Mind Map

3. The precepts for training in those practices

I. Training in the six transcendent perfections

A. Transcendent generosity (25)

In the verse on practicing generosity, the focus is on the importance of giving without expectation or attachment, an essential practice for those on the path to enlightenment. Generosity, or dana in Sanskrit, is the first of the six transcendent perfections, or paramitas, that guide a bodhisattva's journey. The essence of generosity lies in the act of giving, whether it is material goods, time, or service, with an open heart and without any expectation of reward or recognition.

Generosity begins with the simple act of sharing what we have, not only material possessions but also our time and attention. This act of giving counters the tendency to cling and grasp, which is a source of much of our suffering. The joy of giving is in both the act itself and in the intention behind it. When we give with a pure motivation, we cultivate an open, joyful heart, which is the foundation of a compassionate and altruistic life.

Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche emphasises that true generosity is complete in itself and does not seek any reward. When we give out of sheer love, devotion, or compassion, the act of giving becomes an expression of our inner wealth and freedom. The act of generosity is most powerful when it is free from the concepts of giver, receiver, and the act of giving, which makes it a transcendent practice leading to enlightenment.

Generosity is also about letting go of attachment to material possessions and recognising their impermanent nature. By giving freely, we both help others and purify our own minds from the grasping tendencies that lead to suffering. The ultimate form of generosity is giving the Dharma, as it offers others the path to liberation; the greatest form of wealth.

The story of the miserly man who learned to give, beginning with small acts of generosity, illustrates that even those who struggle with giving can cultivate this quality through gradual practice. By starting small, one can eventually develop a heart that delights in giving without reservation.

In essence, practicing generosity is about cultivating a mind of non-attachment, where the act of giving is free from ego and self-interest. This pure form of generosity is what transforms it into a paramita, a transcendent perfection that leads to the ultimate goal of enlightenment.

B. Transcendent discipline (26)

In the verse on practicing discipline, the focus is on the essential role of discipline in the path of a bodhisattva. Discipline (ethical conduct) is the bedrock upon which all spiritual practices are built. Without a foundation of discipline, it is impossible to achieve personal spiritual growth, let alone be of genuine benefit to others.

Discipline is the framework that supports the entire structure of Dharma practice. Just as a garden must be prepared before it can yield crops, the mind and actions of a practitioner must be cultivated with discipline before any other virtues can take root. The five basic precepts (refraining from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, and intoxicants) are the starting point. These are not arbitrary rules but timeless principles that guide us toward living harmlessly in the world.

Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche emphasises that discipline is the foundation for all Dharma practice, supporting the cultivation of positive qualities across all levels of practice, from the basic ethical precepts to the more advanced vows of the Mahayana and Vajrayana paths. Without discipline, the mind remains unruly, and the path to enlightenment is obstructed by the negative karma generated by unethical actions.

The verse reminds us that practicing discipline is not about seeking approval or merit but about aligning our actions with the truth of the Dharma. True discipline is an internal commitment to live in harmony with the principles of the Dharma, regardless of external recognition or reward. It is about being true to oneself and one's path, knowing that discipline is the source of both personal happiness & the ability to genuinely benefit others.

In practicing discipline, we ensure that our actions, speech, and thoughts are aligned with the Dharma, creating a vessel in which the teachings can flourish. This disciplined approach leads to a peaceful and well-controlled mind, free from the turmoil of negative emotions and actions. Discipline, when observed with sincerity and without samsaric motives, becomes the foundation for all other practices and the key to progressing on the path to enlightenment.

C. Transcendent patience (27)

In the verse on practicing patience, the text emphasises the importance of cultivating patience as an essential quality on the path of a bodhisattva. Patience is not just about enduring difficulties or harm without anger; it is about welcoming these challenges as opportunities to transform the heart and mind. When someone causes harm or circumstances provoke anger or resentment, these are seen not as obstacles but as precious treasures that allow us to practice patience and develop the virtues necessary for enlightenment.

There are three types of patience to cultivate

Practicing patience in these ways is crucial for a bodhisattva. By transforming negative emotions like anger and resentment into patience and compassion, we cultivate the qualities necessary for the path. As Shantideva teaches, anger can destroy countless acts of virtue, while patience and love lead to enlightenment. Thus, even those who harm us can be seen as benefactors, providing the precious opportunity to practice and grow.

The verse reminds us that true patience is free from resentment. It is a state of mind that sees adversaries not as enemies but as teachers who help us develop tolerance, a quality essential for Buddhahood. In this way, patience becomes a powerful tool for transforming the mind and cultivating the joys of virtue on the path to enlightenment.

1. Patience with Harm from Others: When others harm us, it is essential to remember that this harm is the result of our own past negative actions. The person causing harm is themselves driven by delusion, and their actions will lead to their suffering in the future. By responding with patience, we can purify our own past negative actions and accumulate merit. This person, far from being an enemy, is actually a spiritual friend who offers us the opportunity to practice and grow. Understanding this allows us to cultivate compassion rather than resentment.

2. Patience with Hardships in the Dharma: Practicing the Dharma often involves enduring hardships like illness, hunger, or extreme weather. These difficulties are not to be resented but accepted joyfully, as they help purify past negative karma and lead us toward ultimate buddhahood. Just as a condemned man might gladly endure the loss of a hand to save his life, we should embrace these temporary sufferings for the sake of long-term spiritual progress.

3. Patience with Profound Dharma Teachings: The deepest truths of the Dharma, such as the nature of emptiness and the unconpounded nature of primordial wisdom, can be challenging and even frightening to accept. True patience involves facing these profound teachings without fear and embracing the reality that all phenomena are empty by nature. Rejecting these truths can lead to downfall, but by accepting them, we open the door to ultimate liberation.

D. Transcendent diligence (28)

In the verse on practicing diligence, the text emphasises the crucial role of diligence in the path of a bodhisattva. Diligence, or joyous effort, is the driving force that enables one to develop all the paramitas, including generosity, discipline, patience, meditation, and wisdom. It is the quality that propels us forward on the path to enlightenment, ensuring that we do not fall into laziness or complacency.

The practice of diligence is divided into three aspects:

Each of these aspects of diligence has its opposite in corresponding forms of laziness:

The Laziness of Comfort: This manifests as a desire for ease and idleness, leading to neglect of Dharma practice. The antidote is to meditate on death and impermanence, realising that time is precious and limited.

The Laziness of Discouragement: This occurs when one feels overwhelmed by the path and doubts one's ability to reach enlightenment. The antidote is to strengthen one's resolve by reflecting on the benefits of liberation and enlightenment.

The Laziness of Misplaced Priorities: This happens when one becomes preoccupied with worldly concerns and neglects the deeper aims of spiritual practice. The antidote is to recognise that worldly pursuits are ultimately causes of suffering and to refocus on the true priorities of the Dharma.

Diligence is vital because it sustains and empowers all other qualities on the path. Without it, bodhichitta (the aspiration to attain enlightenment for the benefit of all beings) and the activities of a bodhisattva cannot take root and grow. The Buddha and great saints of the past serve as inspiring models of diligence, demonstrating the immense effort required to achieve enlightenment.

For a bodhisattva, the practice of diligence is not just about personal liberation but about carrying the burden of all beings and working tirelessly for their ultimate happiness. This requires a heroic sense of purpose and determination, a quality we can develop with courage and devotion.

The text also highlights the importance of being aware of laziness, in all its forms, and countering it with diligence. Whether it is the gross laziness of avoiding practice, the subtle laziness of self-doubt, or the busyness that distracts from deeper practice, diligence is the key to overcoming these obstacles and progressing on the path to enlightenment.

Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche encapsulates the essence of diligence as the joyous effort and active determination to carry out positive actions, without any expectations or self-satisfaction. This kind of diligence is essential for awakening and developing all the paramitas, and for achieving the ultimate goal of enlightenment for the benefit of all beings.

Diligence in Action: This involves the actual application of one's determination through the practice of the six perfections and other meritorious activities. It is about taking immediate and sustained action without procrastination, feeling joy in the opportunity to practice and progress on the path. This type of diligence helps to overcome laziness and ensures that one's practice is steady and purposeful.

Armour-like Diligence: This is the determination and courage to persist in one's practice, regardless of the obstacles or difficulties encountered. It is like wearing an armour of fortitude that protects against the four demons; negative emotions, attachment to comfort, physical sickness, and death. This kind of diligence is essential for maintaining consistent effort on the path, ensuring that one does not give up or become discouraged.

Diligence that Cannot be Stopped: This is the unrelenting and insatiable energy to work tirelessly for the benefit of all beings. It involves engaging in every possible way, day and night, to help others, whether directly or indirectly. This kind of diligence is marked by a deep commitment to the welfare of others, with no expectation of reward or recognition.

E. Transcendent concentration (29)

Shamatha and Vipashyana:

In the verse on practicing concentration, the text highlights the importance of cultivating a deeply focused and tranquil mind as a foundation for profound insight. Concentration, when developed through practices like shamatha (calm abiding) and vipashyana (clear insight), is crucial for overcoming the distracting emotions and attaining true liberation. The practice of concentration is not just about achieving a state of mental calm; it is about using that calm to gain deep insight into the nature of the mind and reality itself.

The Four Formless States:
The text also refers to the four formless states (the realms of infinite space, infinite consciousness, nothingness, and neither perception nor non-perception), which are advanced meditative absorptions. These states are rarefied and can be mistaken for ultimate liberation. However, they are still within the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth and are not the final goal. In the Tibetan tradition, the emphasis is not on these states themselves but on using the stability and clarity of mind achieved through shamatha to develop vipashyana.

The Nature of the Mind:
Through the combination of shamatha and vipashyana, one can realise the empty and luminous nature of the mind. When examined closely, the mind is not a solid, independent entity. It is like space; present everywhere but without any inherent characteristics. This realisation of the mind's empty nature is a crucial step on the path to enlightenment.

Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche explains that once the mind is calmed and clear, it can be used as a tool to gain insight into the nature of reality. This insight is not just intellectual understanding; it is a direct, experiential realisation of the mind's true nature, which is beyond conceptual thinking. This realisation is what ultimately liberates us from the cycle of samsara.

The practice of concentration, therefore, is about more than just achieving a peaceful mind. It is about using that peaceful mind to penetrate the nature of reality, to see through the illusions of dualistic thinking, and to awaken to the true nature of the mind and all phenomena. This is the practice that leads to the complete transcendence of the four formless states and the realisation of ultimate truth.

Shamatha is the practice of calming the mind and developing a focused, one-pointed concentration. Initially, the mind is like a restless monkey, constantly jumping from one thought or sensation to another. Through sustained practice, the mind becomes more stable, focused, and calm. This is like putting water on blotting paper, where it soaks in and stays in place, as opposed to pouring water on wax paper, where it simply runs off.

Once the mind has been tamed through shamatha, it is ready for vipashyana, which involves investigating the nature of the mind and reality. This is where the practice moves beyond simple concentration and delves into understanding the true nature of thoughts, emotions, and phenomena. Vipashyana is about questioning and examining the mind itself: What is a thought? Where does it come from? Who is thinking?

This investigation reveals that everything we experience (our thoughts, emotions, perceptions, and even our sense of self) is ultimately insubstantial and empty of inherent existence. This recognition leads to a profound insight into the nature of reality, transcending the dualistic notions of subject and object.

F. Transcendent wisdom (30)

The verse on practicing wisdom addresses the essential role of wisdom in the path to enlightenment. It emphasises that without wisdom, the other five perfections (paramitas) (generosity, discipline, patience, diligence, and concentration) cannot lead to complete enlightenment. Wisdom, in this context, refers to the deep, experiential understanding of the empty nature of all things, a realisation that transcends ordinary conceptual thinking and dualistic perceptions.

The Role of Wisdom:
Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche highlights that the practice of wisdom is the key to transforming the other perfections into true paths to enlightenment. While the other paramitas accumulate merit, they remain bound by conceptual thinking if they are not accompanied by wisdom. The key point here is that actions performed with the belief in a truly existing self (the subject), an act (the action), and an object (the recipient) continue to bind one to samsara, the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth.
For example, giving a gift, even with the best intentions, still involves the three concepts: the giver, the act of giving, and the receiver. Without wisdom, this act, though meritorious, perpetuates the cycle of samsara because it reinforces the belief in the inherent existence of these three concepts. Wisdom, therefore, is essential to see through these illusions and recognise that ultimately, there is no inherent giver, no act of giving, no inherent gift, and no inherent recipient. This realisation is what transforms ordinary actions into transcendent ones.

The Three Concepts and Emptiness:
The text discusses the "three concepts" that must be transcended: the subject (self), the object (other), and the action itself. Wisdom is the understanding that all these concepts are empty of inherent existence. The practice of wisdom involves cultivating this understanding, leading to the dissolution of the ego and the realisation of non-duality. This realisation is described as a "brilliant sun rising in the sky," dispelling the darkness of ignorance and transforming all actions into expressions of ultimate truth.
Without this wisdom, the practice of the other paramitas remains incomplete, as they are still tied to the conceptual mind and the dualistic notions of self and other. When wisdom is cultivated and integrated into the practice, it frees these actions from the constraints of dualistic thinking, allowing them to become true vehicles for enlightenment.

Stages of Developing Wisdom:
The practice of wisdom is outlined in stages. It begins with hearing and studying the teachings, reflecting on their meaning, and finally meditating on them to integrate their truth into one's being. The process of developing wisdom involves moving from an intellectual understanding of emptiness to a direct, experiential realisation. This progression is crucial, as it allows the practitioner to gradually deepen their insight and overcome the more subtle forms of ignorance and attachment.
The wisdom that arises from meditation, particularly the understanding of emptiness, leads to a spontaneous and boundless compassion for all beings. This compassion is not driven by a sense of self or other but arises naturally from the recognition of the non-dual nature of reality. The practice of wisdom ultimately unifies the relative and absolute truths, leading to a state where compassion and emptiness are seen as inseparable.

The Ultimate Realisation:
The text concludes by emphasising that the realisation of wisdom is the ultimate goal of all Mahayana and Vajrayana teachings. It is the culmination of the path and the essence of the bodhisattva's practice. The realisation of wisdom is both an intellectual achievement and a profound transformation of one's entire being. It leads to a state where all actions are free from the constraints of conceptual thinking and are instead expressions of the ultimate truth.
In this state, the practitioner sees no difference between self and others, and all actions are motivated by a spontaneous and boundless compassion. This is the true realisation of the paramitas and the path to enlightenment.

In summary, wisdom is the crown jewel of the bodhisattva's practice, the key that transforms the other perfections into true vehicles for enlightenment. Without wisdom, the path remains incomplete, bound by conceptual thinking and dualistic perceptions. With wisdom, the practitioner transcends these limitations and realises the true nature of reality, leading to ultimate liberation.

II. Training in the four instructions taught in the Sutra

A. To examine oneself for one's own defects and to give them up (31)

Conclusion:
The practice of examining oneself is about maintaining a vigilant and honest awareness of one's inner state. It is a process of continually refining and correcting one's thoughts, words, and actions to ensure they are in harmony with the Dharma. By doing so, a bodhisattva not only purifies their own mind but also becomes more capable of guiding and benefiting others. This practice of self-examination is essential for anyone on the path to enlightenment, as it fosters the development of true wisdom and compassion.

The Four Basic Downfalls:
The text also outlines four basic downfalls that one must train to avoid:
Praising oneself and disparaging others out of desire for wealth or prestige.
Failing to give what one can to those in need out of miserliness.
Abusing others verbally or physically out of animosity or failing to forgive those who have sought forgiveness.
Criticising or rejecting the Mahayana teachings out of ignorance or hypocrisy.
These downfalls are crucial to recognise and avoid, as they can significantly hinder one's spiritual progress. The antidote to these downfalls is to maintain a constant awareness of one's motivations and actions, ensuring they align with the principles of the Dharma.

The Path of Mindful Awareness:
To truly practice the Dharma, one must integrate the teachings with their own mind. This involves a constant and mindful awareness of one's thoughts, actions, and intentions. It is through this ongoing process of self-examination that one can identify negative patterns and apply appropriate antidotes, such as patience in the face of anger or clarity in moments of confusion.
The ability to observe and transform one's own mind is not just beneficial for personal growth but is also essential for effectively helping others. A bodhisattva's ability to guide others depends on their own inner clarity and stability. Therefore, the practice of self-examination and the continuous effort to align one's mind with the Dharma are fundamental aspects of the bodhisattva path.

Avoiding the Pitfall of Pretending:
A common challenge in the practice of Dharma is the tendency to adopt an outward persona of a "perfect" practitioner while ignoring or suppressing inner conflicts and faults. This tendency can lead to a disconnect between one's external behaviour and internal reality. The verse warns against this kind of pretence, which can lead to self-deception and hinder genuine spiritual progress.
Gyalse Thogme, in his teachings, points out the dangers of overlooking one's own faults while being quick to discern those of others. This behaviour not only hampers one's progress but also perpetuates a cycle of delusion and ego-centrism, which is contrary to the principles of the Dharma.

The Importance of Self-Examination:
Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche's commentary underscores the necessity of continuously looking inward to recognise and address one's own shortcomings. He emphasises that without this introspection, one's actions, even if outwardly aligned with the Dharma, may still be driven by delusion and negative emotions. The primary focus should always be on refining and correcting one's own mind rather than on observing the faults of others.
This practice is not about self-criticism in a harsh or punitive sense. Instead, it involves a constructive and honest acknowledgment of one's flaws and challenges. The metaphor of using a mirror to check for dirt on one's face aptly describes this process of self-examination. Just as a mirror reveals the dirt on the face, regular introspection allows one to see where their thoughts, words, and actions may be misaligned with the Dharma.

The verse on examining oneself emphasises the critical importance of self-awareness and self-examination on the bodhisattva path. It highlights the need to continuously reflect on one's own faults and to address them, rather than merely projecting an outward appearance of being a Dharma practitioner. The practice of examining oneself is essential for genuine spiritual growth and for aligning one's actions with the true principles of the Dharma.

The practice of abandoning criticism is a profound aspect of the bodhisattva path, one that involves more than just refraining from negative speech. It requires a deep respect for the potential in all beings and a commitment to maintaining harmony within the sangha. By cultivating pure vision and compassion, we not only protect others from harm but also safeguard our own spiritual progress, ensuring that our Dharma practice remains authentic and effective.

B. To give up speaking of a bodhisattva's faults (32)

The Importance of Harmony and Pure Vision:
Maintaining harmony within the sangha is crucial for the preservation of the teachings. This involves both refraining from criticism and also actively cultivating respect, kindness, and openness toward all Dharma practitioners. In the Vajrayana tradition, this practice extends to maintaining harmony with vajra brothers and sisters, as any discord can hinder spiritual progress and obscure the attainment of realisation.
Milarepa's words, "The world all around is the best of all books," remind us that everything we encounter can be a teaching if we maintain pure vision. The verse concludes with an emphasis on the importance of setting right our own defects rather than proclaiming those of others. This approach preserves the purity of our practice and maintains the integrity of the Dharma.

Respecting All Beings:
Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche's commentary further emphasises the importance of seeing all beings as possessing the Buddha-nature. This view fosters respect and compassion, making it inappropriate to criticise or find fault with others. He also warns against the dangers of sectarianism and encourages a nonjudgmental, pure vision that sees all Dharma traditions as valid expressions of the Buddha's teachings.
When we perceive faults in others, it is often a reflection of our own imperfections. The analogy of a white conch appearing yellow to someone with jaundice illustrates how our impure perception can distort the way we see others. The verse teaches that every action of enlightened beings and bodhisattvas has a deeper meaning, often beyond our immediate understanding. Therefore, we should refrain from criticism and instead cultivate faith and pure vision, which are essential for genuine Dharma practice.

The Harm of Criticising Others:
Gossip and denigration are recognised as non-virtuous actions that create disharmony and often serve as a way to deflect attention from one's own shortcomings. When we criticise others, especially fellow Dharma practitioners, we may think we are pointing out their faults, but in reality, we are reinforcing our own negative emotions and delusions. This behaviour both harms the person being criticised and also degrades our own spiritual progress.
The Buddha's teachings remind us that it is inappropriate to disparage others because all beings possess the potential for Buddhahood. By recognising this, we cultivate respect and compassion for everyone. The verse advises that if someone is abusing their position or acting unethically, we should speak out, but with careful consideration, ensuring our actions are motivated by compassion and the desire to protect others, rather than by negative emotions like anger or jealousy.

The verse on abandoning criticism highlights the importance of refraining from speaking ill of others, especially those who have entered the path of the Mahayana. This practice is not merely about avoiding negative speech but about cultivating a mindset that respects and values the inherent potential in all beings, recognising their Buddha-nature.

C. To give up attachment to a sponsor's property (33)

Thogme Sangpo's verse on not profiting from the Dharma is a timeless reminder of the dangers that come with spiritual authority. It calls on practitioners to stay focused on the true purpose of the Dharma and to avoid becoming attached to the material and social benefits that can come with respect and offerings. In doing so, practitioners can maintain the purity of the Dharma and ensure that their practice leads to true liberation.

The Modern Context:
In the modern context, where Dharma centres rely on external funding and the presence of recognised lamas to sustain themselves, the pressure on young lamas to perform and meet expectations is immense. This can lead to a situation where the true purpose of the Dharma is overshadowed by the need to maintain the centre's financial and social standing.
The verse encourages both lamas and their followers to resist these pressures and to prioritise the authentic practice of the Dharma. This means focusing on inner cultivation and avoiding the distractions of wealth, respect, and social status. The ultimate aim is to keep the Dharma pure and to ensure that the teachings are passed down in their true form, untainted by the temptations of worldly gain.

The True Practice:
Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche's commentary emphasises that the essence of Dharma practice is not in the accumulation of wealth or social status, but in the cultivation of inner wisdom and compassion. The verse calls on practitioners to avoid attachment to the homes of friends and benefactors, which can symbolise the comfort and security provided by material wealth and social connections.
Instead, the practice of a bodhisattva is to remain detached from these external comforts and to stay focused on the inner work of listening, reflecting, and meditating on the Dharma. The ultimate goal is to attain liberation, which requires letting go of all attachments, including those to respect, offerings, and social status.

The Impact on Practice:
When a practitioner becomes preoccupied with receiving offerings and respect, their practice can suffer. The time and energy that should be devoted to studying, contemplating, and meditating can instead be consumed by performing rituals, attending to the needs of benefactors, and maintaining social status. This is particularly dangerous for those who are new to the path, as it can lead to a weakening of their foundational practices.
This issue is not unique to contemporary times; it has been a concern for centuries. However, the modern context, with its global reach and the pressures on young lamas to travel and support Dharma centres worldwide, exacerbates the problem. The verse serves as a cautionary note for both the lamas and their followers to stay focused on the true purpose of the Dharma and not be distracted by the external trappings of respect and material offerings.

The Danger of Attachment:
The verse begins by pointing out that offerings and respect, though well-intentioned, can lead to discord and cause the essential practices of listening, reflection, and meditation to decline. This happens when a practitioner becomes attached to the comfort and admiration that such respect and offerings bring. The result is a distraction from the true purpose of the Dharma path, which is to cultivate inner wisdom and compassion.
Thogme Sangpo, as a respected lama himself, is cautioning his fellow practitioners, especially those who are in positions of authority, to be vigilant. The verse is particularly relevant today, as many young incarnate lamas and spiritual leaders are recognised and elevated to positions of great respect at a very early age. While the intentions behind these recognitions are often good, there is a real danger that these young lamas may not yet be fully prepared for the responsibilities placed upon them. The adulation and expectations of their followers can lead them to become complacent, or worse, arrogant.

Thogme Sangpo's verse on not profiting from the Dharma is a powerful reminder of the potential dangers that come with receiving offerings, respect, and adulation, particularly for those who hold positions of spiritual authority. This verse warns against becoming attached to the material and social benefits that can come with being a respected Dharma practitioner or teacher.

D. To give up harsh speech (34)

Giving up harsh speech is a vital aspect of the bodhisattva path. By being mindful of our words, we can avoid causing harm to others and ensure that our speech aligns with our intention to benefit all beings. Harsh speech both disrupts the minds of others and also undermines our own practice. Therefore, we should strive to speak with kindness, truthfulness, and compassion, always considering the impact our words may have. Thus, we uphold the integrity of the Dharma and support the spiritual growth of ourselves and others.

The Consequences of Negative Speech:
Engaging in harsh speech or gossip can lead to significant negative karma. It not only disturbs others but also derails our own progress on the path. Criticising others, especially those who are also on the Dharma path, can create a mountain of negativity for ourselves. Instead, the bodhisattva's way is to use speech constructively, to guide and inspire others toward enlightenment.

Practicing Compassionate Speech:
A bodhisattva's practice involves using speech to benefit others, bringing them closer to the path of liberation. This means speaking in ways that open people's minds, make them happy, and gently introduce them to the Dharma. The Buddha exemplified this approach by tailoring his teachings to suit the capacities and receptivity of his audience, always aiming to lead them toward greater understanding and compassion.
Nagarjuna, in his Letter to a Friend, categorises speech into three types: words that are like honey (helpful and pleasing), words that are like flowers (honest and true), and words that are like excrement (harmful and false). As practitioners, we are encouraged to cultivate speech that resembles honey and flowers, while abandoning speech that resembles excrement.

Avoiding Excessive Speech:
In addition to avoiding harsh speech, we should also be mindful of excessive or meaningless chatter. Idle talk can distract both ourselves and others from more meaningful activities and can dilute the power of our words when we do need to speak. Sometimes, the best form of communication is silence, particularly when it is a noble silence that fosters reflection and inner peace.

The Responsibility of Speech:
As beings with the capacity for language, we bear the responsibility of using our speech wisely. Words can cause more harm than physical actions because they strike directly at the heart and mind. The old saying, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never harm me," is, as the Tibetan saying suggests, misleading. Words can tear our hearts to pieces, leaving emotional wounds that can take much longer to heal than physical injuries.
As practitioners, we are encouraged to speak truthfully, ensuring that our words are trustworthy and do not deceive others. However, truthfulness alone is not enough; our speech should also be kind and beneficial. Even when we must speak critically or offer difficult feedback, it is crucial to check our motivation and ensure that our words are meant to help, not to harm.

The Impact of Harsh Words:
The verse on giving up harsh speech highlights the profound impact that our words can have on others and ourselves. Words are powerful; they can either heal or harm, uplift or bring down. Harsh words, in particular, have the potential to disturb the minds of others and disrupt our own practice as bodhisattvas. As practitioners on the path, we must be mindful of the language we use and the tone in which we speak. Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche emphasises that harsh words are often the root cause of conflicts and wars, leading to long-lasting feuds and resentment. This lack of tolerance and patience can escalate into large-scale devastation, illustrating the far-reaching consequences of something as simple as speech. Parents, in particular, should be aware of the lasting impact their words can have on their children. A single harsh remark, spoken in anger or frustration, can leave deep emotional scars that may affect a child throughout their life.

III. Training in how to be rid of the negative emotions (35)

The Challenge of Habitual Emotions:
Negative emotions, when they become habitual, can be deeply ingrained and difficult to uproot. The key to overcoming these emotions lies in cultivating mindfulness and vigilance. Mindfulness, in this context, refers to being fully aware of our thoughts, feelings, and actions in the present moment. Vigilance is the ongoing watchfulness that checks in on our state of mind, ensuring that we stay on track and do not fall into the trap of negative emotions.
Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche provides a powerful analogy: when the mind is distracted, we might not even notice a mosquito bite, but when the mind is quiet and calm, we feel it immediately. Similarly, a mind that is stable and concentrated is better equipped to recognise and address negative emotions as soon as they arise.

The Power of Early Intervention:
The importance of catching negative emotions in their early stages cannot be overstated. When emotions are just beginning to surface, they are like wisps of cloud in a clear sky; insubstantial and easy to disperse. However, if left unchecked, these emotions can quickly build up, leading to a cascade of thoughts and feelings that are much harder to control. The key is to recognise these emotions immediately and apply the appropriate antidotes before they take root.
Shantideva, in The Way of the Bodhisattva, likens negative emotions to enemies that must be repelled. Unlike human enemies, these emotions have no retreat; and they can be vanquished simply by recognising them for what they are. The moment an emotion arises, we must be ready with the antidote. This is the essence of Dharma practice.

The Role of Mindfulness:
Mindfulness is the path to liberation, as the Buddha taught. It involves a quality of being present, aware, and conscious of what is happening within and around us. The Buddha recommended starting with awareness of physical movements; knowing when you are standing, sitting, walking, and so on. This awareness should then be extended to feelings, sensations, and finally to the mind itself. What is the mind doing at this moment? How is it interacting with external phenomena?
The more conscious we become, the better equipped we are to deal with negative emotions as they arise. The practice of mindfulness allows us to see these emotions clearly, in the moment they appear, and to apply the necessary antidotes before they gain momentum.

The Importance of Vigilance:
Vigilance works hand in hand with mindfulness. It is like a guardian that checks in periodically to ensure that the mind is not straying into negative territory. If everything is running smoothly, vigilance recedes, only to return later for another check. But when vigilance detects a problem (such as the emergence of anger, greed, pride, jealousy, or attachment) it steps in to remind us to apply the antidote.
This approach requires ongoing practice and dedication. Habitual emotions like anger or greed can create well-worn neural pathways in the brain, making them hard to break. But with consistent mindfulness and vigilance, we can interrupt these patterns and transform them.

Applying the Antidotes:
The Buddha's teachings provide a wide range of antidotes for negative emotions. For instance, when anger arises, we can practice patience; when greed emerges, we can reflect on the impermanence of all things. The goal is to become so attuned to our inner state that we can catch these emotions early, before they have a chance to take hold.
As Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche explains, through the practice of shamatha (calm abiding), even a person with strong emotions can gradually develop self-control and inner calm. When the mind is stable and relaxed, habitual tendencies fade away, and altruism and compassion naturally expand.

Ignorance of holding onto a permanent "self"
The ignorance of believing in a permanent 'self' leads to the erroneous distinction between self and others, which is the root cause of all suffering. By realising the emptiness of both, we can transcend dualistic thinking and cultivate true wisdom and compassion.
Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche explains that the root of all suffering and negative emotions is the fundamental ignorance of believing in a permanent, inherently existing 'self.' This mistaken belief in an 'I' creates a dualistic perception that separates 'self' from 'other,' leading to attachment to oneself and aversion to others. This duality is the source of all the afflictive emotions such as attachment, greed, anger, jealousy, and pride.
The concept of a permanent 'self' is a delusion; both the self and others are empty of inherent existence. When we cling to the idea of a fixed 'self,' we also falsely perceive 'others' as separate and distinct entities, which fosters division and conflict. The recognition of the empty nature of both 'self' and 'other' is crucial for overcoming this ignorance. By understanding that both are merely constructs without true, independent existence, we can dissolve the dualistic thinking that underlies all negative emotions.
Rinpoche emphasises that when we recognise the emptiness of 'self,' the distinction between self and others vanishes, and we begin to see all beings as equal in their essence. This realisation naturally gives rise to compassion and the wisdom that all beings are interconnected and share the same nature.

IV. Training in accomplishing others' good with mindfulness and vigilance (36)

The essence of the text is the critical importance of continual mindfulness and self-awareness in the practice of a bodhisattva. This verse 36 emphasises that true Dharma practice involves being constantly aware of the state of one's mind, recognising and addressing negative emotions such as anger, pride, greed, attachment, and ignorance as soon as they arise. This mindfulness should extend beyond formal meditation into all aspects of daily life, where it is crucial to observe and guide one's thoughts, words, and actions to ensure they align with the principles of compassion and altruism.

A bodhisattva's practice is fundamentally about transcending self-clinging and dedicating oneself to the welfare of others. This requires cultivating a pure mind, free from attachment, hatred, and self-centred motivations. The texts highlight that even the grandest actions are meaningless without pure intention focused on benefiting all beings. True Dharma practice is not about external appearances or actions but about the internal cultivation of selflessness and compassion.

By regularly examining our thoughts and motivations, you can reduce your attachment to worldly concerns and increase your confidence in the teachings. This ongoing self-examination and mindfulness help ensure that your practice remains authentic and effective in leading you toward enlightenment and in benefiting others. Ultimately, the practice of a bodhisattva is to cultivate a pure, altruistic intention in everything you do, ensuring that all actions are directed toward the good of others and are free from self-clinging.

V. Dedicating the merit to perfect enlightenment (37)

The verse "Dedicating on Behalf of Others" centres on the importance of dedicating the merit of one's virtuous actions for the benefit of all beings. This dedication should be done without attachment to the deluded, ignorant concepts of a doer, an action, or a recipient, reflecting the realisation of emptiness. By following the example of great bodhisattvas like Samantabhadra, Manjushri, and Avalokiteshvara, one can emulate their vast aspirations and actions, enhancing the power and efficacy of the dedication.

Dedication serves as the final seal in the practice of a bodhisattva, ensuring that the accumulated merit lasts until enlightenment is attained. If not dedicated properly, merit can quickly dissipate, like a drop of water evaporating on a hot stone. The goal of dedication should not be limited to worldly achievements. It should focus on the ultimate aim of attaining full enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings.

Using verses from great masters, such as those from The King of Aspirations for Excellent Conduct or prayers from Lama Mipham, adds strength to the dedication. Actions performed without pride or regret, and dedicated with a pure intention, carry an unhindered energy that propels one toward swift progress on the path to enlightenment.