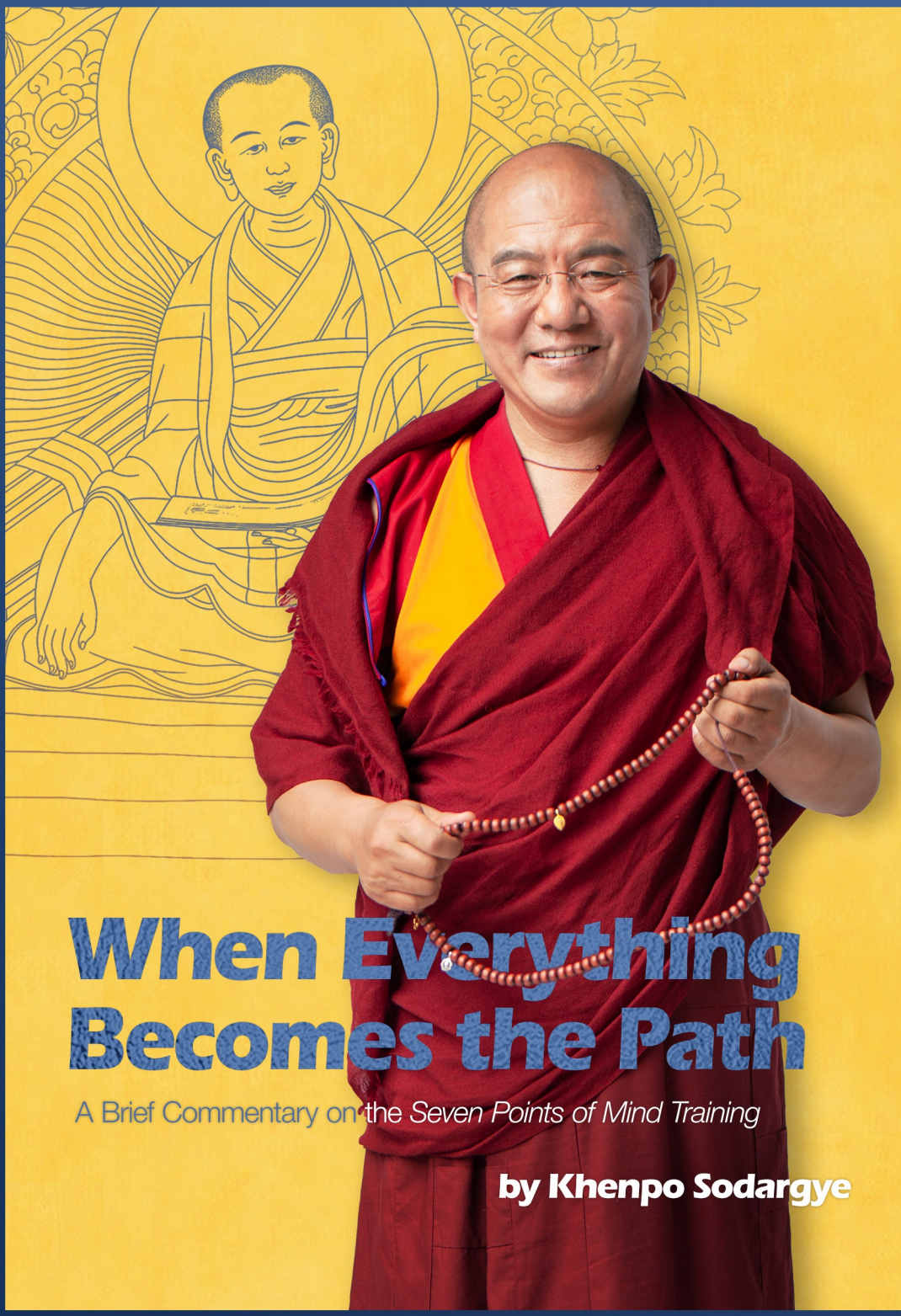

When Everything Becomes the Path

A Brief Commentary on the *Seven Points of Mind Training*

by Khenpo Sodargye

When Everything Becomes the Path: A Brief Commentary on the *Seven Points of Mind Training*

Khenpo Sodargye

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(Root Text)

Composed by Geshe Chekawa Yeshe Dorje

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Transforming the prevalent five degenerations
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When the karma of past trainings arose,
With abundant faith as the cause,
I have easily disregarded hardship and disparagement,
and
Obtained teachings that subdue self-clinging.
Now, even in death, I shall have no regrets.[a]

[a] The root verses draw primarily on Adam Pearcey's rendering from Lotsawa House, with minor adjustments to better align with Khenpo Sodargye's explanations, which derive from Jamgon Kongtrul Rinpoche's Tibetan commentary.

When Everything Becomes the Path:

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the *Seven Points of Mind Training*

Taught by Khenpo Sodargye

Lecture One

August 5, 2019

Words before the Teaching

Encouragement for Life-Release Activities

Yesterday, which happened to be both *Chokhor Duchen* and my birthday, many of you in different parts of the world kindly carried out life-release activities. From the depths of my heart, I feel truly touched and deeply grateful. Although we are currently unable to conduct life-release activities here at Larung Gar, hearing that so many of you voluntarily engaged in this virtuous practice brings me immense joy. In truth, nothing brings greater meaning than saving the lives of sentient beings. If, in the course of one lifetime, we manage to save even a single life, our life will have held genuine purpose, regardless of when we eventually leave this world. Because life is the most precious treasure in this world, safeguarding it is the greatest virtue, while taking it is the gravest wrongdoing.

Last year on the fourth day of the sixth month of the Tibetan calendar, together we released over eight hundred million lives. This year, you do not need to conduct the release activities precisely on that date. You are welcome to do so a little earlier or later; all lives saved before August 10 will be counted toward the "Birthday

Life Release." We will tally the total on August 10 and dedicate the accumulated merit on that day or August 12.

I shared on Weibo last year that life release is the birthday gift I cherish most. This year, I deliberately stayed quiet about it, not wanting anyone to feel the slightest obligation. Even so, numerous people acted entirely of their own accord and, in a single day, saved a great number of lives. I have watched many of the photos and videos you shared, and they have moved me very deeply. Every devoted man and woman who practices the generosity of protecting life deserves sincere appreciation. It is through our combined efforts that such a virtuous deed was accomplished, and dedicating this collective merit toward all beings' enlightenment is quite meaningful.

The Significance of This Text

Today and tomorrow, I will be teaching the *Seven Points of Mind Training*. I realize that covering this text in just two days is ambitious. However, were we to extend it, those of you visiting for only a few days might not have time to finish the course. Therefore, please be prepared for our sessions to run slightly longer than usual. I will give the first part of the Tibetan oral transmission today and conclude it tomorrow. (Khenpo confers the reading transmission.)

Fourteen years ago, in 2005—also during the Ksitigarbha Dharma Assembly—I taught this text based on the commentary by Gyalse Tokme Zangpo, who authored *The Thirty-Seven Practices of a Bodhisattva*. The 2005 teaching spanned eight lectures, and I strongly encourage everyone, especially those with faith and interest, to study the lecture notes and audio recordings of those sessions thoroughly, as they are exceptionally beneficial for the cultivation and practice of bodhicitta. With respect to bodhicitta, works such as *The Way of the Bodhisattva*, *Ornament of the Mahayana Sutras*, and *The Compendium of Training* mainly explain it from a theoretical perspective. As for practical training in bodhicitta, texts like the *Seven Points of Mind Training*, the *Eight Verses for Training the Mind*, and *The Thirty-Seven Practices of a Bodhisattva* offer the most essential instructions in the Mahayana tradition. Though concise, the *Seven Points of Mind Training* is filled with profound, hidden pith instructions, and for this reason, it deserves our utmost reverence and attention.

In the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, this text is cherished across all schools, with an unbroken lineage that is widely taught and practiced to this day. However, in Han regions and elsewhere, the treatise is perhaps less well known. Although this course is a prerequisite for the Vajrayana program in our Bodhi Study

Associations, I have noticed that attendance is often inconsistent, leaving many unfamiliar with its vital instructions. I encourage all Mahayana practitioners to study this text. You can find its root text, my translated commentary, and my previous lecture notes online. Since I can only offer a brief overview during these two sessions, please utilize those resources for a deeper understanding.

Previously, I advised you to study Madhyamaka treatises like *The Ornament of the Middle Way* and *Nagarjuna's Precious Garland*. I know some have taken this to heart, while others have not. Yet, if even a few of you are willing to heed my advice, I sincerely ask that you study the audio recordings and lecture notes of my eight lectures on the *Seven Points of Mind Training* from 2005 at some point this year. We did not have video recordings of my lectures until 2006; otherwise, visual materials would have been available, which I know many of us find easier to follow.

This text has long been highly regarded worldwide, with over twenty existing commentaries and translations, including the commentary by Jamgon Kongtrul Rinpoche. Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche gave teachings on this text many times, perhaps most notably in France in 1990. Another fairly extensive commentary is *Mind Training Like the Rays of the Sun* by Nam-kha Pel, a disciple of Lama Tsongkhapa. I received its oral transmission from another khenpo.

Many of these commentaries have been translated into English and other languages. Last year, a professor in the West volunteered to translate my lecture notes on the *Seven Points of Mind Training* into English, a project I hear is nearly complete, and other languages will likely follow.

A great number of Westerners especially appreciate practicing bodhicitta through the *Seven Points of Mind Training*. The power of the teachings in this text is indeed extraordinary. Through studying these teachings, many hardships in daily life can be transformed into the path of awakening. Some Dharma friends have told me, with tears in their eyes, that without these precious pith instructions, they might not have survived their struggles. Truly, these direct and illuminating teachings have saved many lives.

I understand that during the Ksitigarbha Dharma Assembly, you have been reciting liturgies since early morning, and you may feel quite tired. Yet, enduring some hardship for the sake of the Dharma is deeply worthwhile. We know that the great masters of the past overcame tremendous difficulties to obtain even a single four-line verse. Seeking Mahayana teachings in this life and persevering in this pursuit—despite hunger, fatigue, or a hectic schedule—is a truly meaningful endeavor.

On a side note, I noticed during the group recitation that a dozen children were playing on iPads in the stairwell of the Dharma hall. We understand that some parents may need to bring their children here during the Dharma assembly, and we appreciate everyone's efforts to participate. However, playing iPads during group recitation is not allowed according to our academy's policy. I hope the parents and disciplinarians keep a mindful eye on this.

In general, everyone has been diligently reciting the rituals and mantras during the Dharma assembly. However, if you are feeling too exhausted or prefer not to join the group chanting, please rest quietly in your room rather than walking around outside. Some who are wandering out there may have ulterior motives other than attending the Dharma assembly or circumambulating the mandala. As practitioners, whatever we do, it is essential to remain attentive: when chanting, concentrate on the ritual; when listening, focus on the teachings.

The Lineage and Propagation

The history of the *Lojong* lineage traces back to Lord Atisha. He received these key instructions on bodhicitta from three great masters: Master Serlingpa; Dharmarakshita, who gave away some of his own flesh in an act of generosity; and Maitriyogi, who was

able to take others' sufferings directly upon himself. Atisha later transmitted these teachings to Dromtonpa—regarded as an emanation of Avalokiteshvara—who passed them to Potowa. Potowa's disciple Sharawa then transmitted them to Chekawa. During the later dissemination of Buddhism in Tibetan regions, Chekawa compiled these key instructions into the. *Seven Points of Mind Training*. Whether written down by him or his disciples, this lineage has been continuously upheld and remains vibrant in Tibetan areas to this day.

It is my sincere hope that, having received this precious lineage, all of you will pass these teachings on to others within your lifetime. If you have the opportunity to serve as a mentor or Dharma teacher, you may teach the entire text. If not, simply sharing a single key point or passage through skillful means is already meaningful. For example, you could make cards or bookmarks featuring a verse and a brief explanation—a simple yet effective way to help others encounter this wisdom.

Of course, the most important thing is that you genuinely absorb the meaning of the text yourselves. The sincere wish to share will naturally arise only when you truly experience its benefit. We often experience this in everyday life. For instance, when we dine out for hotpot, if the meal is delicious, we naturally want to recommend it

to friends and family; if it leaves no impression, we are unlikely to return or suggest it to others.

I believe that many who practice bodhicitta through the *Seven Points of Mind Training* will have experiences of various depths. Personally, I have always felt a strong connection to this teaching and consider it exceptionally valuable. It was this conviction—that you would also find delight and benefit in it—that led me to take the initiative to teach it this time, even without a formal request.

Previously, I taught the *Seven Points of Mind Training* based on Tokme Zangpo's commentary. Today, I will briefly explain the literal meaning of the root verses following the pith instructions in Jamgon Kongtrul Rinpoche's Tibetan commentary. The commentary begins with the homage verse which is offered by the commentator and does not appear in the root text. You will find that its outline closely resembles Tokme Zangpo's.

The concept of "mind training" appears in the sutras, the instructions of Guru Padmasambhava, and within Vajrayana texts such as *Khandro Yangtig*. In this context, it refers to training the mind through bodhicitta. The *Seven Points of Mind Training* encompasses all the essential instructions required for cultivating bodhicitta. They are divided into seven main topics: 1) the preliminaries; 2) the

main practice; 3) transforming adversity into the path; 4) applying the practice throughout the whole of life; 5) the measure of mind training; 6) the commitments of mind training; and 7) the precepts of mind training. If we take this text to heart and engage in its practice regularly, year after year, we will become thoroughly familiar with its profound teachings. Such appreciation and consistent engagement are of great importance.

1 The Preliminaries

Train in the preliminaries.

The first point is to train in the preliminaries. I would like to clarify that in this specific context, "preliminaries" does not refer to the five hundred thousand accumulations of Vajrayana practice. Rather, following the tradition of the Kadampa masters, they mainly refer to guru yoga, which is a necessary preparation to any Dharma practice, as well as the four common preliminaries. In Tibetan Buddhism, the lineage guru is regarded as the source of all accomplishments and the root of all qualities; without the guru's blessings, making progress in almost any practice is incredibly difficult.

To practice guru yoga, visualize your guru above the crown of your head. With single-pointed devotion, offer the following sincere prayer:

> Glorious Guru, wish-fulfilling jewel, I pray to you:
>
> Bless me so that uncontrived bodhicitta, in both aspiration and action, may arise in my mindstream. Where it has not

arisen, may it arise; where it has arisen, may it not decline, but ever increase, bringing benefit to limitless sentient beings.

If you have a specific guru prayer, you may recite it at this point.

Following the prayer—as practiced in the Guru Yoga of His Holiness Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche—visualize the guru dissolving into light and merging into your own heart. Then rest in the state where your mind and the guru's mind are inseparable. This general method of practicing guru yoga is extremely crucial for every Dharma practice, which is why we traditionally begin every teaching session with guru yoga.

After guru yoga, we turn our minds to the four common preliminaries: the preciousness of human birth, the impermanence of life, the defects of samsara, and the infallibility of karma. While I will not elaborate extensively, it is essential to appreciate their significance. Whatever practice we undertake, we must first reflect on the preciousness of human birth. We have been born in Jambudvipa, encountered the Dharma and sublime spiritual teachers, and received the pith instructions that make attaining enlightenment possible in this very life. This human body offers an opportunity for practice superior to that of beings in all other realms—including hell beings, hungry ghosts, animals, and even the gods. Recognizing

how rare and valuable this human life is, we should give rise to deep appreciation; failing to practice the Dharma in this life would be a tremendous loss.

Building upon that appreciation, we reflect that this precious life is impermanent and our lifespan is uncertain. We never know when or how death will strike. The impermanence of death waits for no one. Therefore, while our bodies are still strong, let us strive with a burning sense of urgency to practice the genuine Dharma—especially the Mahayana bodhicitta—which brings benefit to both ourselves and others.

We all know that death is not, as nihilists claim, a plunge into nothingness where everything simply ceases. Instead, driven by karma, we continue to wander after death through the six realms of samsara, which are filled with suffering. Even the human realm, a higher realm being considered fortunate, is in reality pervaded by suffering. Regardless of who or where we are, suffering is the very nature of samsaric existence. It is vital to come to a heartfelt recognition of samsara's defects.

The sufferings of samsara do not arise without cause; they are the result of our own negative actions. Hence, we should be meticulously careful in our conduct, adopting virtue and abandoning non-virtue

whenever possible. If we do not heed this, the consequences will be unbearable when the results of negative karma eventually ripen in our lifetime and rebirths.

Before undertaking any practice, we need to train thoroughly in these preliminaries. For those who genuinely wish to practice the Dharma, it is highly recommended to begin with *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*. Specifically, it is critical to let go of all worldly attachments and start one's practice earnestly by contemplating on the rarity and preciousness of a human birth, and then go on to complete the rest of the four common preliminaries. After that, continue on to taking refuge through the practices of the uncommon preliminaries. Just as a building requires a solid base, when the foundation of the preliminaries is firmly established through diligent practice, whatever walls or ornamentation built upon it will remain stable and enduring. For any practitioner, the foundation of the preliminaries is of paramount importance.

2 The Main Practice

2.1 Ultimate Bodhicitta

"Ultimate Bodhicitta" refers to the realization of emptiness as directly experienced in the mindstreams of buddhas and bodhisattvas. A natural question arises: Before we have attained such a high realization, is it possible for us to practice ultimate bodhicitta? While we may not yet be able to practice it in a fully authentic and perfect way, we can nevertheless follow the instructions of the great masters and noble beings of the past, and train in approximation of ultimate bodhicitta in accordance with their example.

2.1.1 Meditation

> **Contemplate all phenomena as dreams.**
> **Examine the nature of unborn awareness.**
> **The remedy itself is freed in its own place.**
> **The essence of the path rests in the *alaya*.**

Note that in some versions of the text, "the essence of the path" is rendered as "the nature." The first line teaches that when we analyze phenomena from the perspective of their true nature, we

see that while they certainly appear, they lack inherent existence. Much like dreams, illusions, mirages, or the reflection of the moon in water, they appear whilst lacking true existence.

One might ask: Does this mind that perceives the outer world truly exist? The second line of this verse guides us to examine the nature of the mind itself. Upon investigation, we find that the mind is also unborn, non-abiding, and unceasing. It has no origin, no abiding place, and no destination; it possesses no color, shape, inherent nature, or distinguishing features.

Since all phenomena are illusory and the mind is unborn emptiness, does the wisdom that realizes this emptiness have any inherent existence? The third line clarifies that the remedy—the wisdom itself—also has no true nature of its own; it is self-liberated in its own place. Collectively, these three lines describe the practice of analytical meditation, cultivating ultimate bodhicitta through investigation.

The fourth line states, "the essence of the path rests in the *alaya*." Here, the term "*alaya*" is used in a distinct, positive sense to refer to the natural, luminous buddha-nature. It is important to distinguish this from other contexts in Vajrayana where "resting in the *alaya*" is sometimes critiqued as resting in a merely neutral state of storehouse

consciousness. In this specific context, however, when we practice resting meditation, we are not resting in neutrality, but abiding in the innate luminosity of our own nature.

To summarize, the first three lines describe analytical meditation, which involves training in seeing all phenomena as dream-like and in realizing the emptiness that is free from conceptual elaboration. The last line focuses on resting meditation. The essence of this practice is abiding in the luminous buddha-nature, appearing yet being devoid of inherent existence. Alternatively, the first three lines can be understood as the method of realizing emptiness according to the Second Turning of the Wheel of Dharma, and the last line as the method of realizing luminosity according to the Third Turning.

2.1.2 Post-Meditation

In post-meditation, consider phenomena as illusory.

During formal meditation, we rest in equipoise or contemplate the inconceivable view of the Middle Way. But how should we continue once the session ends and we rise from our meditation practice? We cannot remain in meditation forever; even in strict retreat, we

must eventually rise from meditation and stand up to eat, walk, and interact with others.

At that time, gently train in recognizing all phenomena as illusory. It is not uncommon for practitioners to feel clear and spacious during the session, only to find themselves caught up in strong attachments as soon as they return to ordinary activities. When this happens, we can gently remind ourselves not to fall back into the habit of seeing things as truly existent. Instead, we can strive to carry the understanding and experience cultivated during meditation into our daily lives. Just as the ultimate bodhicitta experienced in meditation is dream-like, continue to view all appearances as illusory during post-meditation. By maintaining this mindfulness, we gradually reduce our attachment.

2.2 Relative Bodhicitta

2.2.1 Meditation

> **Train in the two—giving and taking—alternately.**
> **These two are to be mounted on the breath.**

The practice of relative bodhicitta in meditation centers on alternating between taking and giving. This is the practice of exchanging oneself and others. "Taking" means to willingly take upon yourself

the suffering of all sentient beings, bearing it as your own. "Giving" means to offer all your happiness, virtues, merit, and resources to others, wishing them well-being and joy.

Exchanging oneself and others is a challenging practice. A more accessible starting point is the equality of oneself and others. This involves cultivating the recognition that, just like you, every being wishes to be free from suffering and to attain happiness. You can train in this by thinking, "Just as I wish to be happy and free from pain, so do all others." However, true equality is fully expressed through the actual exchange of oneself and others: taking on the suffering of others as your own, and giving them your happiness. While difficult, it is essential to train in this way, as explained in the seven key instructions for generating bodhicitta taught by Atisha.[1]

Another way to engage in the practice of exchanging oneself and others is to mount the practice on the breath. As you breathe out, visualize all your happiness, virtues, and merit transforming into white vapors, flowing out through your nostrils and merging with all sentient beings, bringing them joy. Sincerely rejoice in their well-being. As you breathe in, imagine drawing in all the suffering and illnesses of others, relieving them of their burdens. Feel genuine

joy at the thought that they are now relieved of their pain. Practice and pray with great courage and compassion in this manner.

I once taught this method of exchanging oneself and others to a group of volunteers working with patients with AIDS. Some were understandably apprehensive, fearing that by visualizing taking on the illness, they might actually contract it. I reassured them, "Do not worry—this is a visualization practice. It cannot actually infect you. You have not yet reached the high level of realization where you can truly take on others' sufferings directly."

We can practice this visualization whenever we are mindful of our breath, even during routine activities. For instance, during a medical checkup, the doctor will often instruct us to "inhale, exhale, and hold your breath." We can use those specific moments to practice exchanging oneself and others. And what should we do when the doctor asks us to hold our breath? Should we abide in the *alaya*? (Khenpo laughs.)

2.2.2 Post-Meditation

Three objects, three poisons, and three roots of virtue.
To enhance recollection of the practice,

Use sayings to train in all activities.

Begin the sequence of exchange with yourself.

Some versions of the text omit the phrase "to enhance recollection of this." Here, the "three objects" refers to pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral objects we encounter. In response to these, we tend to generate the three poisons: desire, anger, and ignorance, respectively. Whether these poisons arise within ourselves or in others, if we can eliminate them or transform them into the path, they become the "three roots of virtue." It is helpful to note the distinction in approach: while Theravada Buddhism focuses on eliminating the three poisons, Mahayana Buddhism emphasizes transforming them into the path.

It is essential to frequently recall these three roots of virtue, reminding ourselves: "I will take upon myself all the desire, anger, and ignorance of all sentient beings, and I will give all my virtue of non-desire, non-anger, and non-ignorance to others." This kind of recollection serves as a practice of relative bodhicitta during the post-meditation period. A frequently quoted mind training teaching states: "If my illness benefits sentient beings, may I be ill; if my health benefits sentient beings, may I be healthy; if my death benefits sentient beings, may I die soon." Such aspirations

may seem daunting, but they are powerful tools for training the mind by evoking the recollection of bodhicitta. Would you dare to make such aspirations?

In our daily activities—whether walking, standing, sitting, or lying down—it is important to constantly recite prayers focused on exchanging oneself and others. We might recall Langri Tangpa's teaching:

> *Take loss and defeat upon oneself,*
> *Offer gain and victory to others.*

Or, we can recite the verse His Holiness often taught:

> *I dedicate all benefit and happiness to sentient beings;*
> *May these benefit and happiness pervade all of empty space.*
> *I take all the suffering of sentient beings upon myself;*
> *May the ocean of suffering be dried up.*

When we face obstacles, demons, or nightmares, we can practice exchanging oneself and others through reciting these verses, prefacing them with "Namo." It is especially important to remember and recite the verse His Holiness often taught, as this itself is the practice of exchanging oneself and others. The aspiration to give all happiness to sentient beings—so that happiness fills the world—and to

take all suffering upon oneself so that the ocean of suffering may quickly dry up, is truly noble. In times of adversity, we can also practice *chod*. In the past, when His Holiness encountered demons or obstacles on the road, he would stop and practice *chod*. The essence of many teachings is condensed in the verse above, and I urge everyone to recite it often.

The exchange of oneself and others is not merely theoretical. To genuinely accept the suffering of sentient beings, we need to proceed step by step, starting with ourselves—just as the saying goes, "Start with me." Specifically, we can contemplate as follows: if my suffering is to arise in the future, may it ripen upon me in this very life; if other sentient beings are to experience suffering, may all that suffering ripen upon me; if they are to suffer tomorrow, may that suffering ripen upon me today. By making such aspirations, not only do we not increase our own suffering, but we also dispel it—this is a particularly supreme method of practicing the exchange of oneself and others.

Naturally, everyone wishes to be healthy and happy, and it is understandable to feel some concern that this practice might bring suffering upon oneself, especially at first. However, there is no need for such worries. Through the practice of exchanging oneself and others, not only do sentient beings become free from suffering and

attain happiness, but our own altruistic mind will swiftly mature, growing stronger and more expansive, nourished by the power of bodhicitta.

3 Transforming Adversity into the Path

3.1 Overview

When evil fills the world and its inhabitants,
Transform adversity into the path of enlightenment.

This teaching encourages us to transform adverse conditions into the path of awakening, even when negativity pervades both the external world and sentient beings. Externally, the world may be troubled by disasters, calamities, and widespread hardship. Internally, sentient beings experience the challenges of a degenerate age of the five impurities marked by intense afflictions and pervasive suffering. It is common to hear people remark on how difficult or unfavorable current circumstances are, whether at home or abroad. When adversity is widespread—affecting both animate and inanimate phenomena—we should strive to transform all obstacles in our practice, daily life, work, and relationships into opportunities for enlightenment. In essence, we are encouraged to turn adversity into the path of bodhi.

For a genuine Buddhist practitioner, nothing is truly an obstacle. All negative conditions, whether arising in the world around us or within ourselves, can be transformed into opportunities for practice. This is similar to how a skilled physician can turn every plant on a mountain into medicine. For someone with strong practice, both praise and criticism are met with equanimity—regardless of how others treat them, every situation becomes an opportunity to progress on the path of enlightenment. Without mind training, however, many people tend to feel elated when praised and deeply discouraged or distressed when criticized, sometimes for hours or even days.

There are three essential methods for transforming adverse conditions into the path: through relative bodhicitta, ultimate bodhicitta, and the four applications. While many people fear obstacles, a true practitioner sees adversity as support for practice. Once we have thoroughly studied and practiced the *Seven Points of Mind Training*, we will no longer worry about obstacles, as any adverse condition can be transformed into aids on our path to enlightenment.

3.2 Explanations

3.2.1 Transforming Adversity into the Path through Relative Bodhicitta

Drive all blames into one.

Meditate on the great kindness of all.

When we encounter difficulties—such as physical pain, mental distress, or slander—recognize these challenges as the result of our own negative karma amassed since time without beginning. While external circumstances provide the conditions for these experiences to manifest, the root cause lies within. Ultimately, these consequences are not caused by others, but by our own self-grasping.

Here, the "one" refers to self-grasping, which has led us to create negative karma since beginningless time. When this fundamental cause meets external conditions, suffering arises. Thus, self-grasping is the real source of our troubles and misfortunes. When faced with unpleasant situations, a genuine practitioner does not look outward to place blame but looks inward, acknowledging their own mistakes and taking responsibility for the consequences: "This result is not due to others, but to my own strong self-grasping and

past karma." Consistently seeking the cause within ourselves is the correct and beneficial approach. This is the essence of "drive all blames into one."

All sentient beings have been our parents in past lives and have shown us great kindness, especially those with whom we have karmic connections. All beings are essential for our progress toward enlightenment, as the six perfections can only be practiced in relation to others. In this light, those who create obstacles on our spiritual path are actually our teachers.

It is important, then, to cultivate deep gratitude toward all beings, whether they are friends or adversaries, and regardless of how they treat us. You might feel you can be grateful to most people, but not to that one specific person who torments you like a "Devadatta." (Audience laughs.) Do you have a "Devadatta" in your life? Someone just said he has five "Devadattas"! That means he has five beings to be especially grateful for.

In summary, the practice of relative bodhicitta is to reflect that all beings have been our parents and to recognize our own self-grasping as the source of our difficulties. By ceasing to blame others and looking within, we can resolve problems with greater ease. The

above summarizes the approach of transforming adversity into the path of enlightenment through relative bodhicitta.

3.2.2 Transforming Adversity into the Path through Ultimate Bodhicitta

> **Meditating on illusory appearances as the four *kayas***
> **Is the unsurpassable protection of emptiness.**

When confronted with adversity, we turn our attention inward and observe our own minds. In truth, the mind is unborn, non-abiding, unceasing, and non-dual. For example, if we are slandered by someone today and start to think that others are creating obstacles for us, this is actually a deluded state of mind. It is essential to recognize that such experiences are manifestations of a deluded mind and, as previously analyzed, all phenomena are like dreams or illusions.

Upon close examination, both the mind and the illusory appearances of the external world share the same true nature: emptiness, which is the Dharmakaya; their intrinsic quality is luminosity, the Sambhogakaya; the inseparability of emptiness and luminosity is the Nirmanakaya; and the unity of all three is the Svabhavikakaya. Thus, by observing with wisdom, we see that adversity is nothing

more than an illusory appearance, which is never separate from the essence of emptiness, the nature of luminosity, and their inseparable unity—what we call the four kayas. In this way, whenever obstacles arise, the four kayas are present.

Ultimately, the essence of these four kayas is great emptiness, which serves as the supreme protection in our spiritual practice—"protection of emptiness." This wisdom is the most sublime instruction. Whether we are troubled by demons, enemies, difficulties at work, or disharmony at home, all that we fear is, in reality, just an illusory appearance of our own mind. If we analyze these appearances further, we find that they are none other than the four bodies, or emptiness itself. This wisdom of emptiness is, in fact, the greatest protection.

Unfortunately, many suffer because they do not yet understand emptiness. Recently, I read about a woman who, overwhelmed by distress, jumped off a bridge into a river. Fortunately, she was rescued. If she had realized the nature of emptiness, she would not have felt compelled to act in this way. When we are held captive by strong attachment, it becomes evident in our words and actions.

As you encounter the precious Dharma, I hope you will deepen your understanding of emptiness. Even if you do not fully realize

it yet, simply recognizing that the objects of your attachment are conceptual fabrication without any true substance can bring great relief. What we cling to today may feel significant at present, but could seem trivial tomorrow, and utterly insignificant a year from now. In ten years, our current worries might even seem laughable. Without this kind of perspective, we remain deceived by illusion, mistaking things as truly existent and experiencing unnecessary suffering.

Cultivating emptiness is the supreme practice. As Nagarjuna taught, among all nectar-like teachings, the doctrine of emptiness is the most sublime. This is illustrated by the story of Milarepa. One day, returning to his cave from gathering firewood, he found a demoness with glaring eyes appearing before him. He tried various methods to banish her, but none seemed effective. Finally, he rested in the state of inseparable luminosity and emptiness as taught by his guru, and the demoness vanished.

Thus, when adversity arises, the highest approach is to contemplate or rest in ultimate bodhicitta—the wisdom of emptiness. However, suppose we have not yet developed the ultimate bodhicitta, or the relative bodhicitta of viewing all beings as our parents. In that case, we can apply the following four methods to turn obstacles into the path of awakening.

3.2.3 Transforming Adversity into the Path through the Four Applications

The four applications are the best method.
Whatever you encounter, apply these practices.

The four applications are often recommended for practitioners who have not yet attained a high level of realization. The first is the accumulation of merit. Whether we encounter favorable or unfavorable circumstances, it is essential to recognize that the root cause of happiness is our own virtuous action, and suffering stems from non-virtuous action. Only by accumulating virtue can we experience happiness instead of suffering. In daily life, it is beneficial to accumulate as much merit as possible—such as by making offerings to the buddha statues or the sangha, or by circumambulating stupas.

When illness or misfortune strikes, many Dharma friends instinctively turn to these practices, circumambulating stupas or making donations for prayers. While these "last-minute" efforts may not be as powerful as practicing ultimate or relative bodhicitta, they remain effective. This is commonly seen among Tibetan lay practitioners, who place great value on these methods. Similarly, in Han regions, some may generally dismiss Buddhism, yet when they

face trouble, they immediately offer money for the sangha to recite prayers. (Audience laughs.) It seems that in times of distress, people naturally turn to the Three Jewels. Even without deep-seated faith, performing virtuous deeds during difficult times helps accumulate merit and dispel certain obstacles. It is like taking medicine when sick: while it may not resolve the root cause, it still provides necessary relief.

The second practice is the purification of negative actions. The suffering we experience is the result of negative actions committed in the past. By sincerely acknowledging and confessing our misdeeds, we can gradually purify the negative karma. For instance, if we experience poor health or misunderstandings, it is because we have harmed others, either in this life or previous ones. Such situations invite us to engage in purification practices, such as reciting the Vajrasattva or Hundred Syllable mantras, resting in emptiness, or cultivating bodhicitta. Through these methods, negative karma is purified, allowing circumstances to improve gradually. Some practitioners become especially diligent when ill, reflecting that their suffering is linked to past ignorance, negative deeds, and karmic creditors. With this understanding, they make a sincere effort to purify any negative actions committed in the past.

The third practice helps to alleviate obstacles by making offerings to harmful influences. There are two approaches to this practice. Those with higher realization or superior capacity may actually welcome obstacles or demonic interference, thinking, "Obstacles and demons, you are welcome to harm me! The more you harm me, the more I will offer you my happiness." This is a rather advanced level of practice. For people with middling capacity, the usual approach is to perform fire offerings, smoke offerings, water offerings, or to recite mantras and offer food to karmic creditors and obstructing spirits. One can also dedicate merit to them, saying, "Please, do not create obstacles; may my practice proceed smoothly from beginning to end."

The fourth practice involves making offerings to Dharma protectors. An effective way to overcome obstacles is to seek the protection and support of Dharma protectors by making offerings to them, either personally or by requesting the sangha to do so—a practice the sangha in our academy regularly engages in. While some people may start diligently and then let their practice lapse—only to remember to pray to Tara, Avalokiteshvara, Gesar, or Tsiu Marpo when difficulties return—consistency is valuable.

Dharma protectors have the power and blessings to transform various causes and conditions. Thus, when undertaking significant

tasks, it is especially important to make offerings to them. Since their support is crucial for the successful completion of virtuous activities, it is commendable to include such offerings as a regular part of our daily practice, as many of you already do.

Both individuals and groups can apply these four practices to transform adverse conditions into the path of enlightenment. In the past, His Holiness and our academy would utilize these methods whenever difficulties arose. If you are not yet able to apply ultimate or relative bodhicitta, please make good use of these four supreme methods: the accumulation of merit, confession, making offerings to harmful influences, and relying on Dharma protectors.

4 Applying the Practice throughout the Whole of Life

4.1 Practice during One's Lifetime

A summary of the essence of pith instructions
Is to apply yourself to the five strengths.

Throughout our lives, the cultivation of bodhicitta remains the most essential practice among all pith instructions of Mahayana Buddhism. Indeed, all Mahayana teachings ultimately converge on this single point. While we often aspire for "genuine, uncontrived bodhicitta," transforming this from mere words into a powerful, internal force requires dedication. It is through the five strengths that bodhicitta is cultivated and sustained. Briefly, these strengths are:

- The strength of impetus: make a heartfelt vow never to part from bodhicitta, both in intention and in action, until attaining Buddhahood.

- The strength of familiarization: rely on mindfulness and awareness to continually remember, nurture, and maintain bodhicitta. By repeatedly bringing it to mind and practicing it, bodhicitta becomes a natural part of our experience.
- The strength of wholesome seeds: continually accumulate merit through virtuous actions, such as reciting scriptures and releasing captive animals. Merit supports the stability of bodhicitta, helping it to flourish and remain present.
- The strength of revulsion: work to eliminate self-clinging, the main obstacle to generating bodhicitta. Strong self-clinging leads to self-centeredness, making it difficult for altruistic intention or bodhicitta to develop fully.
- The strength of aspiration: regularly renew our resolve, vowing never to abandon bodhicitta in any lifetime, even in challenging circumstances or dreams.

4.2 Practice at the Time of Death

The Mahayana instructions for transference
Involve the same five strengths. Conduct is important.

Mahayana instructions on death also emphasize these five strengths and their application. With respect to the strength of wholesome seeds, at life's end, it is beneficial to let go of attachments to material

possessions by offering them to sources of merit and those in need. This should be done without any clinging. It is also important to release attachment to loved ones. For the strength of aspiration, when leaving this world, sincerely pray to our gurus, yidams, and Dharma protectors, and aspire to maintain bodhicitta in all future lives.

The strength of revulsion is especially relevant at death, as self-clinging is the primary challenge. Strive to let go of selfishness and pass away with an altruistic mind. The application of the strength of impetus means to reaffirm our intention never to be separated from bodhicitta, whether facing death or the bardo. As to the strength of familiarization, if it is difficult to recall these aspirations at the time of death, it is helpful to have Dharma friends nearby to gently remind us to let go of attachments, confess any regrets, and arouse bodhicitta.

Departing this world with these five strengths ensures happiness in future lives. Additionally, certain postures are recommended at the time of death, such as resting in the lion's posture or the vajra posture, as these are traditionally believed to support a positive transition and even liberation.

5 The Measure of Mind Training

All teachings converge on a single essential point.
Of the two witnesses, rely upon the principal one.
Always maintain a joyful attitude.
Practice even amidst distraction. These measure proficiency in practice.

At the heart of all Mahayana Buddhist teachings lies "a single essential point": the abandonment of self-clinging. The purpose of all teachings or practices is to help us let go of self-attachment. Rooted in this essential point, there are four standards for measuring our proficiency in mind training:

The first and foremost standard is to assess the strength of our self-clinging. As some teachings suggest, if we "weigh" ourselves and find our self-attachment remains heavy, it indicates our practice has not progressed far. Genuine progress in practice is reflected in a gradual lightening of self-clinging¬—for example, a reduced tendency to be drawn into arguments or disputes centered around "me." If, after years of practice, we still become easily upset or emotional when our own interests are threatened, it is a clear sign

that self-clinging remains strong, and that deeper realization has not yet been attained. If we cannot maintain even the composure of an ordinary person, we can hardly claim to have genuinely cultivated bodhicitta.

The second standard is to rely primarily on self-assessment rather than the opinions of others. While the proficiency of our practice can be judged by two witnesses—ourselves and others—external opinions are often unreliable. Others see only our outward actions; they cannot see our inner motivation or virtue. For instance, a single mistake may lead others to assume our entire practice is flawed, even if our inner virtue remains intact.

Since each of us knows ourselves best, self-validation should take precedence. Only we know if we are truly practicing the Dharma or merely maintaining a facade. Through honest self-reflection, we might recognize, "On the surface, I may appear to be a good practitioner, but inwardly, I still struggle with greed, anger, ignorance, jealousy, and laziness. I may act like a practitioner in front of others, but in reality, I am still working through many challenges." Sometimes, people appear cheerful outwardly while feeling frustrated inside. Some may even find themselves habitually pretending, but deep down, they are aware of the gap between appearance and reality. In short, between external and internal

validation, self-validation is most crucial. Rather than relying on others' judgements, it is essential to assess ourselves honestly.

The third standard is the ability to cultivate and sustain a joyful mind regardless of circumstances. While it is easy to be happy when things are going well, the real test is sustaining that joy during adversity. An excellent practitioner remains undisturbed by adversity and does not disturb others, maintaining a joyful state of mind. As *The Way of the Bodhisattva* says,

> *So come what may, I'll not upset*
> *My cheerful happiness of mind.*

Remaining calm and joyful even in adversity is a sign of genuine practice and well-developed bodhicitta. If we only appear to be a practitioner when things are going well, but become more troubled than ordinary people when difficulties arise, it suggests that true bodhicitta has not yet been cultivated. Therefore, we should strive to maintain a joyful mind at all times.

The fourth standard is the ability to maintain one's practice in a busy or distracting environment. While in retreat or during prayer recitation behind closed doors, we may have certain experiences and gain confidence in our practice. Still, the real challenge is

sustaining bodhicitta while working or interacting with others in a busy, even challenging, environment.

If we can genuinely engage in practice amidst distraction, our practice is strong. For most of us, it is difficult to maintain bodhicitta while browsing the internet, chatting, watching TV, or playing games, without becoming attached or distracted. If bodhicitta is truly well-developed, as described in the mind training teachings, that person becomes like a skilled horse rider who, even if momentarily distracted, never falls off the horse because their ability is so ingrained. Occasional lapses may occur, but recovery is swift. For most of us, however, if we fall, the consequences can be much more serious.

Some people can maintain bodhicitta in solitude but find it challenging in a busy environment. When confronted with others or difficult situations, strong emotions may arise, tears may flow, and negative actions of body, speech, or mind may follow. This indicates that our practice is not yet stable. Although we may outwardly vow to develop bodhicitta and benefit all beings, our reactions in the face of distraction and adversity reveal the true depth of our practice. Thus, being able to engage in practice amidst distraction and difficulty is a key measure of genuine mind training.

In summary, these four standards can measure our proficiency in mind training. Personally, I find these standards challenging, and reflecting on them reveals many areas for improvement in my own practice. I believe that those who consider themselves good practitioners, or who have studied Buddhism for a long time, may also benefit from reflecting on these teachings and reconsidering their own level of practice.

Lecture Two

August 6, 2019

Words before the Teaching

Before we begin today's teaching, I would like to share a few important matters with you.

First, the Wisdom and Compassion Primary School, which I founded in my hometown, is currently seeking several teachers, including English, Chinese, and music teachers. If this opportunity interests you, I encourage you to consider it thoughtfully. Those wishing to apply are welcome to attend a brief interview at the Larung Hotel Cafe after class. I am pleased to see that many of you have already expressed interest by raising your hands. Those who would like to apply online may do so through the application link.

Education in my hometown remains relatively underdeveloped, especially in English instruction. To help address this, we are introducing English classes starting from the first grade of our primary schools this year. Without this change, it may be difficult for our students to keep pace with current educational standards and future opportunities. We would be deeply grateful to any teachers willing to join us in this effort. Ideally, applicants should have studied at a teachers' college, hold a teaching qualification

certificate, and possess both compassion and sincere motivation. The preferred commitment for these positions is about two years.

Second, in recent years, I have established a library near the school to preserve valuable books in Chinese, Tibetan, English, and other languages. If you would like to donate books, new books are always welcome. For used books, we appreciate those that are out-of-print or particularly valuable. Ordinary books or items without collection value are not needed, as our focus is on building a meaningful collection. The inspiration for this library came from my travels in Europe and America, where I saw private collections and libraries filled with precious books and artworks spanning many subjects and languages. This experience motivated me to create something similarly meaningful in my own community.

Additionally, preserving the culture and history of all ethnic groups is deeply meaningful, as much of this heritage is at risk of fading away—a challenge faced by many countries today. I am concerned that many traditional clothing, costumes, and ornaments from the three Tibetan regions—Amdo, U-Tsang, and Kham—are gradually disappearing. Each region, including places like Ngari and Ny-ingchi in U-Tsang, and Gyarong, Litang, and Batang in Kham, has its own unique traditional costumes. The clothing styles of Tibetan agricultural and pastoral regions also have distinct characteristics.

Out of both a desire to preserve this heritage and personal interest, I hope to collect valuable Tibetan clothing and related historical materials. In the future, I plan to display these items in a dedicated exhibition hall to showcase the rich clothing culture of various Tibetan regions, and possibly other types of clothing as well. For those of you who have relevant resources or know researchers or collectors who might be interested in contributing, I will provide the address and contact information in a few days. We are also open to purchasing such items if necessary. I want to emphasize that participation in this project is entirely voluntary, and any unreasonable or illegal activities conducted in its name are strictly prohibited.

Yesterday, I discussed several key points from the *Seven Points of Mind Training*, including the preliminaries, the main practice, transforming adversity into the path, methods for lifelong practice, and the measure of proficient mind training. Imminent masters have explained that meeting the four standards—experiencing a reduction in self-clinging, relying on self-assessment, always maintaining a joyful mind, and being able to practice even when distracted— indicates that one has reached a certain stage in practice. However, this does not mean that there is no longer any need to continue practicing the Dharma. The true perfection of Dharma

practice is the attainment of Buddhahood. Therefore, we should continue to diligently engage in our practice until Buddhahood, always striving to make steady progress.

Today's session will also last a little longer than usual. I invite everyone to listen carefully and take notes if possible. I realize that lay practitioners studying at the Buddhist Study Associations may have a different experience than those in the oral presentation class here. Without the pressure of mandatory oral presentations, some tend to slack off over time, despite their initial enthusiasm. When hearing, contemplating, and practicing Dharma teachings, it is beneficial to remain as focused and dedicated as a hungry cow eating grass.

(Khenpo continues to confer the reading transmission.)

6 The Commitments of Mind Training

1.

Train constantly in three general principles.

The sixth main point introduces the sixteen commitments of mind training. The first commitment encourages Mahayana practitioners to uphold three general principles consistently.

The first principle is to avoid transgressing commitments. This entails faithfully upholding the Pratimoksha vows, the Bodhisattva vows, and the Vajrayana vows.

The second principle is not to be reckless. Mahayana practitioners are encouraged to act with mindfulness and awareness rather than engaging in careless behavior, such as excessive drinking, smoking, trampling on green spaces, destroying forests, or taking other unconventional actions. Nowadays, some individuals may claim to be tantric yogis or accomplished practitioners and display unusual behaviors in public, yet have not attained genuine realization. For

Mahayana practitioners, it is crucial to preserve pure conduct and abstain from actions that contravene social norms or proper decorum.

The third principle is to avoid partiality by treating all sentient beings equally. It is inconsistent to tolerate harm from humans but not from animals, to accept harm from those of higher status but not from those of lower status, or to accept dissatisfaction from friends and family but not from strangers. Such biased attitudes are not in keeping with the Mahayana path.

Regular reflection on these three general principles helps ensure that our actions remain proper and in harmony with the Dharma, fostering consistency over time. The goal is to maintain steadiness in practice, rather than fluctuating between calmness one day and erratic behavior the next.

2.

Change your attitude, but remain steady.

After commencing the practice of Mahayana Buddhism, it is essential to shift our previous attitude fundamentally. While we may have been selfish and self-centered in the past, we are now encouraged

to place all sentient beings first and make altruism our primary focus.

This commitment teaches us to "remain steady," meaning to cultivate our inner qualities quietly and sincerely rather than constantly displaying our virtues or boasting about our achievements. This principle applies even among peers and like-minded communities. While self-promotion has become common in today's society, Buddhism generally does not encourage such behavior. Exceptions are rare and typically only apply when great masters act for the benefit of sentient beings, as permitted by the Pratimoksha and Bodhisattva vows.

A low-key and steady approach is recommended, focusing on developing an altruistic mind and transforming previous negative habits. Many people may naturally hold strong personal views and see self-centeredness as reasonable. From a Buddhist perspective, however, it is this self-clinging, present since beginningless time, that gives rise to unwholesome actions and continues to bind us within samsara, making liberation more difficult to attain.

3.

Do not speak of others' weak points.

The third commitment is to refrain from speaking about others' weak points, whether related to worldly matters or spiritual practice. For instance, making remarks about physical characteristics—such as calling someone deaf, mute, or fat—is unreasonable and unkind. In the context of spiritual practice, it is also inappropriate to refer to someone as a vow-breaker or as holding wrong views. Even if such faults exist, there is no need to mention them casually in public.

Without holding any authority, some individuals habitually focus on the flaws of others, perhaps due to past karma. They may judge others' practice as weak, their discipline as impure, or their temperament as harsh, acting as if they alone are buddhas while everyone else is a demon. In truth, when the mind is pure, the world appears pure; when the mind is impure, everyone else seems to be at fault. Ultimately, our perception of the world is merely a reflection of our own mind—our inner state shapes our experience of the outer world.

4.

Do not ponder others' faults.

The fourth commitment advises against dwelling on the mistakes of others or constantly finding fault with their actions. As a Tibetan saying reminds us, "You can spot a louse on someone else's face, but

you cannot see a yak on your own." It is often much easier to notice and criticize even the smallest flaws in others, sometimes searching for faults that may not even exist, while remaining unaware of our own more significant shortcomings. This habit does not reflect the behavior of a genuine practitioner.

5.

Purify the strongest afflictive emotion first.

The fifth commitment suggests that we address our most severe afflictive emotion first. For some, this may be intense greed and strong desires that lead to unwholesome actions; for others, it could be powerful anger, with outbursts so intense they seem capable of shaking even Mount Meru. Some may struggle more with deep ignorance, while others may be more prone to jealousy, arrogance, or deceit.

It is beneficial to identify which afflictive emotion is most prominent in our own experience and focus our practice on transforming it. For instance, if anger is a significant challenge, we might concentrate on teachings that counter anger, such as the chapter on patience in *The Way of the Bodhisattva* or the guidance found in *The Compendium of Training*. If greed is more dominant, teachings from *Nagarjuna's*

Precious Garland or the meditative concentration chapter of *The Way of the Bodhisattva* can be particularly helpful.

Self-reflection plays a critical role: consider which afflictive emotion is most troublesome for you and direct your efforts toward understanding and purifying that mental obscuration.

6.

Abandon any expectations of results.

Release attachment to personal desires for worldly fame, gain, health, happiness, and similar outcomes. In Mahayana Buddhism, any pursuit—whether aimed at this life or the next—that does not consider the welfare of sentient beings is regarded as misguided. Even the aspiration for personal liberation, if motivated by self-interest, is not praised. In fact, seeking fame, wealth, health in this life, or a favorable rebirth in the next, when driven by self-centered motivation, is viewed as a form of poison within the Mahayana tradition. Instead, Mahayana Buddhism encourages practitioners to cultivate a mind dedicated to benefiting all sentient beings. That is why it is necessary to let go of any expectations of results motivated by self-interest.

7.

Give up poisonous food.

Abandon the poisonous mind of selfishness, just as one would avoid toxic food. No one would knowingly consume food laced with poison, as it is indigestible and ultimately life-threatening. Similarly, in Mahayana Buddhism, a self-centered mind is considered the most dangerous toxin. There is a type of poison called *hala* poison; once it touches the body, both body and mind are destroyed. In the same way, if selfishness becomes very strong, then whether we listen to teachings, give teachings, count a mala, or turn a prayer wheel, all virtuous roots become, as stated in the *Verse Summary of the Perfection of Wisdom*, "supreme food mixed with various poisons."

As ordinary beings, it is understandable that we cannot eliminate every trace of selfishness. According to some scriptures, like excrement naturally has a foul smell, self-centeredness is naturally present in the mindstream of ordinary beings. However, through studying and practicing Mahayana Dharma, we can gradually reduce self-grasping. Diminishing and eventually eradicating selfishness through Dharma practice is especially important for those who lack altruism or are particularly self-centered. Remember, this

transformation is a gradual process; selfishness does not disappear simply by attending a single teaching.

8.

Do not be so loyal to the cause.

Refrain from overvaluing worldly notions of "loyalty" or "brotherhood." "Protecting one's kin and destroying one's enemies," where one feels obligated to revenge enemies, seems to be a prevalent practice in society. As a saying goes, "Revenge is a dish best served cold." The mindset of taking revenge can be surprisingly persistent. I recall an incident where two young monks were fighting in front of the Dharma hall. I struck them lightly with my mala to warn them—though perhaps a bit too hard, and I regretted it afterward. One of them said, "Today I do not dare fight in front of Khenpo, but a gentleman never forgets his revenge. Just wait—ten years is not too late!"

A more tragic illustration of this long-held desire for revenge comes from a news story. A thirteen-year-old boy's mother was brutally murdered by three neighbors. Twenty-two years later, still consumed by the memory, he killed all three and was sentenced to death himself. Some scholars and lawyers argued he should not be executed, while others disagreed. Regardless of the legal

debate, the hatred remained in his heart for twenty-two years. No one counseled him, and the case was never resolved, resulting in a terrible cycle of violence.

From a worldly perspective, taking revenge is often seen as normal, especially in cultures of certain ethnic groups where "revenge must be repaid" is considered honorable. However, after studying Mahayana Dharma and beginning to cultivate bodhicitta, it is necessary to change this mindset. We should not think that if someone harms us, we must repay them in kind. While repaying kindness is appropriate, it is best to avoid repaying enmity. As *Standards for Being a Good Student and Child* says: "Repay kindness; forget resentment." All in all, the notion of "repaying every enmity" is not a principle of Mahayana Buddhism and Mahayana practitioners are expected to follow the Dharma, thereby transcending and surpassing various worldly rules.

9.

Do not use harsh or abusive speech.

Avoid harsh or abusive speech in daily conversation. Regardless of our position or status, uttering extremely unpleasant words in public not only causes great harm to others but also reflects poorly on our own character. Striving to use gentle and kind speech at

all times benefits both ourselves and those around us. Lala Sonam Chodrup Rinpoche's *Extensive Commentary on Aspiration Prayer of Sukhavati* discusses many faults of harsh speech and includes related stories, which many of the audience here may recall.

10.

Do not wait in ambush.

The tenth commitment cautions against waiting in ambush for revenge. Some worldly people, after being harmed, may hide in dangerous places waiting for an opportunity to retaliate. Others may appear outwardly fine but harbor resentment that erupts later. For instance, during the Cultural Revolution, some disciples of great masters denounced their own teachers, bringing up past grievances when their teachers were in trouble. Similarly, subordinates who seem obedient may suddenly settle old scores when their superiors become vulnerable. In contrast, the conduct of a genuine Mahayana practitioner is to extend even greater support to those experiencing hardship or crisis.

11.

Do not strike at a vulnerable point.

This commitment encourages us to avoid deliberately targeting the vulnerabilities of others, whether through our words or actions. When someone is already suffering, exploiting their vulnerability deviates from this commitment. It is inappropriate to intentionally expose others' faults or use cutting words to strike at their most tender wounds. This principle extends to all beings, including nonhuman beings—we should harbor no malicious intent toward them, nor employ harmful mantras against them. Instead, let us approach every being with love, purity, and joy.

The principle of ensuring our words do not become a blade that reopens another's softest wounds is especially relevant today when emotional sensitivity is common. Careless and harsh words can be unbearable for some, and may even lead to tragic outcomes such as suicide. In such cases, the person who said those words may bear the fault of causing harm. Therefore, it is best to communicate with civilized and gentle language. However, in certain situations, firmer language may be necessary; otherwise, we risk appearing weak and certain individuals might disregard, discriminate against, or disrespect us.

12.

Do not transfer the dzo's burden to the ox.

The items carried by a dzo should not be transferred onto an ordinary ox. Some versions translate this as "do not move the dzo's load onto a dairy cow," which may not be entirely accurate. Dzos, which can be either male or female, are mainly used for plowing. They have relatively slender bodies, long tails, and a physical shape distinct from other cattle. Yaks, for example, are generally not used for plowing because they are not obedient. The dzo is known as the "king of cattle" and is highly valued. The underlying message here is that carrying loads is the dzo's responsibility, and it is unnecessary to shift that burden to other cattle who may not be able to bear it. In the same way, it is essential to take on our own responsibilities rather than passing them onto others.

A common human tendency, often driven by self-preservation, is to embrace credit for success while deflecting blame for failure. For instance, some leaders are eager to take credit for achievements, even if they were not directly involved, but when issues arise, they distance themselves, saying, "This has nothing to do with me; I did not sign the approval documents." In the academy, I am sometimes asked to sign documents, and I understand that the intention is often to have me take the blame. (Audience laughs.) As Mahayana Buddhists, we are encouraged to cultivate a broad mind and a sense of responsibility, having the courage to accept responsibility

for what is ours, rather than shifting it onto others. After all, if we aspire to take on the suffering of all beings, how can we neglect our own responsibilities?

13.

Do not be competitive.

The thirteenth commitment teaches us not to compete for self-interest. In many situations, people strive to win and get ahead, but when it comes to fame, status, and wealth, it is best to refrain from excessive competition. While a certain level of competitive spirit is natural—and Buddhism does not deny the value of healthy competition—it becomes problematic when personal gain comes at the expense of others. Competition of this kind ultimately holds no real value.

14.

Abandon all wrong livelihoods.

Wrong livelihood mainly encompasses the following: wrong views—such as nihilism or eternalism; wrong practice—incorrect spiritual practices; and wrong conduct—unwholesome actions. It is essential to abandon all forms of wrong livelihoods, including those motivated by fame and gain.

15.

Do not reduce gods to demons.

Offering to celestial beings can bring blessings, but if we do not rely on them properly, we may suffer harm and deem these same beings as demons. The same principle applies to Dharma practice: when practiced correctly, Dharma leads to liberation; but if misapplied, it can have the opposite—and frightening—effect. As Dagpo Rinpoche said:

> *Unless you practice Dharma according to the Dharma,*
> *Dharma itself becomes the cause of evil rebirths.*[2]

When the teachings do not truly enter the hearts of some practitioners, their minds may become disturbed by demonic forces, leading to negative outcomes. In such cases, the celestial beings are reduced to demons. The Dharma is intended to bring happiness and relieve suffering, but if misused, it can result in harmful actions such as slandering the Three Jewels or breaking vows, which carry serious consequences.

16.

Do not seek others' misery as crutches of your own happiness.

The final commitment guides us away from seeking happiness by causing others pain. The aim is to ensure our own joy is not built upon another being's suffering. For example, some people feel pleased when their enemies encounter misfortune. They may even deem their benefactors' illness as an exciting opportunity to receive offerings. Others may feel satisfied when their business competitors struggle. However, true happiness does not arise from the suffering of others. When we see others in pain, it is critical to offer help whenever possible. Even if we are unable to take on others' suffering directly, we can still empathize, dedicate merit, or make aspirations for their well-being—these actions are deeply meaningful.

The text above outlines sixteen commitments. However, some commentaries divide the three general principles found within the first commitment, resulting in a total of eighteen vows. Regardless of how they are counted, it is essential that we diligently observe these vows and engage in careful self-reflection.

7 The Precepts of Mind Training

In general terms, Vajrayana Buddhism speaks of "vows," while Sutrayana uses the term "precepts." In this text, the commitments discussed earlier may be understood as aspirations, while the following twenty-two precepts are rules of discipline to be observed in practice.

1.

All yogas gathered into one.

"Yogas" refers to our daily demeanor and conduct—such as walking, standing, sitting, lying down, eating, and sleeping. "Gathered into one" means that practitioners of Mahayana mind training should focus single-mindedly on cultivating altruistic bodhicitta. Whether it is day or night, during meals or conversations, we are encouraged to keep bodhicitta present in our thoughts, words, and actions. In this way, we bring every action of body, speech, and mind into this one practice of bodhicitta.

2.

Counter all adversity with a single remedy.

Whenever we encounter adversity—such as illness, conflict, disturbances from spirits, emotional turmoil, physical pain, or various natural and human disasters—we should wholeheartedly cultivate altruistic bodhicitta. For example, when illness arises, we can wish for the demon of illness to find happiness, letting go of concern for our own suffering. If others slander or harm us, we can reflect sincerely: "Though this person appears to harm me today, the root cause of my suffering is actually my own past negative karma. May they find happiness." The aim is to meet every difficulty with this compassionate perspective.

3.

At the beginning and at the end, two things to be done.

Upon waking in the morning, begin the day by aspiring to generate and act with bodhicitta. Throughout the day, strive to keep both the aspiration and the action of bodhicitta present in all activities. Before going to bed, reflect on the day: Did I uphold these two aspects of bodhicitta today? If there were lapses, confess diligently; if not, take a moment to rejoice, thinking, "I did well today! My actions benefited sentient beings. I am drawing closer to Buddhahood—perhaps I deserve a good meal!" (Audience laughs.)

Such gentle encouragement is valuable support on our spiritual journey.

4.

Whichever of the two occurs, be patient.

This principle guides us to cultivate patience in the face of both favorable and adverse circumstances. During times of adversity—such as poverty, illness, loss of reputation, or other misfortunes—it helps to recognize that these experiences are transient, like dreams or illusions. The suffering felt today is no different from a passing dream last night; with time, all difficulties fade away.

Patience is just as vital when favorable circumstances arise—such as fame, health, or wealth. In these moments, the practice is to guard against arrogance or ostentation, even when we feel content or successful. While many people endure hardship well, prosperity can sometimes give rise to a pride that hinders one's spiritual path. History offers examples of practitioners who remained steadfast through great turmoil, only to find their practice faltering when they later gained freedom and comfort.

Upon careful reflection, both happiness and suffering are impermanent states like dreams or illusions, lacking any real essence or

significance. Recognizing this helps us stay committed to the path with a steady mind, avoiding wild swings between ecstasy and agony.

5.

Keep the two even at your life's expense.

We remain prepared to give up our lives rather than abandon the general and specific vows. The general vows include the pratimoksha vows, bodhisattva vows, and tantric vows. The specific vows refer to the sixteen commitments discussed earlier.

6.

Train in the three difficulties.

Working on afflictive emotions involves three stages of difficulty: initially, recognizing afflictive mental states can be challenging; in the middle, overcoming them is difficult; and finally, eradicating them is not easy. Training in all three stages involves first becoming aware of the arising of afflictive emotions, then applying appropriate antidotes, and ultimately eliminating all afflictions.

7.

Acquire the three main provisions.

To cultivate Mahayana bodhicitta, three essential provisions are required. First, a qualified teacher who can clearly explain loving-kindness and bodhicitta is indispensable. Second, it is vital to have a workable mind with genuine faith in Mahayana Buddhism. Third, the necessary favorable conditions for Dharma practice—such as adequate food, clothing, and shelter—must be present.

These three elements serve as the primary causes and conditions for developing bodhicitta. If any one is missing, the opportunity to practice may not arise. Without a virtuous teacher, we lack guidance with respect to how to practice; with a teacher but no faith, practice remains impossible; and even with both, if basic needs are unmet, sustaining the precious path of cultivating bodhicitta becomes extremely difficult, and we may ultimately have to give it up. Some Dharma friends with a sincere wish to practice are unable to do so because they lack merit and these favorable conditions.

8.

Cultivate the three that must not decline.

To cultivate bodhicitta, three qualities must not deteriorate. First, devotion and respect for one's teacher must remain steadfast. Without faith in the teacher, it is not possible to successfully practice

guru yoga and truly develop bodhicitta. The teacher is the embodiment of all the buddhas of the three times, and generating wrong views or anger toward the teacher can obstruct the practice of guru yoga. His Holiness often shared a story about a practitioner who, after a conflict with his teacher, went to meditate in a cave in Qinghai. Although he knew to begin with guru yoga, every attempt to visualize his teacher brought the conflict to mind. Realizing he could not attain siddhis with such thoughts, he ultimately had to give up. This story serves as a cautionary example.

Second, faith in Mahayana Buddhism must not be lost, as the practice of mind training cannot proceed without it. Third, it is necessary to uphold precepts, including samaya vows, and proper conduct, ensuring that they are not transgressed.

9.

Keep the three inseparable.

Ensure that the body, speech, and mind are consistently engaged in virtuous actions. This means dedicating the body to wholesome deeds like prostrations, circumambulations, and making offerings. Speech can be devoted to virtuous expression through reciting

mantras, sutras, and other sacred texts. And the mind is consistently oriented toward altruism, loving-kindness, compassion and bodhicitta, day and night.

10.

Apply the training impartially to all objects.

Cultivate impartial great compassion and equanimity toward all objects, including both sentient beings and inanimate things. This verse teaches us to refrain from generating wrong views, anger, or harmful intentions toward any object, whether it is living or not.

Sometimes, when people are angry or upset, they may vent their emotions by damaging objects—throwing phones, slamming doors, or smashing pots and pans. Such actions are unwise and unnecessary, as these objects have done nothing to deserve anger. Much of this dramatic behavior is influenced by movies and television, which often portray exaggerated reactions that people then imitate in real life. In contrast, a person with stability and inner cultivation, even when experiencing anger, refrains from taking it out on inanimate objects. This approach aligns with the sutras, which caution that even becoming angry at something like ashes can have significant karmic consequences.

11.

The training needs to be all-pervasive and deep.

This verse reinforces the previous one by emphasizing that the cultivation of the great compassionate bodhicitta should be both all-pervasive and deep. The objects of a broad practice encompass both sentient beings and inanimate things without exception. To practice deeply means that boundless loving-kindness and bodhicitta arise genuinely from the heart rather than remaining a superficial idea. In this way, strong afflictive emotions will not arise toward animate and inanimate phenomena.

The power of a well-practiced mind is profound. There is a story of an accomplished master whose compassion was so powerful that even the mountains, rivers, and plants around him joined in reciting the Vajrakilaya mantra, *Om Benza Kili Kilaya Hum Pe*. A mind filled with virtue can inspire kindness in both sentient beings and inanimate things, while a mind filled with negativity can have the opposite effect—this is a natural law.

While complete equanimity is a long-term goal that appears to be challenging to achieve right now, developing self-control over our emotions is a crucial step on the path. In light of the severe consequences of failing to manage one's afflictive emotions, it is

concerning that some students of Mahayana Buddhism still face such a struggle. Many people end up in prison because they lack self-control—a significant shortcoming. According to Buddhist texts, an even greater number of beings experience suffering in the hell realms for similar reasons. Although only a small portion of those who commit harmful actions are ever caught,and many more likely go undetected, those unrestrained actions still produce karmic consequences, which will manifest as suffering in lower realms. After receiving the teachings, the goal for all of us is to strive toward better control of our mental afflictions.

In this regard, the *Seven Points of Mind Training* is effective. Sometimes, my teachings may feel personally directed, as they could touch upon some people's "wounds." Please understand I am not scolding anyone individually; I am merely repeating and interpreting the words of Geshe Chekawa. My own practice is not perfect, and these teachings apply equally to me. Although at times I feel unqualified to teach such profound Dharma, the *Avatamsaka Sutra* suggests that even a lamp held by a blind person can help others see the path.

12.

Meditate constantly on those who have been set apart.

Continually cultivate loving-kindness and bodhicitta toward "those who have been set apart." This term carries several meanings. It can refer to our competitors or those who may harm us. Certain commentaries explain it as beings with karmic ties—those entangled with us through negative connections. This term can also mean our root guru, parents, elders who have shown us kindness, patients, enlightened beings, and Dharma teachers, especially those who frequently expound the Dharma.

Harboring ill will toward any of these individuals only obstructs our own happiness, both in this life and in future ones. Instead of holding onto harmful or angry thoughts, we are encouraged to nurture loving-kindness and bodhicitta toward all beings, especially the object of our deep veneration, over the long term.

13.

Do not be dependent on external conditions.

A common challenge in practice is inconsistency driven by external circumstances. Many people's Dharma practice is dependent on external circumstances—they only engage in practice when various favorable conditions are present. When they have good health, a pleasant mood, and a comfortable working environment with little pressure, practice can feel enthusiastic. However, when faced with

challenges like illness, a low mood, an unpleasant environment, or a busy schedule, diligence often wanes, and they may find excuses to stop.

A genuine practitioner of bodhicitta, however, remains steadfast regardless of external circumstances. The hallmark of a true practitioner is the ability to persist day and night, undeterred by whether circumstances like health, mood, or environment are favorable or not. This serves as a reminder of the great masters of the past, whose circumstances for practice were often far more challenging than our own.

In reality, as long as our body and mind are capable, we have many favorable conditions for practice. While everyone faces various troubles and daily concerns, with faith and self-control, the conditions needed for practice are generally present. To summarize, relying on external factors for motivation ultimately hinders spiritual development. We are encouraged to maintain a stable and consistent practice, independent of outside influences.

14.

This time, practice what is most important.

Having wandered in samsara since beginningless time, we have now obtained a precious human life with freedoms and advantages; thus, it is imperative to practice Dharma. When considering whether to practice for this life or future lives, it is more important to focus on future lives. When choosing between practicing for oneself or for others, practicing for others takes precedence. Among various teachings, the practice of bodhicitta stands out as most essential. Within bodhicitta practice itself, there are both theoretical approaches and pith-instruction methods, with pith-instruction practice holding greater significance. Many teachings in the Buddhist scriptures have been explained by great masters such as Nagarjuna, Asanga, and Shantideva, while later masters like Atisha and Dromtonpa emphasized the importance of practicing bodhicitta through pith instructions.

Today, with a variety of excellent methods readily available, the practice of bodhicitta is more accessible than ever before. For a diligent practitioner, the *Seven Points of Mind Training* can provide valuable guidance and foster genuine progress in cultivating bodhicitta, much as a driving manual offers straightforward instructions. These pith instructions have been passed down by great masters to the present day. Although the Dharma is now widespread, the true pith instructions for practicing bodhicitta are not found everywhere.

If you wish, you can search through all exoteric and esoteric scriptures to see this for yourself. In summary, focusing on the pith instructions of bodhicitta is of utmost significance.

15.

Do not misunderstand right and wrong.

There are six types of misconceptions to be avoided.

1) Misplaced patience occurs when one struggles to be patient in the practice of forbearance, where true patience is needed, yet can endure all sorts of trivial worldly activities with great perseverance. For example, some practitioners find it very difficult to memorize a single treatise, but when it comes to following a TV series, they display remarkable interest, patience, and persistence—even to the point of skipping meals or sleep.

2) Misplaced intention describes a state in which one lacks interest in virtuous actions but feels especially enthusiastic and joyful about meaningless worldly matters. For such individuals, virtue holds as little appeal as grass offered to a hungry dog.

3) Misplaced relish means failing to appreciate the profound joy of hearing, contemplating, and practicing the Dharma, and instead seeking enjoyment in worldly matters and sensory pleasures.

4) Misplaced compassion arises when people pity monastics engaged in ascetic retreats in mountain caves, while admiring the wealthy who, bound by karma and afflictions, spend their days accumulating negative karma. For instance, when Milarepa was practicing asceticism, seven young women remarked, "There is no one in the world as pitiful as you." Milarepa replied, "Actually, there is no one in the world as pitiful as you," and then taught them Dharma through songs of realization. This story is recorded in Milarepa's biography. In fact, all sentient beings are suffering, and it is for them that we should generate compassion.

5) Misplaced pursuit is seen when one fails to encourage dependents to pursue the Dharma, instead urging them to focus on worldly matters. Those in authority are encouraged not to lead others toward actions that create negative consequences. As disciples, it is more beneficial to focus on hearing, contemplating, practicing, and benefiting sentient beings, rather than giving undue importance to trivial matters. It appears that certain disciples of a few spiritual teachers become preoccupied with tasks unrelated to liberation.

6) Misplaced joy arises when one feels happiness at a rival's suffering. For example, some may feel elated when their enemies experience misfortune, thinking, "My rival had bad luck today—how wonderful! Time to celebrate!" I have heard that many people

even rejoiced at others' misfortune after the 9/11 incident. A more beneficial and compassionate response, even toward someone who has mistreated us, is to cultivate a sincere wish for their well-being, thinking, "Although this person has not treated me well, may they be free from suffering and find happiness." True practice of bodhicitta calls for genuine kindness and honest reflection. It is inconsistent to present a compassionate exterior—holding a mala and prayer wheel, chanting "Om Mani Padme Hum"—while inwardly harboring ill will.

16.

Do not be inconsistent.

Consistency is essential in any practice. Rather than working by fits and starts, it is far more beneficial to sustain our efforts steadily, like a stream that flows without interruption. Real progress and inner strength come from remaining engaged with one method over time.

Genuine practice calls for sustained commitment rather than brief bursts of zeal. Some Dharma friends were extremely diligent when they first became monastics, practicing through the night or rising at three in the morning, only to lose that enthusiasm after a few days. In any endeavor, accomplishment depends on patient effort without

expecting immediate results. The most admirable practitioners are those who embody perseverance and patience. By cultivating a steady and enduring mind, and by practicing with patience over the long term, we can make real progress.

17.

Train wholeheartedly.

Approach our mind training with a strong and unwavering will, maintaining effort without letting it diminish over time. From the moment we take refuge in the Three Jewels and generate bodhicitta, it is important to continue moving forward in this direction. I have seen Dharma friends who have remained diligent for ten or even twenty years, sustaining their commitment without regression or loss of faith. Such steadfastness and devotion are signs of great merit and are extremely valuable.

18.

Gain freedom through discernment and analysis.

This teaching encourages us to observe our self-grasping and mental afflictions. Alternatively, it can be understood as observing the coarse stages of one's afflictive mental states and the subtle stages. By examining whether afflictive mental states are present,

we gradually become aware of them. Once recognized, we can apply the appropriate antidotes, eliminate these afflictions, and ultimately attain liberation. This is the proper path of practice.

19.

Do not be boastful.

Refrain from seeking recognition or praise for small achievements. It is best not to show off or constantly look for acknowledgment from others after doing a little good.

In some Tibetan versions of this text, this line is rendered as "do not complain or feel sorry for yourself," which offers another valuable perspective. Practicing Dharma and benefiting others are commitments we have voluntarily made as Mahayana practitioners. Complaints such as, "I work so hard, why don't you understand and care about me?" are not helpful. Instead of expecting special treatment from others or feeling upset about them, it is better to be mindful of our commitments of cultivating bodhicitta and benefiting beings. Developing the mindset to bear difficulties independently supports the fruition of our practice.

20.

Do not be irritable.

It is essential to avoid irritability and a quick temper. Some individuals may appear gentle and refined in daily life, yet when provoked, they may suddenly lose their temper and display unexpected behaviors. It is beneficial to be mindful of these tendencies and work to counteract them. If Buddhists, particularly those in monastic robes, exhibit unruly behaviors such as shouting harsh language, it is likely to lead non-Buddhists to lose faith in the Dharma.

Because irritability is such an unsettling emotion, venting impulsively in public can dramatically alter how one is perceived. A person may be regarded as a dedicated practitioner, but a single outburst can undo that impression. While good deeds often go unnoticed, a single mistake can leave a lasting negative mark—much like the Chinese proverb, "Once bitten by a snake, one is afraid of ropes for ten years." Therefore, practicing self-control is especially vital for those whose emotions are easily swayed.

Some commentaries caution against becoming like the fierce spirits of U-Tsang, who are known for their volatile tempers. *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* describes their patience as being more fragile than tender flesh in a wound. Even a minor provocation can enrage them and cause misfortune. Similarly, some young people today react intensely to trivial words or actions, sometimes leading to unwise

decisions as drastic as suicide. People who are easily angered and irritable can sometimes be reminiscent of fierce spirits.

21.

Do not be temperamental.

Try not to be as changeable as the weather in spring—cloudy one moment, clear the next. Some people are cheerful and joyful when things are going well, but become quite intimidating when circumstances shift. Such fluctuations in mood are not beneficial.

22.

Do not seek fame.

While a good reputation can sometimes help sentient beings and support certain goals, fame itself is ultimately just an empty name without real substance. Especially when one's inner qualities do not match their reputation, such recognition is merely an illusion and lacks true significance. Those without inner merit who continually seek external validation to feel fulfilled merely reveal their deep-seated insecurity.

People who truly cultivate bodhicitta never place themselves above others or seek personal fame and profit, regardless of the situation. This Mahayana Buddhist approach differs from worldly beliefs or

some other religions. Many people, particularly in the West, believe that focusing on oneself is the key to success. However, placing too much importance on the self can lead to endless afflictions and suffering, and ultimately harm society, the nation, and the world as a whole. If the world leaders exhibit selfishness, they often influence their citizens to adopt similar behaviors. When selfishness becomes more widespread, cooperation and trust within and between societies will decline, resulting in a diminished sense of security on our planet. Anyone with wisdom can easily infer this outcome.

Conclusion

Transforming the prevalent five degenerations
Into the path of enlightenment,
The essence of the nectar-like pith instructions
Was passed down from Master Serlingpa.

In this degenerate age of the five impurities, these supreme teachings for turning adverse conditions into opportunities for spiritual growth are like a treasury of nectar. Whoever partakes in this nectar can dispel all suffering.

By relying on these pith instructions, transmitted through Master Serlingpa and Venerable Atisha, we learn to transform obstacles into the path, even amidst the challenges of this degenerate world. This approach is unique compared to other methods of practice. Often, when difficulties arise, people may see them simply as misfortunes and seek blessings to remove them. However, after studying these instructions, obstacles can be deemed as causes for happiness. For those cultivating bodhicitta, obstacles are not intimidating; instead, they become fuel to the fire of practice, making it ever more vibrant and successful. One might even say: "Wow, I must be making

great progress in my practice to be able to face and withstand such adversities!"

When the karma of past trainings arose,
With abundant faith as the cause,
I have easily disregarded hardship and disparagement,
and
Obtained teachings that subdue self-clinging.
Now, even in death, I shall have no regrets.

Geshe Chekawa explained that, due to the virtuous karma of his past practice and his immense faith, he was able to endure all the hardships and criticism encountered in seeking the Dharma. As a result of his merit, faith, and ascetic practice, Geshe Chekawa received the supreme teaching—the *Seven Points of Mind Training*—which cuts through self-clinging. Even if death were to come tomorrow, he would have no regrets.

As stated in the *Analects*:

> If one hears the right way in the morning, one may die in the evening without regret.

This line can be interpreted in various ways. Perhaps I can explore the *Analects* further in the future. Now that we have studied the

Seven Points of Mind Training, there is no regret whenever death may come. These teachings contain the most precious instructions for upholding precepts, cultivating bodhicitta, and transforming adversity into the path. They encompass the preliminary and main practices of Mahayana Buddhism.

As we conclude these two sessions, I am grateful to have shared this profound text with you, drawing upon the wisdom of the great masters who came before us. May you carry these teachings in your hearts, and let them inspire you to do your utmost to benefit all sentient beings.

Notes

1. The seven point pith instruction for generating bodhicitta related to its cause and effect has the following seven points:

   1) Recognizing all beings as mothers: realizing that all sentient beings have been our mothers.

   2) Remembering their kindness: when they were our mothers, their kindness to us was immense.

   3) Repaying their kindness: after recognizing their kindness, we should try every means to repay it.

   4) Compassion: in the process of repaying kindness, wishing that these mother sentient beings be free from suffering.

   5) Loving-kindness: wishing that they obtain all temporary and ultimate happiness.

   6) Exceptional resolve: the task of freeing them from suffering and bringing them happiness must be undertaken by me.

   7) Generation: after earnestly contemplating in this way, bodhicitta will arise in one's mindstream.

2. Patrul Rinpoche, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, trans. Padmakara Translation Group (Boston: Shambhala Publications,1998), 12.

Dedication

May the merit resulting from this piece of work contribute
in the greatest possible measure to the long life of all great masters,
to the flourishing of the Buddhadharma,
and to the welfare of all sentient beings.

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