

THE THIRTY-SEVEN PRACTICES OF BODHISATTVAS

By Tokme Sangpo

Homage to Lokeshvaraya.

Respectful homage always through the three doors
To the supreme lamas and the protector Avalokiteshvara
Who, though perceiving that all phenomena have no going or coming,
Make effort single-pointedly for the welfare of migrating beings.

The perfect buddhas, the sources of benefit and happiness,
Arise from having practiced the holy Dharma
That in turn depends on knowing its practices.
Therefore, I will explain the practices of bodhisattvas.

- 1 It is a practice of bodhisattvas –
For the sake of freeing themselves and others from the ocean of cyclic existence –
To hear, think, and meditate day and night without indolence
Here at this time of having attained the great ship of leisure and fortune hard to gain.
- 2 It is a practice of bodhisattvas to give up their fatherland
That has, like water, the fluctuations of attachment for the class of friends,
That, like fire, has burning hatred for the class of enemies,
And that has the darkness of ignorance forgetting to adopt and discard.
- 3 It is a practice of bodhisattvas to resort to isolation –
Through abandoning bad objects, the afflictive emotions gradually diminish,
Through the absence of distraction, application to virtue naturally increases,
Through clarity of mind, ascertainment of doctrine is generated.
- 4 It is a practice of bodhisattvas to renounce this life –
Close friends who have been together for a long time separate,
The wealth and articles achieved with striving are left behind,
And the guest-house of the body is left by the guest of consciousness.
- 5 It is a practice of bodhisattvas to abandon bad friends
Who, when accompanied, increase the three poisons,
Cause the activities of hearing, thinking, and meditating to deteriorate,
And make love and compassion non-existent.
- 6 It is a practice of bodhisattvas to hold more dearly
Than their own body the holy spiritual guide
Who, when relied upon, causes faults to be removed
And good qualities to increase like a waxing moon.
- 7 Who could be protected by a worldly god

Himself also bound in the prison of cyclic existence?
 Therefore, it is a practice of bodhisattvas to go for refuge
 To the Three Jewels which are undeceiving when refuge is sought.

- 8 The Subduer said that the sufferings of bad migrations,
 Very difficult to bear, are the results of negative actions.
 Therefore, it is a practice of bodhisattvas never to do
 Negative actions though it comes down to their life.
- 9 The happiness of the three existences
 Like dew on the tip of a blade of grass, disintegrates after a brief time.
 [Therefore] it is a practice of bodhisattvas to seek
 The supreme state of immutable liberation.
- 10 What is the use of one's own happiness if mothers
 Who were kind to oneself since beginningless time suffer?
 Therefore, it is a practice of bodhisattvas to generate the mind of enlightenment
 In order to free limitless sentient beings.
- 11 All suffering arises from wanting happiness for oneself
 Whereas the perfect buddhas are born from the mind benefiting others.
 Therefore, it is a practice of bodhisattvas to exchange completely
 Their own happiness for others' suffering.
- 12 Even if someone out of great desire steals all their wealth
 Or sends another to steal it away,
 It is a practice of bodhisattvas to dedicate to that person
 Their body, resources, and virtues of the three times.
- 13 Even if someone cuts off their head
 When they do not have the slightest fault,
 It is a practice of bodhisattvas out of compassion
 To take upon themselves the negativities of that person.
- 14 Even if someone proclaims throughout the billion worlds
 Various types of ill-repute about them,
 It is a practice of bodhisattvas to speak with a mind of love
 Of the good qualities of that person.
- 15 Even if someone in the middle of a gathering of many beings
 Exposes their faults and speaks bad words about them,
 It is a practice of bodhisattvas to bow respectfully
 With a discrimination of that person as a virtuous spiritual guide.
- 16 Even if a person, dearly protected like their own child ,
 Views them as an enemy,
 It is a practice of bodhisattvas to be especially merciful
 Like a mother to her child stricken with illness.
- 17 Even if a being, equal with or inferior to them,
 Derides them out of pride,

- It is a practice of bodhisattvas respectfully to take
That person to the crown of their head like a guru.
- 18 Though they are bereft of livelihood, always despised by people,
And afflicted by grave illness and demons,
It is a practice of bodhisattvas without discouragement
To take all beings' negativities and sufferings upon themselves.
- 19 Though they are famous, venerated by many beings,
And have attained the likes of the wealth of Vaishravana,
It is a practice of bodhisattvas to be without conceit
Seeing the essencelessness of the glory and wealth of cyclic existence.
- 20 If the internal enemy of hatred is not tamed,
When one tries to tame external enemies they increase.
Therefore, it is a practice of bodhisattvas to tame their own continuum
By means of the soldiers of love and compassion.
- 21 The good qualities of the desire realm, like salt water,
Increase craving no matter how much they are enjoyed.
Therefore, it is a practice of bodhisattvas to abandon immediately
Things generating obsession.
- 22 Whatever appears is one's own mind; the mind itself
Is free from the start from the extremes of elaborations.
It is a practice of bodhisattvas, through knowing just that,
Not to take to mind the signs of apprehended and apprehender.
- 23 When they meet with attractive objects,
It is a practice of bodhisattvas to view them as untrue –
Even though appearing to be beautiful like a summer rainbow –
And to abandon obsession.
- 24 Like the death of a child in a dream, through holding the erroneous appearances
Of the varieties of suffering to be true, one makes oneself weary.
Therefore, it is a practice of bodhisattvas, when meeting
With unfavorable conditions, to view them as erroneous.
- 25 Since it is necessary for those who want enlightenment to give up even their body,
What need to say anything about external things?
Therefore, it is a practice of bodhisattvas to give gifts
Without hope for reward or fruition.
- 26 If without morality one's own welfare cannot be achieved,
To assert that others' welfare could be achieved is a source of laughter.
Therefore, it is a practice of bodhisattvas to safeguard morality
Without aspirations involved in cyclic existence.
- 27 For a Bodhisattva wanting the resources [arising] from virtues
All harmers are like a treasure of jewels.
Therefore, it is a practice of bodhisattvas to cultivate patience
Without deep hatred for anyone.

- 28 In that even hearers and solitary realizers achieving only their own welfare
Are seen to make effort as though putting out a fire on their head,
It is a practice of bodhisattvas to make effort,
The source of good qualities, for the sake of all migrating beings.
- 29 Understanding that the afflictive emotions are completely conquered
Through special insight thoroughly endowed with calm abiding,
It is a practice of bodhisattvas to cultivate concentration
That exceeds even the four formless absorptions.
- 30 Since one cannot attain perfect enlightenment
Through the [other] five perfections without wisdom,
It is a practice of bodhisattvas to cultivate the wisdom
Possessing method and not conceptualizing the three spheres.
- 31 If one does not analyze one's own mistakes,
One can perform non-practices with the form of a Dharma practitioner.
Therefore, it is a practice of bodhisattvas to continually examine
Their own mistakes and abandon them.
- 32 If due to afflictive emotions bodhisattvas speak of a fault
Of another bodhisattva, they themselves degenerate.
Therefore, it is a practice of bodhisattvas not to speak of the fault
Of persons who have entered into the Great Vehicle.
- 33 To dispute back and forth out of [wanting] gain and honor
Causes the activities of hearing, thinking, and meditating to deteriorate.
Therefore, it is a practice of bodhisattvas to abandon attachment
To the households of friends and patrons.
- 34 Harsh words disturb others' minds and cause
A bodhisattva's conduct to deteriorate.
Therefore, it is a practice of bodhisattvas to abandon
Harsh words about the unpleasantness of others.
- 35 If one becomes accustomed to the afflictive emotions, they are hard to overcome through
their antidotes.
Therefore, it is a practice of bodhisattvas to overcome
The afflictive emotions of attachment and so forth immediately upon their first being
produced
Through brandishing the weapon of the antidote by generating mindfulness and
introspection.
- 36 In brief, it is the practice of bodhisattvas to achieve
Others' welfare through continually possessing mindfulness and introspection,
[Knowing] the state of their own mind
In each and every behavior.
- 37 It is the practice of bodhisattvas to dedicate to enlightenment
With the wisdom of the purity of the three spheres
The virtues achieved with effort in this way

In order to remove the suffering of limitless transmigrators.

For the sake of those wishing to train in the bodhisattva path
I have written down these thirty-seven practices of bodhisattvas,
The meanings taught in the sutras, tantras, and treatises,
Drawing on the speech of the holy beings.

Because my intelligence is low and training slight,
This is not poetry to delight scholars.
However, because it relies on sutras and the words of the holy beings,
I think it is the unmistakable practice of bodhisattvas.

Still, it is difficult for one with an inferior mind such as mine
To fathom the great waves of the bodhisattva conduct.
Therefore, the holy beings are requested to bear with
The collection of faults – contradictions, unrelatedness, and so forth.

Through the virtue arising from this, may all migrating beings
Become like the protector Avalokiteshvara,
Not abiding in the extremes of existence and peace,
Through the supreme ultimate and conventional minds of enlightenment.

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