37 Principles of Bodhisattva

PART ONE: The Preparation

Make meaningful this human existence of yours, so rare and difficult to obtain (1)

- To listen, contemplate, and meditate is the practice of a bodhisattva
- First I hear and study, then I think about it and meditate, then I become it. These three things are very important. First we have to study to know what we are trying to do, then to really think it through so that we really understand it, and then incorporate it into our lives and become it.
- When buddhas look at samsara with the eyes of their omniscience, they do not see it as an enjoyable place. They are acutely aware of the sufferings of beings, and they see how senseless are the pointless, temporary goals that beings try so hard to attain. It is important to become more and more clearly convinced that the only thing worth achieving is supreme enlightenment. Contemplating the sufferings of samsara, you will naturally develop a strong wish to be liberated from it. Rather than meaninglessly wasting your energy, you will concentrate on practicing the Dharma.
- If your mind is in accord with Dharma, you will not experience any problems with the things of this life; while if you are constantly preoccupied with your ordinary pursuits, your problems will increase, and nothing will be accomplished.
- Determination to be free from samsara, based on disillusionment, is the foundation of all Dharma practice. Unless you have made a clear decision to turn your back on samsara, then however many prayers you recite, however much you meditate, however many years you remain in retreat, it will all be in vain.
- a practitioner who yearns to leave the miseries of samsara behind will make use of all the ways in which that can be done, such as taking refuge, generating the mind set on attaining enlightenment for the sake of others, undertaking positive actions, and so on, with a firm determination to get out of samsara constantly in mind.
- When the Buddha first turned the wheel of Dharma, he taught the Four Noble Truths. The First Noble Truth is that there is suffering, and it should be recognised. The Second Noble Truth is that suffering has a cause, which therefore needs to be given up. That cause is the *kleshas*, the negative emotions or afflicting mental factors. Although there are many such obscured states of mind, the five principal obscurations are desire, aggression, ignorance, pride, and jealousy. The Third Noble Truth is that there is a path that leads beings away from suffering; this path therefore needs to be followed. The Fourth Noble Truth is that suffering can thus be brought to cessation. Through the Four Noble Truths, the Buddha urged us to renounce worldly concerns and strive for liberation from samsara.
- In our search for the means to be free from samsara, the first step is to listen to the teachings, which explain the different methods of so doing.
  The second step is to reflect on what you have heard and try to find the essential meaning in it. Examine your own mind to see whether it is really as the teachings describe or not, and whether you can keep it focused on an object of meditation.
  Third, once you have a clear idea of the essential meaning of the Dharma, you must try to realise that meaning through your inner experience, and assimilate it into your being. This is called meditation.
- *The meaning of leaving behind your native land is to* ***leave behind the emotions of attachment, hatred, and the obscuring ignorance*** *that permeates both. These* ***three poisons****, generally speaking, are most active in the relationships you establish with family and friends in your own homeland.*
  "Native land" means our ordinary habitual responses; these are what we have to leave behind. And the way to leave them behind is first to be conscious of them.

Abandon Attachment, Aversion and Ignorance, the three poisons (2)

- The Buddha said - the cause of our suffering, of our duhkha, is attachment, clinging and grasping
- People react to each other out of old habits, without even really thinking about it anymore. Many negativities come up because of the way people habitually act and talk to others with whom they are familiar. The patterns may continue that started in childhood.
- It is easy to cultivate antipathies and conflicts. We like this person, but we don't like that one. It is easy to feel long-term hostility toward our neighbours or even our siblings, when we have not examined why we feel the way we do. It is hard to see people who we know well, like our family, as they really are and not as our 'projection'.
- Lojong teaching is all about how to cultivate skilful responses in place of our habitual unskilful responses. We need to look, question and see without pretending; cultivate inner change. Where we see things in our responses which are negative or not helpful; that is our path. That is our practice. To change and transform. Everything can be changed.
- There is this heaviness when it comes to actually making the effort to change. Like a thick fog which comes into the mind and prevents us from seeing with clarity: what could be done differently, what would be skilful and what is unskilful. Even if we've read about it a thousand times, we still find ourselves caught up in the same old habitual responses.
- For instance, somebody says something unkind and we get all upset, angry, and hurt; which is just the ego being sad that people don't love it.
- Remember that nobody, not even the Buddha, can do it for us. It is up to us.
- Recognise that these three poisons inside our heart (our attachment, our hatred, and our basic unknowing or ignorance) are the cause of our suffering in samsara. It is not out there; it is inside us. We can do something about it.

Renunciation – Benefiting from Solitude (3)

- The foundation of Buddhism is renunciation "to really get out of something." If we are serious about becoming the masters of our minds, instead of the slaves of our emotions; if we are dedicated to leading a life that will be of benefit for ourselves and others, then we have to be selective.
- We have to decide in our lives what is really important to us and what is not. Then simplify. This is renunciation. Letting go of distractions.
- We should look for environments where the afflictive emotions such as our anger, aggression, jealousy, and attachment begin to grow less. At the same time, our good qualities are given a chance to increase because everybody else is trying to be kind and friendly, and so naturally one wants to be kind and friendly too.
- Be selective with the company that we keep. Avoid bad company
- When our minds gradually begin to see more clearly, with less delusion, less judgment, more clarity, and all our upsets, anger, and ego defences quiet down

1. Contemplating our precious human life so that we are grateful for our existence.
2. Contemplating impermanence and death so that we seize the opportunities of this life right now.
3. Contemplating karma (the law of cause and effect) so that we understand that our every action impacts ourselves and others.
4. Contemplating the suffering of cyclic existence (samsara) so that we are no longer entranced by worldly things and want to escape samsara forever.
5. Contemplating bodhicitta and helping all sentient beings out of samsara.

Giving up the concerns of this life by reflecting on impermanence (4)

- You're all alone. Naked. The only thing we carry with us is our karmic imprints. And what have we done about that?
- In our delusion, we see things as being permanent and truly self-existing. But in reality phenomena are impermanent, and devoid of any true substantial existence. We want to believe that our friends, partner, wealth, and influence will all endure, but by nature they are bound to change. It is therefore senseless to be so preoccupied with them.
- Not a single stable phenomenon can be found anywhere in the world outside. The same is true of people. We change with every passing moment. We change minute by minute, from youth to old age, and from old age to death. Our opinions, ideas, and plans are constantly changing and evolving. It is never certain that a project once begun will ever be completed, nor is it certain to unfold in the way we intended.
- "I will die, you will die." And then he added, "That's all my guru taught me; that's all I practice. Just meditate on that. I promise there is nothing greater."
- Look at the number of people you have known since you were very young; how many are still alive? For the moment, you may still be with parents, friends, a partner, and so on. But you cannot escape the fact that at death you will be taken away from them like a hair removed from butter; not a bit of butter remains attached to the hair.
- The timing of your death is uncertain, and the circumstances that will bring it about are unpredictable. Like a frog in the mouth of a snake, you are already in Death's mouth. Death may strike at any moment, without warning, and result from all sorts of causes and circumstances. Some people die young, some old, some from sickness, some in war, or because of a sudden violent accident such as falling off a cliff. Some die in their sleep, some while walking, some while eating. Some die serene, some wracked by attachment for their relatives and possessions. We all have to die, no matter how.

Avoiding unsuitable friends, whose company creates conditions unfavourable to your progress (5)

- **The Influence of Company on Spiritual Growth:** The text highlights that just as a crystal takes on the colour of the cloth it is placed upon, we are deeply influenced by those we associate with. Suitable friends, who embody qualities like compassion, kindness, and a focus on spiritual practice, naturally inspire us to develop similar virtues. In contrast, unsuitable friends, who are immersed in worldly distractions and negative behaviours, can amplify our own negative emotions (such as hatred, attachment, and ignorance) while diminishing our commitment to Dharma practices like listening, reflection, and meditation.
- **The Dangers of Bad Company:** Associating with unsuitable friends is compared to being led by a bad captain who steers his ship onto the rocks. Such friends both distract us from our spiritual goals and also erode the positive qualities we may have cultivated, particularly loving-kindness and compassion, which are central to the bodhisattva path. Over time, the influence of these negative associations can lead to the growth of the three poisons (greed, anger, and ignorance), causing a decline in our spiritual practice and an increase in suffering.
- **Importance of Selecting Friends Who Support Dharma Practice:** The text advises that we should seek out and associate with those who share our values and commitment to the spiritual path. Although these friends need not be Buddhists, they should be good people who embody qualities like integrity, honesty, and kindness. Being in the company of such individuals helps reinforce our own virtues and encourages us to continue our practice with greater dedication and joy.
- **The Role of Spiritual Friends in Deepening Practice:** Authentic spiritual friends are those who, like us, are devoted to practicing the Dharma and are detached from worldly concerns. Their example serves as a powerful motivator, helping us to see the inherent negativity of attachment and hatred and to develop a more profound love for all beings. Such relationships are essential for maintaining and deepening our practice, as they provide a supportive environment where positive qualities can flourish.
- This teaching underscores the critical role that our friendships and associations play in shaping our spiritual journey. By avoiding unsuitable friends who distract us from the Dharma and by seeking out those who embody and inspire virtuous qualities, we can create a supportive environment that nurtures our spiritual growth. This conscious choice of companions helps us to avoid the pitfalls of worldly distractions and to stay focused on the path to liberation, cultivating the qualities necessary for realisation of enlightenment.

Relying on a spiritual teacher, whose presence creates conditions favourable to your progress (6)

- **The Role of the Spiritual Teacher:** A true spiritual teacher is seen as indispensable for spiritual progress. Through the guidance of a teacher, one's faults gradually diminish, and positive qualities, like compassion, loving-kindness, and wisdom, flourish. The relationship with a teacher is likened to the waxing of the moon, where positive qualities grow steadily under their influence. The teacher's role is to provide personalised guidance, ensuring that the disciple stays on the correct path and avoids common pitfalls in spiritual practice.
- **The Teacher as a Living Example:** The teacher is a living embodiment of the Dharma, someone whose actions, speech, and thoughts are perfectly aligned with the teachings. They serve as a constant reminder of what is possible on the spiritual path and inspire their disciples by their example. This is why the teacher is considered more precious than one's own body, as they provide the means to attain liberation, which is far more valuable than any material possession or even life itself.
- **The Importance of Faith and Devotion:** Faith in the teacher is emphasised as a crucial element of the path. Without faith, even the most profound teachings may not be effective. The text stresses that faith in the teacher opens the door to receiving their blessings and allows the disciple to fully benefit from their wisdom and guidance. This faith is not blind but is based on careful examination and the recognition of the teacher's genuine qualities and abilities.
- **The Process of Finding and Committing to a Teacher:** The text advises that finding a true teacher requires careful consideration and discernment. One should listen to accounts of different masters, observe their qualities from a distance, and only commit to one in whom you have complete confidence. Once this commitment is made, the disciple should serve the teacher with devotion and diligently apply their instructions. The relationship between teacher and disciple is thus built on mutual respect and a shared commitment to the Dharma.
- **Transformation Through Association with the Teacher:** Just as ordinary wood takes on the fragrance of sandalwood when placed in a sandalwood grove, so too does the disciple absorb the positive qualities of the teacher through close association. This transformation is gradual and profound, leading to elimination of ignorance and cultivation of wisdom. The teacher helps you navigate complexities of the spiritual path, avoiding unnecessary detours and mistakes.
- **The Practical Benefits of a Teacher's Guidance:** The teacher provides practical advice that saves the disciple time and effort, helping them avoid the common mistakes that many make on the path. The teacher's guidance is seen as essential for making steady progress, especially in the early stages of practice. Without this guidance, the disciple may struggle unnecessarily, much like a blind person without a guide.
- **The Teacher as the Embodiment of the Buddha:** The teacher is viewed as the embodiment of the Buddha, and thus, devotion to the teacher is seen as devotion to the Buddha himself. This view reinforces the importance of maintaining a deep, unwavering respect and commitment to the teacher, as it is through this relationship that the disciple can achieve enlightenment.
- **Cherishing the Teacher Above All:** The ultimate practice of a bodhisattva involves cherishing the teacher more than oneself or anyone else. This level of devotion is seen as the root of all spiritual accomplishments. By viewing the teacher as a real buddha and maintaining constant devotion, enlightenment is brought within reach.
- The teaching emphasises that reliance on a true spiritual teacher is not just beneficial but essential for those on the path to enlightenment. The teacher acts as a guide, protector, and living example, helping the disciple to eliminate faults, cultivate positive qualities, and make steady progress on the path. This relationship, built on faith, devotion, and mutual respect, is the cornerstone of the bodhisattva's practice and the key to ultimate liberation.

Going for refuge, the entrance to the Buddhist teachings (7)

- True refuge is found only in the Three Jewels (the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha); considered to have "absolute wisdom, non-biased compassion, and unimpeded ability."
- Because we are all poisoned by our negative emotions, especially our greed and attachment, anger and aversion, jealousy and pride, along with the underlying quality of our delusory lack of understanding: our ignorance. We don't recognise who we really are.
- This underlying grasping at a false identity (who we are not) and not recognising who we really are is the cause of all these other poisons. We are sick with afflictive emotions.
- The Buddha says, "Yes, you have a big crisis, but there's a reason why you're so sick." The underlying cause is the grasping, clinging, attached mind based on our wrong perception of our identity, which creates a lot of problems.
- The Buddha said that suffering is birth, old age, sickness, and death as well as not getting what we want and getting what we do not want. In fact, it is the whole quandary of living tossed up and down in the ocean of existence called samsara.
- The Buddha is the one who shows you the path to enlightenment. Without him you would have no choice but to remain in the darkness of ignorance. You should therefore see the Buddha as the teacher. The Dharma is the path, the unmistaken way that leads directly to enlightenment. The Sangha is composed of the companions who accompany you along this extraordinary path.
- **"From here until life ends, I take refuge in the Buddha, I take refuge in the Dharma, I take refuge in the Sangha."**

PART TWO: The Main Teachings, Illuminating the Path

First, the path for beings of lesser capacity (Small Scope)

Valuing Virtue (8)

- As long as we believe "I" performed this, "I" did this, "I" said that, then that thread that keeps the karma coming along with us. Once we realise the emptiness of our false identification with a sense of "me and mine", there is no "I" in the centre. Karma is not being made.
- Karma, or action, depends on an actor. So long as we believe "I" am doing something, there are seeds being sown, and if we think of all of our past endless lifetimes, we've done everything.
- Moment to moment we are creating our future by how we respond to what is happening in this moment. It is like a tapestry that we are endlessly weaving.
- The best purification practice is to take whatever happens onto the path.
- The fact is that through the ages, we ourselves have probably killed thousands of people and animals. From a karmic point of view, we have to accept the consequences of those actions.
- We live in a world of our own projections. Everything depends on our state of mind: we project our psychic state outward and then react to it.
- We can decide to avoid doing anything non-virtuous, even at the cost of our life. Non-virtuous basically means "that which harms others." Just don't harm anybody, with our body, speech, or mind. No harm makes sense and has unforeseen and profound benefits.

Second, the path for beings of medium capacity (Medium Scope)

Recognising the Truth of Things (9)

- There are four things to remember regarding the karmic law of cause and result: (1) a karmic result is certain, (2) the result of an action tends to increase, (3) you will never experience anything that is not the result of an action of your own in the past, and (4) karmic seeds sown by your actions are never wasted and never disappear on their own.
- Impermanence (4) Dew on grass lasts such a short time
- Any pleasure that we can think of is short-lived and often hardly worth all the trouble that we went through to get it.
- One of the problems in our modern society is the idea that happiness means pleasure. Therefore a really happy life will be one of unending pleasure. But actually unending pleasure would be extraordinarily boring and unsatisfactory.
- Many people may have a life that appears full and prosperous, but inwardly their life is utterly meaningless. There is no purpose.
- They appear to have everything, yet they ask, "Is this all life is about?" Increasingly, people experience a sense of hopelessness, because they've got everything that society tells them is needed for happiness, satisfaction, and fulfilment; and they are miserable.
- Once you have understood the union of emptiness and the dependent arising of phenomena, you will see clearly how deluded and deceiving the ways of the world really are, and, like an old man forced to play children's games, you will find them very tiresome.
- Once you have realised the utter foolishness of spending your life attached to friends and scheming to subdue your enemies and competitors, you will find it tedious. Once you have been struck by the pointlessness of letting yourself be forever influenced and conditioned by your habitual tendencies, you will become sick of it. Once you know that it is sheer delusion to be preoccupied by thoughts of the future, and to lose your mindfulness and vigilance in the present moment, you will weary of it.
- Acknowledge the suffering of samsara, you will recognise that the source of suffering lies in your obscuring emotions and the negative actions they engender, and that the source of your obscuring emotions lies in your clinging to the idea of self. If you can rid yourself of that clinging, suffering will cease.

In order to renounce the world, you need to keep eleven pledges:
1. Not to conform to the attitudes of ordinary people, but to stay alone.
2. To leave your native land far behind.
3. To feel that you have had enough of sensual pleasures.
4. To maintain the humblest possible condition, thereby being free from caring what others think.
5. To keep a spy posted in your mind; the meditation on ridding your mind of attachment to loved ones.
6. Not to pay attention to what people say; whatever they may say, simply leave it be and let them say what they will.
7. Not to feel distress, even if the winds carry away all that is dear to you.
8. To have nothing to regret in this life, as though you were a dying beggar.
9. To continually recite the mantra "I need nothing!"
10. To keep the reins of your destiny firmly in your own hands.
11. To remain enveloped by the cloud of authentic practice.

Third, the path for beings of superior capacity (Great Scope)

I. Relative bodhichitta

1. The bodhichitta of intention

Valuing Others (10)

- The first level of aspiration is seeing that samsara is impermanent and understanding that outer acquisitions are not going to make us happy. Since everything is impermanent, we should strive for liberation or Nirvana. Get me out!
- The bodhichitta of intention, of aspiration, has two aspects: compassion, which is directed toward beings; and wisdom, which is directed toward enlightenment. You need both: if you do not aim at attaining ultimate enlightenment, then however strong your wish to benefit beings may be, you will never go beyond ordinary kindness and compassion; if you wish to attain enlightenment for your own sake alone, you will never go beyond the limited nirvana of Hinayana practitioners. Both aspects are indispensable.
- bodhichitta means "mind of enlightenment" or "spirit of awakening."
- We have a debt of gratitude to repay; to many hundreds on people in this lifetime alone and millions through all lifetimes. The greatest way to repay that debt is to attain enlightenment in order to liberate others; all our mothers from endless lifetimes.
- According to this aspiration, we are not just practicing to make ourselves feel better. We are practicing so that in this lifetime or in future lifetimes we may be in the position to genuinely help beings, who are so desperately in need of help, whether they realise it or not. That's the motivation.
- Right now, we can't. We are helpless. We can't even help ourselves much less other sentient beings. But the aspiration is there. We may not be able to help effectively now, but we will from this point onward use our time to really create the causes and conditions that in the future will enable us to genuinely help in a deep and meaningful way.
- This aspiration completely transforms one's own motivation: I am not doing this for me but for all beings.
- To set our mind on enlightenment with the aim of liberating limitless sentient beings is the practice of a bodhisattva, because only enlightenment will give us the power, the wisdom, and the compassion to liberate all beings. Nothing else will do.
- The only way to get enlightened is to make use of everything that happens to us (especially the adversities that befall us) by transforming and taking them on the path. We have to take whatever comes to us as it comes and make use of it. Then we advance.

2. The bodhichitta of application

A. The meditation practice of exchanging oneself and others

Practicing Kindness and Compassion (11)

- The reason why we suffer is because we are in the grip of our egoistic delusion, and we imagine that as long as we serve our own interests and can fulfil all our wants and desires, then somehow we will be happy. Our concern is to make ourselves happy. But it doesn't work.
- Our modern society projects these emotional afflictions (the very causes of suffering) as the causes of happiness. Everyone is racing after satisfaction like a mirage in the desert. What looks like water and palm trees is all an illusion, and we die of thirst. It is sad that so many people are desperately chasing after a mirage.
- Our society presents happiness as the result of acquiring more possessions, gaining higher status, staying forever young and beautiful, being desirable to others, and along with it, defending our own territory. These are just the familiar **five poisons: greed, aggression, pride, jealousy, and envy**; all of which make up our ignorance or fundamental ego delusion, which Buddha himself said is the cause of suffering.
- "All suffering without exception arises from desiring happiness for oneself." Yet perfect Buddhahood, which is genuine happiness, is "born from the thought of benefiting others." If we think about others and their happiness, and we stop worrying so much about our own happiness, suddenly we find we are happy. Therefore, "to exchange my happiness for the suffering of others is the practice of a bodhisattva." = practice of tonglen. Tonglen is the important practice of "giving and receiving."
- This more deliberate and focused practice of tonglen has many different applications, but in general it is based on love and compassion. Here is the basic practice: imagine someone who is suffering in any way. They could be actually present, or we can just think about them or use a photo. On the incoming breath, visualise drawing in dark light, rather like a vacuum cleaner sucking up all their suffering, including the causes of their suffering; present and karmic. Visualise drawing in their suffering in the form of black light or smoke and pollution. This goes down into the heart (the centre of the chest, not the physical heart) and forms into a little black pearl that represents the self-cherishing mind; the egotistic mind doesn't want other people's suffering however sorry we may feel for them. This is the mind thinking, *Well I'm really sorry you're sick, but I'm glad it is not me!* Or *This is a very good practice, but I hope it doesn't really work.* Although we are sorry for the other's suffering, we don't want to take it on ourselves.
- Visualise this dark light of others' suffering coming into ourselves and dissolving into that little black pearl of "I-ness" (because the last thing *I* want is somebody else's problems), deliberately inviting the suffering with the wish "I will take it in on myself," which crushes our self-cherishing attitude. Then as the dark light transforms into the pearl, the pearl itself transforms into a diamond and shines brightly, representing our true Buddha-nature, the pristine nature of the mind, which can never be polluted by suffering. It is eternally blissful and healthy. It cannot be anything else. It is the unconditioned and that is never polluted by the conditioned.
- The exchange of yourself and others can be approached step by step. The first stage is to see yourself and others as equally important; others want to be happy and want not to suffer, just as you do. So you should wish happiness for others in the same way that you wish it for yourself, and wish that they may avoid suffering, just as you do. The second stage is the exchange of yourself and others; you wish that others may have your happiness and that you may take their suffering.

Below is the tonglen practice in essence. May it be of benefit to you and all other sentient beings.
- Visualise someone who is suffering
- With the in-breath imagine taking in all their suffering and the causes of their suffering in the form of dark light or polluted smoke.
- This dark light descends with the inhalation to the heart chakra at the centre of the chest. It takes shape as a small black pearl (symbolising the self-cherishing mind).
- The black pearl immediately dissolves and is transformed into a brilliant diamond (symbolising our Buddha-nature).
- On the out-breath imagine that this diamond radiates a bright light that goes out and dissolves into the person being visualised, filling every cell of their body and mind with the clear bright light of health and happiness.

B. The post meditation practice of using unfavourable circumstances on the path

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

a. How to use loss on the path (12) Embracing Adversity

- Instead of feeling upset either at the person causing this negative reaction, or at ourselves for feeling angry, we think, Oh good, this person is so obnoxious. What a wonderful opportunity! Now I can really practice. Thank you so much for showing me how much work I still have to do. You really are my teacher. I didn't notice how sensitive I was about that and you have shown me. I'm really very grateful to you for that.
- instead of regarding somebody who is annoying or hurtful as being the enemy, as being somebody antagonistic to us, and then getting all upset and angry, we might recognise that actually this has given us a great opportunity. It helps us to see ourselves much more clearly; what work needs to be done still and at the same time the opportunity to get to work on the remedy.
- This practice of lojong is a workout in the spiritual realm that really challenges us, but the resulting inner strength is truly profound.
- To feel compassion for someone who is harming you is such an effective way of purifying your obscurations, freeing yourself from anger, and developing the positive side of your nature that, in fact, the harm that the person has done to you will carry you along the bodhisattva's path. As it is said, therefore, "I take refuge in whoever harms me, as he is the source of all happiness."
- When we come into opposition with people who are humiliating or criticising us, especially if their criticisms are not even true, then that sense of defensiveness becomes clear. Since this is what we are dealing with, we feel grateful for their help. This is exactly the central part of this text; how to take these challenging situations involving the eight worldly concerns (praise and blame, gain and loss, pleasure and pain, and fame and infamy) onto the path and use them for our spiritual progress toward inner transformation.
- To have a truly good heart is something for which everyone has the capacity. Take all the suffering of the person harming you into your heart, and send him your own happiness, with great compassion. With the same attitude, you can also offer a water torma, the burned offering of sur, and the visualisation practice of giving away your body as an offering to the Three Jewels, a present to the Dharma protectors, a gift to suffering sentient beings, and repayment of your karmic debts to harmful spirits and obstacle makers.
- For all these practices, it is important to have a thorough grounding in the practice of the four boundless attitudes. They are as follows: boundless love, the wish that all others may have happiness; boundless compassion, the wish that they may all be free from suffering; boundless joy, the wish that all those who already have some happiness may keep and increase it; and boundless impartiality, the recognition that beings are all equally deserving of love, compassion, or nonexistent relationship you may have with them in the narrow perspective of the present.
- In the morning, your first thought should be the commitment to do whatever you can during the day to help others and bring all beings to ultimate happiness. In the evening, dedicate to all beings the merit that you have gathered during the day. If anyone has tried to harm you, make the wish that they be free from all animosity and vindictive feelings, and that all their positive aspirations may be fulfilled.
- To bring about a true change in your attitudes is hard at first. But if you understand the meaning behind this mind training, and keep on trying to apply it, you will find that it helps you in every difficult situation, just as a well-designed vehicle can travel any distance quickly, and with ease.

b. How to use suffering on the path (13)

- when we are faced with someone whose only thought is to harm us (even though we have never done anything to hurt them in this lifetime) how are we going to respond? Well, either we can react with anger, fear, hatred, and fantasies of retaliation, or we can think, This poor person is acting like this because of their own delusions. How sad! I take all their negativity onto myself, and I give them all of my virtue and merits. May they have great happiness, may they find peace!
- Either we go under (and end up bitter, revengeful, and full of self-pity) or we surmount and take everything that happens to us as a teaching on the path.
- there are always situations happening in life, such as people who don't act the way they should for no ostensible reason. Why should they be so nasty? How do we act or react to them? Do we take it as an opportunity for enhancing our practice and benefiting them through our thoughts of loving-kindness; or not? Do we act like ordinary people who have never heard a word of Dharma?
- Dharma practitioner; it is how we respond to everyday circumstances. If someone does something we don't want them to or speaks to us rudely or criticises us, how do we respond?
- If we respond with anger, indignation, or fear, we are just creating more negative karma, whereas if we respond with patience and love and understanding then that karma becomes purified completely.
- If we are faced with someone who is especially difficult, we can try to just put ourselves in their shoes. How would we like to have their mind? What would it be like? Then we feel natural compassion because people don't harm others unless they themselves are hurting inside. A person who is completely happy and at peace with themselves doesn't need to hurt others.
- "in return for harm, a bodhisattva tries to give help and benefit."
- Whatever someone may be about to inflict on you (even beheading you or some other terrible suffering) it is important to remember that this is the result of your own past actions. You must have done the same to others in a previous life. Do not get angry. Let your enemy do whatever he wants to get satisfaction. Be full of compassion for him and the karma he is about to accumulate.
- In return for harm, a bodhisattva tries to give help and benefit. If you see someone doing something negative, think of all the suffering he is accumulating for himself and pray that, rather than his being reborn in the lower realms, the results of his negative actions may come upon you instead; and dedicate to him the results of your own positive actions.

c. How to use disgrace on the path (14)

- If someone says something critical about us, then the first thing to consider is whether or not it is true. Are they pointing out some hidden fault that we hadn't noticed? If so, we can be grateful. Or, if it is totally untrue, so what?
- Far from retaliating, we are advised, out of kindness, to extol that person's qualities.
- The antidote to criticism is praise.
- *Although they might be difficult, from my side I will not retaliate, I will take that challenge onto the path. I will honestly aim to think good things about that person since we all have good qualities as well as difficult ones, and I will think and act as a genuine Dharma person should.*
- The essence of our practice is to learn how to overcome our self-cherishing attitude. Therefore, in all these unpleasant situations what is hurt? It is that sense of I have been harmed. I have been humiliated. I want to have a good reputation. I want people to say nice things about me, so then I am happy. But when somebody says mean things about me, or doesn't do what I want them to do, this creates problems for me. It is all about *me*.
- If someone defames and disgraces you, that is simply the result of having criticised and dishonoured others in the past, especially bodhisattvas. Instead of feeling angry with such people, you should feel grateful to them for giving you the opportunity to purify your past misdeeds. In all circumstances, it is important to act in accordance with the teachings—but especially at such moments. What is the point of having received teachings if you do not apply them? Unfavourable circumstances are the best opportunity you will have to put the teachings into practice.
- Buddhism teaches us to practice on all levels, and this is the level that deals with everyday life, relationships, and challenging things that come up. How do we respond? Do we respond genuinely as someone sincerely wishes to integrate the Dharma into our lives or just like an ordinary person?
- It is when we deal with everyday occurrences that we can see how we're responding, not when we go to Dharma centres and chant beautifully. In everyday life, when someone does something that we don't like and hurts us, how do we react? If we do become angry, upset, and humiliated, we ought not to be angry with ourselves because we are angry since that creates a spiral. Instead we should reflect on the fact that this shows us how much work we still have to do. Good, now we know; we can cultivate humility and try again. Perhaps later we can rerun that scene and try to imagine a different and more positive response. As we continue to do this, gradually new patterns of behaviour grow.
- Whether you have a good reputation or a bad one, it has no objective reality at all. It is not worth caring about. The great teachers of the past never bothered about such things. They always answered slander and disparagement with kindness, and patience.
- Some people spend all their lives, and even risk their lives, to achieve fame. Fame and notoriety are both no more than an empty echo. Your reputation is an alluring mirage that can easily lead you astray. Discard it without a second thought, like the snot you blow from your nose.

d. How to use disparagement on the path (15)

- Humiliation is the emotion we feel when someone says something nasty or critical to us in private and it is much worse if they expose our faults on the internet and even announces them to a crowd of people. It is a sense of incredible humiliation that gives rise to tremendous anger and a desire to hit back.
- Imagine if, during a question-and-answer session following some Dharma teaching, someone stands up and insults all my views with critical language and exposes my hidden faults to everyone present. What do I do? Well I can defend myself: "Who are you to tell me anyway? How dare you challenge my authority?" or, as Thogme Sangpo sagely recommends, I can bow respectfully and regard the critic as a spiritual friend.
- Why? Because anyone who reveals to us our hidden faults is a great friend. If they do that with insulting language in a large gathering, they are even more our friend because it gives the ego the opportunity to get up on its high horse and go at that person with a raised sword for daring to reveal to everybody my true nature (well, my untrue nature) and my hidden faults. Because that is the ultimate humiliation and reveals the ego in all its radiant glory. Then it is so clear and naked. Ego exposed!"
- Instead of being defensive and upset, we should be grateful and, as it says, take our accusers as a spiritual friend. Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche reminds us that, if we want to be a genuine follower of the Buddha, we should never retaliate when we are harmed.
- The four principles of positive training, which are as follows: *(1) If someone abuses you, do not abuse him or her in return; (2) if someone gets angry with you, do not get angry with him or her in return; (3) if someone exposes your hidden faults, do not expose his or hers in return; and (4) if someone strikes you, do not strike them back.*
- If someone criticises you, picking on your most sensitive points, or angrily insults you with the most offensive language, do not return like for like, no matter how difficult it is to bear. Practice patience, and never give way to anger. Take it positively, and use it as a chance to let go of your own pride. Practice generosity and compassion by giving the victory to others and being happy to lose. Allowing others to win is a characteristic of all Buddhist paths. In fact, what is there to be won or lost? From an absolute viewpoint, there is not the slightest difference between winning and losing.
- *No evil is there similar to anger,*
  No austerity to be compared with patience.
  Never give way to anger, therefore. Be patient; and, moreover, be grateful to someone who humiliates you, as they are giving you a precious opportunity to strengthen your understanding and practice of bodhichitta.
- you are unlikely to make much spiritual progress if you lack the courage to face your own hidden faults. Any person or situation that helps you to see those faults, however uncomfortable and humiliating it may be, is doing you a great service.
- From the point of view of absolute truth, there is not the slightest difference between gain and loss, pleasure and pain, fame and disgrace, praise and disparagement. They are all equal, all empty by nature.

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

a. How to use on the path being wronged in return for kindness (16)

- If you do something good for others, it is a mistake to expect anything in return, or to hope that people will admire you for being a bodhisattva. All such attitudes are a long way from the true motivation of bodhichitta. Not only should you expect nothing in return; you should not be disturbed in the slightest when people respond ungratefully. Someone for whom you have risked your very life may return your kindness with resentment, hatred, or harm. But just love him all the more.
- *To meet someone who really hurts you is to meet a rare and precious treasure. Hold that person in high esteem, and make full use of the opportunity to eradicate your defects and make progress on the path. If you cannot yet feel love and compassion for those who treat you badly, it is a sign that your mind has not been fully transformed and that you need to keep working on it with increased application.*
- A true bodhisattva never hopes for a reward. He responds to the needs of others spontaneously, out of his natural compassion. Cause and effect are unfailing, so his actions to benefit others are sure to bear fruit; but he never counts on it. He certainly never thinks that people are not showing enough gratitude, or that they ought to treat him better. But if someone who has done him harm later changes his behaviour, is set on the path, and achieves liberation, that is something that will make a bodhisattva rejoice wholeheartedly and be totally satisfied.
- When somebody we care for turns around and harms us, and this makes us feel hurt and angry, this gives us an excellent opportunity. We think - *Oh, thank you, you're so kind. You have acted despicably, but I'm so grateful! Without you, how could I practice this most precious quality? So really, you are like my teacher. You are mirroring to me my own shortcomings because if you say something I don't like, I get all upset and angry. The problem is not you. Here, the problem is me. I'm going to learn how to cultivate loving-kindness, compassion, and patience in the face of your abuse and your hurtful actions.*
- *"Without you, how would I have learned? You were so helpful for my practice of the path." In order to take the most difficult circumstances onto the path and transform them, we need conditions in which to practice.*
- All of these verses are about not getting upset, not making a double wound. To harbour resentment in our hearts and regurgitate it over and over again, what does it do? It doesn't make us happy, it doesn't help or harm the other person, and it creates negative karma for us. We do to ourselves what only our worst enemies would wish for us. It is better to practice patience and tolerance and move on.

b. How to use humiliation on the path (17)

- This is dealing with the ego and feeling humiliated. If ordinary people, like our friends or those who serve or work for us in some way (employees, taxi drivers, garbage collectors, waiters, and so on) create problems for us and say bad things about us, then instead of trying to put them down in return, we raise them up. Why? Because they are showing us our own pride, arrogance, and narrow-mindedness and how much we resent other people treating us in a way that we don't want to be treated.
- *See and respect such people as kind teachers showing you the path to liberation. Pray that you may be able to do as much good as possible for them. Whatever happens, do not wish for a moment to take your revenge. The capacity to patiently bear scorn and injury from those who lack your education, strength, and skill is particularly admirable. To remain humble while patiently bearing insults is a very effective way of countering your ingrained tendency to be interested only in your own happiness and pleasure.*
- When people criticise us or don't give us the respect we think we deserve, then we get upset and think it is their fault. But again, rather than being upset and miserable, we can feel gratitude and consider how lucky we are because without adversaries how could we travel on the bodhisattva path?
- We can think, *Thank you. Obviously my good karma brought you along so I can get better and better. This is wonderful! I am so grateful to you for being so difficult, but at the same time I have compassion because your attitude is so horrible and I really hope that from now on you will be well and happy!*—and mean it.
- *Whenever I am in the company of others,*
  May I regard myself as inferior to all (as the lowest; the least important),
  And from the depths of my heart
  Cherish others as supreme (higher than myself).
- The four Brahma-viharas (four immeasurable qualities) of loving-kindness, compassion, joy, and equanimity are traditionally practiced by sending these positive thoughts ①first to ourselves, ②then to those we feel affection for, ③those we feel neutral about, ④those we have problems with, and ⑤ finally to all living beings in general.
- When we meet with other people, we consider them more important and more interesting. Our attention should be on the other people, making them happy. Our attention should not be on what they are thinking about us. We shouldn't be thinking, *Do they like me? Don't they like me? Do I give a good impression? Do they think I'm stupid? Blah, blah, blah*. If we are thinking like that, we are trapped in our ego, and we cannot see or deeply listen to the other person because we are too busy talking to ourselves about ourselves. Me, me, me. Poor me! Oh, stupid me! Hopeless me! Me. All about me.
- *May all beings be well and happy. May all beings be free from suffering.*
- With our minds, when these situations come up, in our mind we should think, *Now pause a minute; this is my opportunity to practice.* That's why this is called *mind training*. Lojong. We are training so that we don't respond unskilfully with negative reactions but instead with understanding and compassion.

iii. Using deprivation and prosperity on the path

a. How to use deprivation on the path (18)

- **The Practice of Tonglen:** The practice of tonglen involves visualising oneself taking on the suffering of others and in return giving them all one's happiness and positive qualities. This can be practiced both for others and for oneself when facing difficulties. By thinking of the suffering of all beings who are experiencing similar challenges, one shifts the focus away from self-pity and instead develops a sense of purpose and connection with the universal nature of suffering. This practice helps prevent despair and fosters a sense of inner empowerment and compassion.
- **Embracing Suffering:** Suffering is not something to be feared or avoided, but something beneficial. It serves as a catalyst for motivation, driving the determination to be free from samsara. Suffering humbles and grounds us, acting as an antidote to arrogance and self-importance. The text emphasises that suffering can lead to spiritual growth, allowing you to develop patience, resilience, and a deep understanding of the human condition.
- **Universal Connection through Suffering:** The text highlights the importance of recognising that suffering is a universal experience. By opening one's heart to the pain of others, one can avoid becoming isolated in personal misery. This practice encourages a shift in perspective, transforming suffering into an opportunity to connect with others and develop empathy and compassion. It is through this connection that you can cultivate a sincere aspiration to alleviate the suffering of all beings.
- **Using Deprivation as a Spiritual Teacher:** Deprivation and hardship are seen as opportunities for spiritual development. When one faces extreme difficulties, it is an opportunity to wish for the suffering of all beings to come upon oneself, thereby freeing others from their pain. This practice, though challenging, is a profound way to deepen one's compassion and to make use of difficult circumstances as a means of spiritual practice. The teachings encourage viewing obstacles and suffering as teachers that spur one toward greater Dharma practice and realisation.
- **The Power of Love and Compassion:** Love and compassion are portrayed as transformative forces that can bring about profound changes within yourself and in the world. Meditating on love has far-reaching effects, pacifying calamities and bringing about peace. The text suggests that by treating all beings with love and compassion, one not only benefits others but also enriches one's own spiritual journey, leading to the fulfilment of all aspirations.
- The text emphasises that in the face of destitution, illness, or adversity, the practice of compassion, particularly through tonglen, is a powerful and transformative response. By taking on the suffering of others and giving them one's own happiness, one can transcend personal misery and develop a deeper connection with the universal nature of suffering. Suffering is not seen as an obstacle but as an opportunity for spiritual growth and the cultivation of love and compassion. This approach aligns with the bodhisattva's path of selfless service and the aspiration to alleviate the suffering of all beings.
- I don't like happiness, I like suffering:
  If I am happy, the five poisons increase.
  If I suffer, my past bad karma is exhausted.
  I don't value high positions, I like low ones.
  If I am important, my pride and jealousy increase;
  If I am lowly, I relax and my spiritual practice grows.
  The lowest place is the seat of the saints of the past.

b. How to use prosperity on the path (19)

- **The Ephemeral Nature of Worldly Success:** Wealth, fame, beauty, and influence are compared to fleeting phenomena like a flash of lightning, a dewdrop, or a bubble. These worldly achievements are temporary and devoid of true substance. No matter how much wealth you accumulate or how revered you become, these things are ultimately impermanent and cannot provide lasting happiness or fulfilment. At the time of death, all worldly possessions and status are left behind, and you are left to face death alone, without any external markers of success.
- **The Dangers of Attachment and Arrogance:** The text warns against becoming attached to wealth, fame, or the good opinions of others. Such attachments can lead to arrogance, insecurity, and suffering. When one's sense of self-worth is tied to external factors, it becomes fragile and easily threatened. The text emphasises that it is important not to become conceited or proud, no matter how much you achieve in the worldly sense. Instead, you should recognise the emptiness of these achievements and maintain humility.
- **The Importance of Equanimity:** A key practice for a bodhisattva is to maintain inner equanimity regardless of external circumstances. Whether you experience wealth or poverty, praise or blame, fame or insignificance, the response should be one of balanced equanimity. This involves neither clinging to pleasurable experiences nor rejecting painful ones but rather accepting both with an open heart and mind. The analogy of a boat gliding through the waves (riding smoothly when the sea is calm and remaining steady when the waves are rough) illustrates the ideal state of equanimity.
- **Using Wealth and Power for the Benefit of Others:** The text highlights the responsibility that comes with wealth and power. A bodhisattva uses these resources for the benefit of others, not for personal gain. This includes providing for the physical needs of others (such as food, clothing, and shelter) and, more importantly, offering the gift of Dharma. The example of great bodhisattvas and religious kings is cited, who used their wealth to alleviate suffering and promote virtuous actions among their people, ensuring that no one in their kingdoms would be reborn in the lower realms.
- **The Practice of Generosity:** Generosity is presented as a key virtue. Even small acts of generosity, when done with an altruistic mind, accumulate great merit. In contrast, miserly behaviour, whether from a rich or poor person, leads to negative karmic consequences, such as rebirth among tortured spirits. The text encourages the use of wealth to benefit others and to accumulate merit through generous actions. This is seen as the best way to make your wealth meaningful and to ensure that it contributes to your spiritual progress rather than being a source of attachment and suffering.
- **The Need for Humility:** The bodhisattva is urged to remain humble despite any worldly success. Recognising that wealth and glory are without essence helps to prevent arrogance and fosters a mindset of service and compassion. The ultimate goal is not to achieve worldly success but to progress on the path to enlightenment, which requires letting go of attachments and focusing on the welfare of all beings.
- The text underscores the transient nature of worldly achievements and the dangers of attaching your identity and self-worth to external success. Verse 19 advocates humility, equanimity, and the responsible use of wealth and power to benefit others. True value is found not in accumulating riches or fame but in cultivating virtue, practicing generosity, and progressing on the path to enlightenment. The practice of a bodhisattva involves recognising the emptiness of worldly concerns and dedicating yourself to the service of others, using whatever resources you have to promote the well-being and spiritual growth of all beings.

iv. Using hatred and desire on the path

a. How to use objects of hatred on the path (20)

- **The Futility of External Conflict:** The text emphasises that trying to overcome external enemies through aggression only leads to the creation of more enemies and perpetuates the cycle of conflict. Anger, when indulged, feeds on itself and grows stronger, leading to more suffering. The more you fight against outer adversaries, the more they will multiply, as hatred breeds more hatred. This is a reflection of how world conflicts and personal disputes can escalate when driven by anger and retaliation.
- **The Power of Inner Transformation:** True peace and the resolution of conflict come from within, by conquering the hatred and negative emotions that reside in the mind. When one's own mind is tamed and free from hatred, the concept of an "enemy" dissolves. This transformation is achieved through the practice of patience, loving-kindness, and compassion. These qualities serve as the "armies" that a bodhisattva uses to overcome internal adversaries and, by extension, external conflicts.
- **Befriending the Mind:** A central idea is that in order to cultivate these positive qualities, you must first make peace with oneself. This involves befriending the mind, forgiving oneself, and recognising the inherent Buddha-nature within. The text likens this process to taming a wild horse; it must first be befriended and made to trust before it can be trained. Similarly, the ego, which often acts as an obstacle to spiritual progress, must be tamed through kindness and understanding rather than through force or self-criticism.
- **The Practice of Loving-Kindness:** The practice of loving-kindness begins with oneself and then extends to others. This involves wishing well-being and happiness for oneself, loved ones, neutral individuals, and even those with whom you have conflicts. This practice is seen as a powerful antidote to anger and a means of cultivating a more peaceful and compassionate heart. The text suggests that by regularly practicing loving-kindness, you can transform the mind from a state of self-centredness to one of expansive, selfless love.
- **The Consequences of Anger:** The text vividly illustrates the destructive power of anger. They recount stories, such as that of the Buddha in a previous life as a turtle, to demonstrate the long-term karmic consequences of acting out of anger. The story shows that even when faced with severe provocation, responding with compassion rather than anger can lead to positive outcomes, both in this life and future rebirths. Anger is identified as the true enemy that must be conquered to prevent the endless cycle of conflict and suffering.
- **The Importance of Skilful Means:** The teachings emphasise the importance of using skilful means in dealing with anger and other negative emotions. This involves recognising anger as merely a thought that can be neutralised with the right antidotes, such as mindfulness and understanding the emptiness of emotions. By turning the mind inward and applying these antidotes, you can dissolve anger and prevent it from manifesting in harmful actions.
- **The Impact of Emotional Control on the World:** The text suggests that the widespread turmoil in the world, including wars, famines, and natural disasters, is a reflection of the collective emotional states of beings. As long as attachment, aversion, and ignorance dominate human minds, these outer calamities will persist. Therefore, taming one's own mind is not only a personal practice but a contribution to the greater peace and stability of the world.
- **The Path of the Bodhisattva:** For a bodhisattva, the practice of transforming anger into compassion is essential. This path involves continually working to neutralise negative emotions and cultivate a mind of loving-kindness and compassion. The ultimate goal is to transform the self-centred ego into a vast, open awareness that places the happiness of others above one's own, leading to a state of inner peace unshakable by external circumstances.
- "Giving Peace a Chance" emphasises the importance of inner transformation as the key to resolving external conflicts. The text teaches that the root of all conflict lies within the mind and that true peace can only be achieved by cultivating loving-kindness and compassion, starting with oneself. Through the practice of taming the mind and dissolving anger, you can break the cycle of hatred and contribute to a more peaceful and harmonious world. This practice is not only essential for personal spiritual development but also has profound implications for the collective well-being of all beings.

b. How to use objects of desire on the path (21)

- **The Insatiable Nature of Greed:** Greed is likened to drinking saltwater; the more you indulges, the thirstier you become. This metaphor illustrates that the pursuit of sense pleasures and material desires never leads to lasting satisfaction. Instead, it creates a perpetual state of longing that can never be fully quenched. The more you try to satisfy these desires, the deeper you fall into the cycle of craving, which only leads to more suffering.
- **The Deceptive Innocence of Greed:** Unlike anger or hatred, which are often recognised as harmful, greed can seem harmless or even desirable because it is associated with pleasure and happiness. However, the text cautions that greed is the root of suffering, as it fosters attachment and clinging. This attachment creates a deep-seated dissatisfaction and unrest within the mind, making it difficult to achieve true peace and contentment.
- **Attachment and Suffering:** The text emphasises that the root of suffering lies in attachment. When you become attached to people, possessions, or desires, the inevitable loss or change of these attachments leads to pain and suffering. This attachment is deeply embedded in the psyche, making it challenging to uproot. The solution is not to renounce all possessions or relationships but to cultivate an inner sense of non-attachment, where you can appreciate and enjoy what you have without clinging to it.
- **The Importance of Letting Go:** "Letting go" is a central theme in overcoming greed. This doesn't mean abandoning everything outwardly but rather developing an inward sense of detachment. The practice of letting go involves recognising that nothing in the material world can provide lasting fulfilment and learning to release the tight grip on desires. This practice leads to greater freedom and peace of mind.
- **Generosity as an Antidote to Greed:** Generosity is a powerful antidote to greed. By giving to others, you begin to break the cycle of selfish desire and opens the heart to compassion and kindness. The joy of giving, especially when it stretches beyond one's comfort zone, helps to counteract the greed-driven mindset of accumulation and self-centredness. This practice benefits others and brings a deep sense of contentment and joy to the giver.
- **Contentment and True Wealth:** True wealth is found in contentment with what you have. The great saints and hermits of the past exemplified this by living simple lives, finding satisfaction in the bare necessities. The more you cultivate contentment, the less you are tormented by the incessant desires for more. This contentment leads to a deeper sense of fulfilment and reduces the suffering caused by endless craving.
- **The Futility of Worldly Pursuits:** The text also highlights the futility of chasing after worldly achievements such as wealth, power, and fame. These are seen as transient and ultimately meaningless in the grand scheme of spiritual progress. The story of King Mandhatri, who despite attaining great power and wealth, still desired more and ultimately fell into ruin, serves as a cautionary tale about the dangers of unchecked greed.
- **The Endless Pursuit of Dharma:** While the text advocates for contentment with worldly possessions, they emphasise that you should never be content with your understanding and practice of the Dharma. Unlike material desires, the pursuit of spiritual knowledge and practice is boundless and should be continuously sought after. This pursuit leads to spiritual growth and the ultimate liberation from the cycle of samsara.
- "Dropping Greed" teaches that the pursuit of material desires and sense pleasures is inherently unsatisfying and leads to greater suffering. True contentment and freedom are found not in accumulating wealth or indulging in pleasures but in letting go of attachments and cultivating generosity, contentment, and a relentless pursuit of spiritual wisdom. By recognising the fleeting nature of worldly achievements and focusing on inner detachment, you can break free from the cycle of craving and move closer to spiritual liberation.

II. Absolute bodhichitta

A. The meditation practice of remaining in a state free of conceptual elaborations without any clinging (22)

- **Dualistic vs. Non-dualistic Perception:** The text contrasts our ordinary, dualistic way of perceiving the world with the ultimate, non-dual nature of mind. In our daily lives, we operate on a dualistic level, constantly categorising experiences, people, and objects into likes and dislikes, friend and foe, pleasant and unpleasant. This dualistic thinking traps us in samsara, the cycle of suffering, because it is based on the fundamental delusion of a separate, autonomous self (the "I").
- **The Nature of Mind:** The ultimate nature of mind is described as primordial pure awareness, which is inherently free from conceptual limitations. This means that the true nature of the mind is not bound by the dualistic thinking that characterises our ordinary consciousness. Instead, it is empty of inherent existence, yet luminous and aware. This emptiness is not a void or blankness but a spacious, cognisant awareness that transcends all concepts of existence and nonexistence.
- **The Illusory Nature of Perception:** The text emphasises that all perceptions and experiences are the work of one's own mind. What we perceive as reality is actually a mental projection, filtered through our senses and shaped by our thoughts, judgments, and past experiences. This constructed reality is not a true representation of what actually exists; rather, it is a subjective interpretation that we mistake for the objective truth.
- **The Concept of No-Self (Anatman):** The Buddhist teaching of anatman, or no-self, is central to understanding the non-dual nature of mind. The "self" that we cling to and identify with is an illusion; a construct of the mind. When we investigate the self, whether through the body, mind, or name, we find that it cannot be pinpointed as a singular, independent entity. This realisation is crucial for breaking free from the delusion that sustains samsara.
- **Mindfulness and Beyond:** Mindfulness is an important practice in observing the mind and its thoughts. However, even mindfulness operates on a dualistic level, where there is an observer (the mindful self) and the observed (thoughts, emotions, etc.). The ultimate practice, however, is to transcend this duality and recognise the non-dual nature of mind, where there is no separation between subject and object. This state of pure awareness is beyond conceptual thought and cannot be grasped by the ordinary mind.
- **The Empty and Luminous Nature of Mind:** The mind is described as empty because it has no inherent, independent existence; it is not a tangible entity that can be grasped. At the same time, it is luminous because it is aware and knowing. These two aspects (emptiness and clarity) are inseparable in the true nature of mind. Recognising this nature leads to liberation from the delusions that cause suffering.
- **The Practice of Non-Conceptual Meditation:** The text encourages the practice of meditation that is free from conceptual elaboration, where one rests in the natural state of mind without clinging to thoughts or concepts. This practice leads to a direct recognition of the mind's true nature, which is beyond dualistic thinking. The union of calm abiding (shamatha) and insight (vipashyana) is essential in stabilising this realisation.
- **Compassion and Wisdom:** The wisdom of recognising the non-dual nature of mind must be coupled with compassion. Even though, from an ultimate perspective, there are no inherently existing beings to save, the relative suffering experienced by sentient beings is real. Therefore, a bodhisattva works tirelessly to alleviate this suffering, even while understanding that both the helper and the helped are empty of inherent existence.
- **Realising Non-duality in Everyday Life:** The text suggests that realising the non-dual nature of mind is not just an abstract concept to be understood but a living reality to be embodied in everyday life. This involves maintaining awareness of the mind's true nature in all situations, not just during formal meditation practice. The ultimate goal is to integrate this awareness into all aspects of life, transforming every moment into an expression of enlightened activity.
- "Embracing the Nondual" is an advanced teaching that challenges practitioners to go beyond their ordinary, dualistic ways of perceiving and interacting with the world. It invites a profound shift in understanding, where one recognises the illusory nature of the self and the world and awakens to the mind's true, non-dual nature. This realisation, coupled with compassion, leads to the path of the bodhisattva, where one works for the liberation of all beings while remaining free from the delusions that bind them to samsara. The teaching is a call to see beyond the surface of reality and to live from the depth of true, non-dual awareness.

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

i. Abandoning any belief in the objects of desire as truly existing (23)

- ***Impermanence and Illusion:*** *The text emphasises that all phenomena, no matter how beautiful or desirable, are impermanent and ultimately illusory. Like a rainbow that appears in the sky, these objects are momentary and will eventually disappear. Recognising this impermanence helps to loosen the grip of attachment and craving, allowing you to appreciate beauty without becoming ensnared by it.*
- ***The Nature of Attachment:*** *Attachment arises when we begin to identify with and cling to objects, people, or experiences, believing that they will bring us lasting happiness. This attachment is based on the mistaken belief that these things have an inherent, permanent existence. However, the text points out that this is a delusion. The objects of our attachment are not truly ours; they are fleeting and beyond our control.*
- ***Appreciation Without Grasping:*** *The practice involves learning to appreciate the beauty and joy of objects, people and relationships without clinging to them. This means seeing things as they are (temporary and transient) and not as permanent fixtures that we can possess or control. By holding everything lightly and with an open hand, we can experience life more fully without the suffering that comes from grasping and attachment.*
- ***Generosity as an Antidote to Grasping:*** *Generosity is highlighted as a powerful antidote to the grasping mind. When we give freely, without attachment, we begin to loosen our hold on material possessions and cultivate a sense of freedom and lightness. This practice benefits others and also helps us to develop a mind that is less attached and more open.*
- ***The Illusion of Ownership:*** *The text challenges the notion of ownership, reminding us that we do not truly own anything; not even our own bodies. At the end of life, we leave everything behind, and the attachment to material things only brings pain. Recognising the illusory nature of ownership helps to diminish the hold that possessions have over us.*
- ***The Role of Mindfulness:*** *Mindfulness plays a crucial role in recognising and overcoming attachment. By being aware of our thoughts and feelings, we can catch ourselves when we start to cling to something and remind ourselves of its impermanent nature. Mindfulness helps us to see through the delusions of the mind and develop a more balanced and equanimous approach to life.*
- ***Cleaning the Mind:*** *The text uses the metaphor of cleaning a room to describe the process of clearing the mind of clutter; old habits, judgments, and attachments. Just as we would clean a room to prepare for a guest, we must clean our minds to make space for wisdom and compassion. This involves letting go of the mental junk that we have accumulated over time and creating an environment conducive to spiritual growth.*
- ***The Role of Teachers and Inner Wisdom:*** *While external teachers and guidance are important, the text emphasises that true wisdom ultimately comes from within. As we mature spiritually, we must learn to trust our own inner wisdom and rely less on external authorities. The process of spiritual growth involves recognising the unity between ourselves and the teachings, understanding that the true guru is within.*
- ***Living with Appreciation and Joy:*** *The goal is to live with an innocent mind that appreciates the beauty and joy of objects, people and relationships without becoming attached to them. This means embracing the impermanence of all things and finding contentment in the present moment, rather than constantly seeking to acquire more.*
- *"Recognising the Illusion" teaches that true freedom and happiness come not from acquiring and holding onto things but from letting go of attachment and recognising the impermanent and illusory nature of all phenomena. By cultivating mindfulness, generosity, and an open-hearted approach to life, we can experience a deeper sense of peace and contentment. This practice is essential for anyone on the bodhisattva path, as it helps to overcome the delusions that keep us trapped in samsara and opens the way to true liberation.*

ii. Abandoning any belief in the objects of aversion as truly existing. Letting go of Illusion (24)

- The various forms of suffering are like the death of one's child in a dream:
  By clinging to deluded perceptions as real, we exhaust ourselves.
  Therefore, when encountering unfavourable circumstances,
  To view them as illusions is the practice of a bodhisattva.
- In this verse, Thogme Sangpo suggests that all experiences (whether good or bad, pleasant or painful) are illusions. Everything in our lives is a projection of our mind, a fabrication that we believe in so deeply that it causes us suffering. Like the death of a child in a dream, these experiences feel very real to us, but ultimately, they are not. The suffering, joy, and all other emotions we experience are not inherently real; they are merely our mind's interpretations and projections.
- When we dream of losing someone dear to us, the pain feels real, but when we wake up, we realise it was just a dream. Similarly, in our waking life, we are trapped in a continuous cycle of deluded perceptions that we take as real. Thogme Sangpo's teaching is about waking up from this dream of ignorance, understanding that all phenomena, including our perceptions, are like a movie; engaging, but ultimately not real.
- Karma also plays a significant role in how we perceive and interpret events. Our past actions influence our current experiences, shaping how we view the world. The experiences we have, both good and bad, are filtered through the lens of our karma, further reinforcing the illusion.
- Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche notes that by contemplating the empty nature of all phenomena during meditation, we can begin to see the dreamlike nature of life even outside of meditation. This realisation helps us approach life with wisdom, seeing the emptiness of all things and responding to challenges with compassion and equanimity.
- Recognising that everything is an illusion doesn't mean becoming detached or indifferent. Instead, it means understanding that our attachments, aversions, and the stories we create about our lives are not as solid or permanent as they seem. This understanding allows us to let go of the tight grasp we have on our experiences, whether they are pleasurable or painful.
- To live in this awareness is to be free from the bondage of ego and delusion. It is to navigate life with a light touch, appreciating beauty without grasping, experiencing pain without despair, and understanding that all of it (our whole life) is like a rainbow, beautiful yet ephemeral, and ultimately, an illusion.