerns of this life by reflecting on impermanence

Practice 4

Close friends who have long been together will separate,

Wealth and possessions gained with much effort will be left behind,

Consciousness, a guest, will leave the hotel of the body—

To give up the concerns of this life is the practice of a bodhisattva.

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.

C5. Avoiding unsuitable friends, whose company creates conditions unfavorable to your progress

Practice 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.

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.

C6. Relying on a spiritual teacher, whose presence creates conditions favorable to your progress

Practice 6

Through reliance on a true spiritual friend one's faults will fade
And good qualities will grow like a waxing moon—
To consider him even more precious
Than one's own body is the practice of a bodhisattva.

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.

C7. Going for refuge, the entrance to the Buddhist teachings

Practice 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.

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.

B2. The Main Teachings, illuminating the Path

C1. The path for beings of lesser capacity

Practice 8

The Buddha taught that the unendurable suffering of the lower realms
Is the fruit of unvirtuous actions.
Therefore, to never act unvirtuously,
Even at the cost of one's life, is the practice of a bodhisattva.

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.

C2. The path for beings of medium capacity

Practice 9

Like dew on grass, the delights of the three worlds
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.

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.

C3. The path for beings of superior capacity

D1. The bodhichitta of intention

Practice 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 set my mind on enlightenment is the practice of a bodhisattva.

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.

D2. The bodhichitta of application

E1. Relative bodhichitta

F1. The meditation practice of exchanging oneself and others

Practice 11

All suffering without exception arises from desiring happiness for oneself,

While perfect buddhahood is born from the thought of benefiting others.

Therefore, to really exchange

My own happiness for the suffering of others is the practice of a bodhisattva.

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.

F2. The post meditation practice of using unfavorable circumstances on the path

G1. Using on the path the four things that you do not want to happen

H1. How to use loss on the path

Practice 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.

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.

H2. How to use suffering on the path

Practice 13

If, in return for not the slightest wrong of mine,
Someone were to cut off even my very head,
Through the power of compassion to take all his negative actions
Upon myself is the practice of a bodhisattva.

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.

H3. How to use disgrace on the path

Practice 14

Even if someone says all sorts of derogatory things about me
And proclaims them throughout the universe,
In return, out of loving-kindness,
To extol that person's qualities is the practice of a bodhisattva.

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.

H4. How to use disparagement on the path

Practice 15

Even if in the midst of a large gathering
Someone exposes my hidden faults with insulting language,
To bow to him respectfully,
Regarding him as a spiritual friend, is the practice of a
bodhisattva.

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.

G2. Using on the path the two things that are difficult to bear

H1. How to use on the path being wronged in return for kindness

Practice 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 sick child, is the practice of a bodhisattva.

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.

H2. How to use humiliation on the path

Practice 17

Even if my peers or my inferiors
Out of pride do all they can to debase me,
To respectfully consider them like my teachers
On the crown of my head is the practice of a bodhisattva.

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.

G3. Using deprivation and prosperity on the path

H1. How to use deprivation on the path

Practice 18

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

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.

H2. How to use prosperity on the path

Practice 19

Though I may be famous, and revered by many,
And as rich as the God of Wealth himself,
To see that the wealth and glory of the world are without
essence,
And to be free of arrogance, is the practice of a bodhisattva.

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.

G4. Using hatred and desire on the path

H1. How to use objects of hatred on the path

Practice 20

If one does not conquer one's own hatred,
The more one fights outer enemies, the more they will increase.
Therefore, with the armies of loving-kindness and compassion,
To tame one's own mind is the practice of a bodhisattva.

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.

H2. How to use objects of desire on the path

Practice 21

Sense pleasures and desirable things are like saltwater—
The more one tastes them, the more one's thirst increases.
To abandon promptly
All objects which arouse attachment is the practice of a
bodhisattva.

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.

E2. Absolute bodhichitta

F1. The meditation practice of remaining in a state free of conceptual elaborations without any clinging

Practice 22

All that appears is the work of one's own mind;
The nature of mind is primordially free from conceptual limitations.
To recognize this nature
And not to entertain concepts of subject and object is the practice of a bodhisattva.

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.

F2. The post meditation practice of abandoning any belief in the objects of desire and aversion as truly existing

G1. Abandoning any belief in the objects of desire as truly existing

Practice 23

When encountering objects which please us,
To view them like rainbows in summer,
Not ultimately real, however beautiful they appear,
And to relinquish craving and attachment, is the practice of a bodhisattva.

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.

G2. Abandoning any belief in the objects of aversion as truly existing

Practice 24

The various forms of suffering are like the death of one's child in a dream:

By clinging to deluded perceptions as real we exhaust ourselves.

Therefore, when encountering unfavorable circumstances,

To view them as illusions is the practice of a bodhisattva.

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.

D3. The precepts for training in those practices

E1. Training in the six transcendent perfections

F1. Transcendent generosity

Practice 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.

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.

F2. Transcendent discipline

Practice 26

If, lacking discipline, one cannot accomplish one's 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.

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.

F3. Transcendent patience

Practice 27

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

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.

F4. Transcendent diligence

Practice 28

Merely for their own sake, even shravakas and pratyekabuddhas
Make efforts like someone 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.

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

F5. Transcendent concentration

Practice 29

Knowing that through profound insight thoroughly grounded in sustained calm

The disturbing emotions are completely conquered,

To practice the concentration which utterly transcends

The four form less states is the practice of a bodhisattva.

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.

F6. Transcendent wisdom

Practice 30

In the absence of wisdom, perfect enlightenment cannot be attained
Through the other five perfections alone.

Therefore, to cultivate wisdom combined with skillful means

And free from the three concepts is the practice of a bodhisattva.

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.

E2. Training in the four instructions taught in the Sutra

F1. To examine oneself for one's own defects and to give them up

Practice 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.

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.

F2. To give up speaking of a bodhisattvas faults

Practice 32

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

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.

F3. To give up attachment to a sponsor's property

Practice 33

Offerings and respect may bring discord
And cause listening, reflection, and meditation to decline.
Therefore, to avoid attachment
To the homes of friends and benefactors is the practice of a
bodhisattva.

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.

F4. To give up harsh speech

Practice 34

Harsh words disturb the minds of others
And spoil our own bodhisattva practice.
Therefore, to give up rough speech,
Which others find unpleasant, is the practice of a bodhisattva.

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.

E3. Training in how to be rid of the negative emotions

Practice 35

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

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.

E4. Training in accomplishing others' good with mindfulness and vigilance

Practice 36

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

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.

E5. Dedicating the merit to perfect enlightenment

Practice 37

Dedicating to enlightenment
Through wisdom purified of the three concepts
All merit achieved by such endeavor,
To remove the suffering of numberless beings, is the practice of a bodhisattva.

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.

A3. Concluding Verses

B1. How and for whom this text was composed

Following the teachings of the holy beings,
I have arranged the points taught in the sutras, tantras, and shastras
As The Thirty-seven Verses on the Practice of a Bodhisattva
For the benefit of those who wish to train on the bodhisattva path.

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.

B2. The unerring nature of these practices

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.

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.

B3. A humble prayer for forgiveness

However, it is hard for someone unintelligent like me
To fathom the great waves of the bodhisattvas' activities,
So I beg the forgiveness of the holy ones
For my contradictions, irrelevances, and other mistakes.

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.

B4. Dedicating the merit of having composed this text

Through the merit arising from this
And through the power of the sublime bodhichitta, relative and absolute,
May all beings become like the Lord Avalokiteshvara,
Who is beyond the extremes of samsara and nirvana.

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.

B5. The colophon

For his own benefit and that of others, Thogme, a teacher of scripture and logic, composed this text at Rinchen Phug, in Ngulchu.

\\Kyabje Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche's version//

*The verses and textual outline are from
The Heart of Compassion by Kyabje Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche*

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

\\His Holiness the 17th Gyalwang Karmapa's version//

*The verses are from Traveling the Path of Compassion by
His Holiness the 17th Gyalwang Karmapa*