Foundational Doctrines 3
Noble Truths: The Four Truths of the Āryas (Four Noble Truths) 3
Sixteen Characteristics of the Four Noble Truths 5
Truth of Suffering 7
Suffering: Three types of suffering 7
Suffering (Lamrim Chenmo synthesis: 8-6-3 & Origin & Practice) 8
Dependent Arising (Origination) 13
Forward and Reverse Cycles 15
Seals: Four Seals 18
Transitory Collections: View of the Transitory Collections 18
Thirty-Seven Factors of Enlightenment vs. Thirty-Seven Practices of a Bodhisattva 20
Mind, Afflictions, and Their Antidotes 23
Afflictions, Kleshas (delusions), Mind and their Antidotes 23
Afflictions: Six Root Afflictions 24
Ignorance (Avidyā) and Wisdom (Prajñā) 26
Wrong Views (Mithyā-dṛṣṭi) 27
Mind: Self-cherishing Mind 29
Enemies: Inner Enemies 31
Obscurations 33
Overcoming Delusions 34
Daily Practice to Overcome Delusions 37
Eliminating Faults 39
Training in Ethics and Conduct 40
Ethical Conduct 40
Morality: Three Types of Morality 41
Vinaya, the 42
Virtuous Actions, ten 43
Ten Non-virtuous Actions 45
Worldly Dharmas: Eight Worldly Dharmas 46
The Bodhisattva Path 47
Bodhisattva Vows and Bodhichitta 47
How to Take or Renew the Vow of Bodhichitta and the Bodhisattva Vow 48
Daily Practice Schedule for Cultivating the Bodhisattva Vow 50
Bodhisattva Training: Tsongkhapa’s combined method of Bodhisattva Training 52
Cause and Effect: Seven Points of Cause and Effect 54
Equalising and Exchanging Self and Others 56
Daily-Life Integration of "Exchanging Self and Other" 59

Bodhisattva levels (ten Bhūmis) 61
Meditation and Mind Training 64
Preparatory Practices: Six Preparatory Practices 64
Meditations - the 10 most important 65
Calm Abiding: Śamatha 68
Mind Training (Lojong): Seven-Point 69
Mindfulness and introspective alertness 74
Reliable Cognizers 77
Renunciation 79
Perfections and Powers 82
Perfections, Pāramitās: Six Perfections 82
Powers: Four Powers 82
Guided Meditation & Daily Practice for Applying the Four Powers 83
Higher Realisations 86
Aggregates: Five Aggregates 86
Attainments: Two attainments 87
Trainings: The Three Trainings 87
Stages: Two Stages 89
Mental Factors: Eleven Virtuous Mental Factors 90
Dharma Body and Devotional Practices 93
Dharmakaya: Twenty-one Pure qualities of the dharmakaya 93
Meditation and Contemplation on the Twenty-One Pure Qualities of the Dharmakaya 94
Weekly Schedule for Cultivating the Twenty-One Pure Qualities of the Dharmakaya 95
Seven Limbed (or Branch) Prayer 97
Om Mani Padme Hum 98
Sources 103
Lamrim Broad outline of the Lamrim (Stages of the Path) 104
Emptiness and Daily Behaviour 105
How is ignorance the root cause of negative actions (karma). 109

Foundational Doctrines

Noble Truths: The Four Truths of the Āryas[1] (Four Noble Truths)

The "four noble truths," form the foundation and structure of the Buddhist path.

Each sentient being has the inherent wish for stable peace, happiness and freedom from suffering. The longing for these motivates us to engage in many activities in an attempt to gain them. However, until now everything we have done has not brought stable peace and joy because we live in cyclic existence (saṃsāra) —the state of having a body and mind under the influence of mental afflictions[2] and karma. Within cyclic existence we encounter only duḥkha—unsatisfactory conditions and suffering.[3]

Without choice, we take a body that gets old, sick and dies and have a mind that becomes anxious, fearful and angry. The I—the person that is designated with dependence upon the body and mind—revolves in cyclic existence. Our five aggregates of body and mind[4] are unsatisfactory by nature and constitute the first truth of the āryas, the truth of duḥkha.

The causes of the five aggregates are mental afflictions—skewed attitudes and disturbing emotions, the chief of which is ignorance (footnote 1 page 2)—and polluted actions.[5] These constitute the second truth, the true origins of duḥkha.

The final true cessation[6] (the third truth) is liberation and nirvāṇa, the state of peace, joy and fulfilment that we seek. Here ignorance, afflictions and polluted actions and the unsatisfactory experiences they cause have been extinguished at the root so that they can no longer arise.

True cessations are attained by a method that eradicates ignorance. This is *true paths*, the fourth truth, which consist primarily of the wisdom realising the ultimate nature—the emptiness of inherent existence of all persons and phenomena—and the virtuous consciousnesses supported by that wisdom.

These paths require time and diligent effort to develop. How to cultivate these paths and actualise nirvāṇa is the subject of this series.

The process of attaining nirvāṇa begins with understanding the first truth, the nature of duḥkha[7] and the various types of unsatisfactory circumstances and suffering that afflict sentient beings in cyclic existence.

Because the root cause of duḥkha, ignorance (a mental factor that misconceives reality and grasps phenomena as actually existent) is erroneous, it can be eliminated by the wisdom that sees things as they really are; empty of inherent existence. By

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[1] Someone who has directly and non-conceptually realised the emptiness of inherent existence.

[2] see footnote 1 page 2. Ignorance, Attachment or desire, Aversion or hatred, Pride or ego, Doubt.

[3] Duḥkha (pr dukkha) is often translated as "suffering," but this translation is misleading. Its meaning is more nuanced and refers to all unsatisfactory states and experiences, many of which are not explicitly painful. While the Buddha says that life under the influence of afflictions and polluted karma is unsatisfactory, he does not say that life is suffering.
Unsatisfactory experiences of cyclic existence, which are of three types: the duḥkha of pain, the duḥkha of change, and the pervasive duḥkha of conditioning; the first truth of the āryas.
Alternatives to 'suffering' include: dissatisfaction, discontent. All synonyms for 'dissatisfaction'.

[4] Aggregates. (1) The four or five components of a living being: body, feelings, discriminations, miscellaneous factors and consciousnesses. (2) In general, the aggregates are a way to categorise all impermanent things. Here form includes the five sense objects, their five cognitive faculties and forms for mental consciousness.

[5] The Sanskrit term āsrava is translated as "polluted," "contaminated," or "tainted," meaning under the influence of ignorance or its latencies.

[6] The cessation of afflictions, their seeds and the polluted karma that produces rebirth in cyclic existence; liberation.

[7] Duḥkha. Unsatisfactory experiences of cyclic existence, which are of three types: the duḥkha of pain, the duḥkha of change and the pervasive duḥkha of conditioning; the first truth of the āryas.

gradually eradicating ignorance and other afflictions, we can bring greater satisfaction and freedom into our lives.

With the final true cessation of duḥkha and its causes, we attain nirvāṇa.[8]

While nirvāṇa may sound like a far-off goal, we can easily see steps going in that direction: the more we cease anger, the greater harmony we experience and the more our greed diminishes, the greater contentment we have. As we gradually reduce ignorance and afflictions through the application of wisdom, tranquility and fulfilment correspondingly increase, culminating in nirvāṇa.

The Buddha spoke of three types of duḥkha. The first is the duḥkha of pain. This is the physical and mental suffering that all beings see as undesirable. All world religions agree that destructive actions, such as killing, stealing and lying, bring physical and/or mental pain.

The second type of duḥkha is the duḥkha of change, which refers to worldly happiness. Why did the Buddha call what is conventionally considered happiness—such as pleasant sensations—duḥkha? Worldly happiness is unsatisfactory because the activities, people and things that initially give us pleasure do not continue to do so. Although eating, being with friends, receiving praise and hearing good music may initially relieve pain or boredom and bring pleasure, if we continue to do them, they will eventually bring discomfort or fatigue. Most people do not recognise worldly happiness as being unsatisfactory by nature.

The third type of duḥkha—the pervasive duḥkha of conditioning—is the fact that we have a body and mind that are not under our control. Without choice, we take a body that is born, falls ill, ages and dies. Between birth and death, we encounter problems even though we try to avoid them. We cannot obtain everything we want even though we try hard to get it and even when our desires are fulfilled, that happiness is not stable: we become disillusioned or separated from what we crave.

The description of the third type of duḥkha—the pervasive duḥkha of conditioning—is unique to Buddhadharma. Other religions nor science do not identify our taking a body and mind that is under the control of ignorance, afflictions and polluted karma as problematic.

Having identified the pervasive duḥkha of conditioning as the basic unsatisfactory condition we sentient beings suffer from, the Buddha sought out its root cause. He identified it as our ignorance grasping at inherent existence and saw that this ignorance can be eliminated completely only by cultivating its opposite, the wisdom perceiving the emptiness of inherent existence. Here the Buddha's teachings on selflessness (anātman)[9] become important. He explained that when we search for what ignorance perceives—the inherent or independent existence of persons and phenomena—we cannot find it. The wisdom that realises this—the true path—has the ability to gradually eradicate all ignorance from the mind, resulting in nirvana, the final true cessation.

In this way, the **Dharma**—true cessations and true paths—is a unique refuge. The Buddha who taught this Dharma is a unique teacher and the Saṅgha—those followers who have realised directly the lack of inherent existence—are unique companions on the path. These three objects of **refuge** as described in Buddhism are unequaled and are not found elsewhere.

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[8] Nirvāṇa. Liberation; the cessation of afflictive obscurations and the rebirth in saṃsāra that they cause.

[9] In this context, "self" does not mean a person but refers to inherent, independent or true existence. "Selflessness" is the absence of independent existence, not the absence of a person.

Sixteen Characteristics of the Four Noble Truths

In Buddhism, the **Sixteen Characteristics of the Four Noble Truths** are a set of meditative reflections that deepen one's understanding of suffering,[10] its origin, cessation, and the path. They are used in **analytical meditation** to cultivate **direct insight** into reality, and they form part of the foundational teachings especially emphasised in **the Lamrim** and **Abhidharma traditions**.

🔷 Grouping Structure

Each of the **Four Noble Truths** is explained through **four characteristics**, making **16 in total**:

Noble Truth	Four Characteristics
1. **Suffering (duḥkha)**	Impermanence, Suffering, Emptiness, Selflessness
2. **Origin (samudaya)**	Cause, Origin, Strong Production, Condition
3. **Cessation (nirodha)**	Cessation, Pacification, Being Superb, Definite Emergence
4. **Path (mārga)**	Path, Awareness, Achievement, Deliverance

Let's explore each truth with its four characteristics, explanation, and examples.

🌿 1. The Truth of Suffering (duḥkha)

These four characteristics help us **see through the illusion** that life can give us lasting happiness.

1. Impermanence (anitya)

- **Meaning**: All conditioned phenomena change moment by moment.
- **Example**: A beautiful flower wilts; youth fades; even joy doesn't last.
- **Purpose**: Undermines attachment to things we think will bring permanent satisfaction.

2. Suffering (duḥkha)

- **Meaning**: All conditioned experiences involve suffering—either obvious (pain), or subtle (dissatisfaction from change or from being conditioned).
- **Example**: Even pleasant experiences bring suffering when they end.
- **Purpose**: Helps us see life's fundamental unsatisfactoriness when clinging.

3. Emptiness (śūnyatā)

- **Meaning**: Phenomena lack a truly independent nature—they are empty of inherent existence.
- **Example**: A car appears solid and real, but it's merely a label on parts arranged a certain way.
- **Purpose**: Breaks down belief in the intrinsic reality of our problems.

4. Selflessness (anātman)

[10] Alternatives to 'suffering' include: dissatisfaction, discontent. All synonyms for 'dissatisfaction'.

- **Meaning**: There's no independently existing "I" in body or mind.
- **Example**: The mind is a stream of thoughts, not a fixed self; the body is parts, not "me."
- **Purpose**: Undermines ego-clinging, the root of all suffering.

🔥 2. The Truth of Origin (samudaya)

These describe the **causal nature** of suffering, primarily **craving and ignorance**.

5. Cause (hetu)

- **Meaning**: Suffering arises from causes, not randomly.
- **Example**: Craving for pleasure and existence leads to rebirth and suffering.
- **Purpose**: Helps us identify and abandon the true cause instead of external blame.

6. Origin (samudaya)

- **Meaning**: These causes are the actual origin of suffering.
- **Example**: Ignorance distorts how we see things → we crave → we suffer.
- **Purpose**: Narrows focus to the internal causes like ignorance and karma.

7. Strong Production (samudbhava)

- **Meaning**: The causes (craving, ignorance) generate suffering powerfully and continuously.
- **Example**: Like a fire fed by wood, craving fuels rebirth and pain.
- **Purpose**: Highlights how entrenched and potent the causes are.

8. Condition (pratyaya)

- **Meaning**: The origin acts as a condition that supports suffering's ongoing existence.
- **Example**: Just as oxygen supports fire, ignorance supports saṃsāra.
- **Purpose**: Encourages us to uproot the supporting conditions to break the cycle.

🕊️ 3. The Truth of Cessation (nirodha)

These four show that **liberation is possible** and what it's like.

9. Cessation (nirodha)

- **Meaning**: The complete ending of suffering and its causes.
- **Example**: Like extinguishing a lamp, when craving ends, so does suffering.
- **Purpose**: Offers confidence that liberation is achievable.

10. Pacification (śānta)

- **Meaning**: Cessation is peaceful and beyond mental afflictions.
- **Example**: Like water calming after waves subside.
- **Purpose**: Inspires aspiration for nirvana as the ultimate peace.

11. Being Superb (praṇīta)

- **Meaning**: Cessation is the highest form of happiness and freedom.
- **Example**: It's greater than all worldly pleasures—unshakeable peace.
- **Purpose**: Helps us value spiritual goals over mundane ones.

12. Definite Emergence (niḥsaraṇa)

- **Meaning**: Liberation is irreversible and definitive.

- **Example**: Like a prisoner released forever, never to be caught again.
- **Purpose**: Deepens resolve knowing the path leads to complete freedom.

🛤️ 4. The Truth of the Path (mārga)

These describe the **noble eightfold path** and its reliable results.

13. Path (mārga)

- **Meaning**: There is a precise path to liberation.
- **Example**: Right view, right concentration, etc., form a complete system.
- **Purpose**: Encourages discipline and structured practice.

14. Awareness (nyāya)

- **Meaning**: The path is grounded in correct knowledge and wisdom.
- **Example**: Insight into impermanence, emptiness, dependent arising.
- **Purpose**: Discriminates true path from false or worldly paths.

15. Achievement (prāpti)

- **Meaning**: The path produces realizations and results.
- **Example**: Practicing compassion increases kindness; wisdom removes ignorance.
- **Purpose**: Builds faith in practice when results are seen directly.

16. Deliverance (niḥsaraṇa)

- **Meaning**: The path leads to full liberation from saṃsāra.
- **Example**: Like a raft that helps us cross the river of suffering.
- **Purpose**: Assures us that following the path truly works.

🧘 How to Use These in Practice

- **Meditate on each characteristic** to deepen your view.
- **Use logical analysis**: "If this is impermanent, can I really rely on it?"
- **Apply to real-life experiences**: "This pleasure is fading—can I see its emptiness?"
- **Shift motivation**: Craving leads to suffering → I must generate renunciation.
- **Cultivate wisdom**: The path is not belief alone, but deep experiential insight.

Truth of Suffering

Suffering: Three types of suffering[11]

In Buddhism, the concept of suffering (dukkha) is central to its teachings. The Buddha identified three types of suffering, which help in understanding the pervasive nature of suffering in life. These three types are:

1. **Dukkha-dukkha (Suffering of Suffering)**:
   - This is the most apparent form of suffering and includes physical pain, emotional distress, and discomfort. It refers to the direct experiences of unpleasant sensations, such as illness, injury, or the loss of a loved one.
2. **Viparinama-dukkha (Suffering of Change)**:

[11] Alternatives to 'suffering' include: dissatisfaction, discontent. All synonyms for 'dissatisfaction'.

- This type of suffering arises from the impermanent nature of all things. It refers to the distress we feel when we experience changes that disrupt our happiness and comfort, such as aging, losing a job, or the end of a relationship. It highlights the transient nature of pleasure and satisfaction.

3. **Sankhara-dukkha (Suffering of Conditioned States)**:
   - This is the most subtle and profound type of suffering, relating to the inherent unsatisfactoriness of all conditioned phenomena. It refers to the existential suffering that arises from the fact that all things are conditioned, interdependent, and subject to decay. This includes the suffering inherent in the very nature of life and existence, even when things are going well.

These three types of suffering underscore the Buddhist view that suffering is an intrinsic part of life and must be understood and transcended through the practice of the Dharma.

Suffering (Lamrim Chenmo synthesis: 8-6-3 & Origin & Practice)

Tsongkhapa devotes four contiguous chapters to suffering (first "slicing" it three ways (eight, six, and three types) and then laying bare its origin) because he wants the recognition of suffering to mature from a vague sentiment into a precise, meditative certainty that energises renunciation, stabilises ethics, and ultimately ripens into insight. In the Snow Lion / Shambhala translation of *The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment (Lamrim Chenmo), Volume 1*, these are Chapter 17 (Eight Types), Chapter 18 (Six Types), Chapter 19 (Further Meditations, including the Three Types), and Chapter 20 (Origin of Suffering). The table of contents and outline explicitly list this sequence.

Below I'll (1) unpack why Tsongkhapa uses multiple taxonomies, (2) summarise each set in practical, meditator-ready terms, (3) explain the origin of suffering in his system, (4) give antidotes and meditations (with special focus on emptiness-of-self), and (5) offer a concise daily/weekly integration plan and common pitfalls.

Why three taxonomies before the origin?

Each taxonomy calibrates your attention differently:

- **Eight types** make suffering personal and immediate (birth, aging, etc.), so disenchantment isn't abstract; it is felt in your body and biography.
- **Six types** expose the *structural* defects of cyclic existence itself (uncertainty, insatiability, etc.), so even "good fortune" is seen as unreliable.
- **Three types** give the *universal grammar* of all dukkha (pain, change, and pervasive conditioning), turning daily experience into a laboratory for insight.

Placing these before the origin prevents a merely intellectual grasp of causality; you first learn *why* you must uproot causes, then you are ready to see *what* those causes are.

The Eight Types: making dukkha unmistakable

Tsongkhapa's Chapter 17 follows the classic eight: **birth, aging, illness, death; meeting the unpleasant; separation from the pleasant; not getting what you want; and the suffering of the five appropriated aggregates** (the basis of all the rest). He instructs analytic meditation keyed to Nāgārjuna's *Friendly Letter* so the recognition becomes visceral, not literary.

How to meditate (brief):
Choose one (e.g., "aging"). Analyse: its certainty; its unpredictability of timing; its erosion of control; the way clinging amplifies it; how others share it (opening compassion). Finish by *placing* the mind in a quiet acceptance that does not dilute urgency. Rotate through all eight across days or weeks.

Functional payoff: the eight erode naiveté and fuel the *determination to be free* without collapsing into despair; they also prepare compassion by universalising what you've found in yourself.

The Six Types: seeing the built-in faults of saṃsāra

In Chapter 18, Tsongkhapa lists the six "faults" (defects) of cyclic existence: **uncertainty; insatiability; casting off bodies repeatedly; repeated rebirth; repeatedly descending from high to low; having no companions (ultimately going alone)**. He even notes a seven-item variant in a commentary, but standardises on six.

How to meditate (brief):
Take "uncertainty." Recall concrete life episodes that looked stable but flipped. Notice how even virtue can't guarantee favourable *worldly* outcomes when the field is conditioned and vast. Let this sober you; not to apathy, but to realism and prioritisation of what *can* be secured (ethical causes, mental qualities, insight).

Functional payoff: the six disable spiritual procrastination ("I'll practice when life settles") by showing that saṃsāra never offers a non-leaky boat. They mature *renunciation* into an intelligent life strategy.

The Three Types: the universal grammar of dukkha

Chapter 19 then has you meditate on **(i) the suffering of change, (ii) the suffering of pain, (iii) the suffering of conditionality (pervasive compounded suffering)**. The outline places "change" first, "pain" second, and "conditionality" third. In many explanations, "conditionality" refers to the five tainted aggregates as the very *basis* that keeps the other two going.

- **Suffering of pain:** the obvious unpleasant.

- **Suffering of change:** the pleasant that turns; its very nature guarantees future dissatisfaction when conditions shift.
- **Pervasive conditioning:** the most important; simply to have appropriated tainted aggregates is to be under the sway of causes that perpetuate unsatisfactoriness.

How to meditate (brief):
Track a recent pleasure (praise, success, a perfect coffee). Watch its arising, peaking, fading; watch grasping move in. See how "pleasant" and "clinging" co-arise and how their very contingency guarantees future unsatisfactoriness. Sit quietly in the *felt* insight: "There is no lasting refuge here." (This is not nihilism; it's diagnostic clarity.)

Functional payoff: you stop chasing rearrangements of conditions as a salvation project and start investing in causes of freedom.

The Origin of Suffering: karma and afflictions, rooted in the conception of self

Only now does Tsongkhapa press the causal point. He states plainly: unless you understand the **origin**, you will miss the path; the **root of cyclic existence is karma and the afflictions (kleśas)**; with the **conception of self** (ignorance grasping at inherent "I" and "mine") as the taproot that energises craving and clinging.

Chapter 20 then proceeds to analyse **how afflictions arise**, how they drive karma, and how this keeps the wheel turning; immediately setting up the next chapter on the **Twelve Links of Dependent-Arising** (Vol. 1, Ch. 21). Taken together, these show the macro-causality (links) and the micro-mechanics (momentary grasping) that make suffering recur.

Antidotes: staged, complementary, mutually reinforcing

1) Immediate antidotes (ethical and attentional):

- **Guard the mind at the gate of contact.** The instant you notice tightening, label it ("craving," "aversion," "conceit"), relax the body, lengthen the out-breath, and redirect attention to the *bare feel* of sensation without the story.
- **Ethics as environmental design.** Reduce triggers that you know inflate kleśas; increase cues for remembrance (texts on your desk, "pause" stickers, short recitations).

2) Structural antidotes (renunciation and bodhicitta):

- The eight and six types foster **renunciation**; not hating life but releasing the fantasy that rearranging saṃsāra will satisfy the deepest aim.

- Let this open into **great compassion** and **bodhicitta**: since everyone is trapped by the same mechanics, your practice becomes a public good, not a private escape.

3) Ultimate antidote (wisdom realising emptiness of self):

- Train insight that the "self" (and phenomena) **lack inherent existence**; what appears arises dependently; by name, parts, causes, and conceptual imputation.
- As Tsongkhapa stresses across the Lamrim, **ignorance makes concrete; wisdom stops treating as concrete**. When the concreting habit weakens, afflictions lose oxygen; karma production slackens; suffering's stream dwindles at its source.

Meditations you can run (analytical → placement → life-integration)

A. Eight/Six/Three cycle (renunciation lab):

- **Week focus:** choose one cluster per week (e.g., "Eight"). Each day take one item.
- **Method:** 10–15 min analysis (why it's certain, how clinging amplifies it, how others share it), then 5–10 min quiet placement on the emotional flavour of disenchantment without aversion.
- **Result:** steady, unforced resolve to practise.

B. Origin drill (twelve-links lens):

- **Trigger replay:** pick a recent upset. Map it very concretely through *feeling* → *craving* → *grasping* → *becoming*; spot the seed thought of a solid "I" that "deserves/needs."
- **Counter:** briefly inquire, "Where is the "*I"* that must have it; same as body? mind? a findable owner?" Don't force an answer; let the felt absence of any findable controller do the work.
- **Result:** craving thins; reactions shorten.

C. Emptiness of self; short analytic set:

- ***Object:*** the sense "I am the thinker" during a thought stream.
- ***Analyse:*** Is the "I" the thought? The stream? Something apart that owns them? If apart, where? Pinpoint or boundary?
- ***Rest:*** when the search fails (as it will), rest in that open, ungraspable clarity. Let appearances play without reification.
- ***Result:*** a lived taste of non-inherent identity; afflictions have less to stick to.

D. Compassion method (using suffering as path):

- When pain arises (physical/mental), add **tonglen** style breathing: on inhalation, *acknowledge* "may I take in this pattern from all who suffer it"; on exhalation, *offer* relief, clarity, and the causes of freedom.
- This prevents renunciation from hardening into self-concern and unites wisdom with method.

Integration into wisdom: how emptiness dissolves the engine of suffering

- **At feeling:** pleasant/unpleasant/neutral are seen as dependently arisen (changing with causes) and not signals of a truly existent "good/bad me/world."
- **At craving:** without a solid "owner" of experience, craving's premise weakens. The mind can prefer without *needing*.
- **At grasping:** insight into dependent designation lets you *use* names and roles without *believing* they pin reality.
- **At becoming/karma:** when afflictive intentions don't ignite, karma-seeds aren't planted; existing seeds find fewer conditions. Over time, the stream cools.

This isn't asceticism for its own sake; it's the hygiene that lets bodhicitta flourish in the world without being of the world.

Common pitfalls (and correctives)

- **Mistaking disenchantment for cynicism.** Antidote: pair every renunciation session with compassion practice so the heart stays warm.
- **Over-intellectualising emptiness.** Antidote: always finish analysis by *resting*; let the absence of a findable self be *felt*, not only concluded.
- **Trying to fix saṃsāra rather than transform the mind.** Antidote: re-read your six-faults notes weekly; ask, "Am I expecting certainty from what is inherently uncertain?"

A compact practice rhythm

Daily (25–35 min):

1. **Set motivation** (bodhicitta; 1–2 min).
2. **Analytic + placement** on one of the eight/six/three (15–20 min).
3. **Short emptiness probe** on the "I" (5–7 min), then rest.
4. **Dedication** (1–2 min).

Weekly: one review block mapping a fresh life event through **feeling → craving → grasping → becoming**, followed by a **tonglen** round for those with the same struggle.

Monthly: one morning on the **twelve links**, tying Vol. 1 Ch. 20–21 together so causality stays vivid.

Closing view

Tsongkhapa's pedagogy is exact: first make suffering unmistakable (8/6/3), then expose its causal engine (karma/afflictions rooted in the conception of self), and finally **cut at the root** with a union of method and wisdom; ethics and compassion channel the energy; emptiness (especially emptiness-of-self) removes the hidden concreter that powers the whole machine. When this order is respected, renunciation is confident rather than bleak, compassion is robust rather than sentimental, and insight is embodied rather than scholastic.

Primary references used above:

- *Lamrim Chenmo*, Vol. 1 (Snow Lion/Shambhala): Chapters 17–20 structure and outline; explicit lists for the eight, six, and three types; and statements that the root is karma and afflictions and, more specifically, the conception of self.
- For concise explanations of "pervasive suffering/affecting suffering" as the five tainted aggregates, see StudyBuddhism's summary (consistent with Tsongkhapa's outline).

Suffering Mindmap
Suffering Handout

Dependent Arising (Origination)

Dependent Arising (Sanskrit: *pratītya-samutpāda*, Pali: *paṭicca-samuppāda*) is one of the core teachings of Buddhism, describing the interconnected and conditional nature of all phenomena. It reveals how everything arises, exists, and ceases due to specific causes and conditions. Understanding this principle is pivotal in realising the nature of reality and freeing oneself from suffering.

The Principle

The essence of dependent arising is expressed in the formula:

> "When this exists, that arises;
> When this does not exist, that does not arise."

This simple statement conveys that all phenomena depend on causes and conditions. Nothing arises independently or exists in isolation.

Twelve Links of Dependent Arising

A primary application of dependent arising is the **twelve links** (*nidānas*), which explain the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth (*saṃsāra*):

1. **Ignorance** (*avidyā*)
   Not understanding the Four Noble Truths or the nature of reality.
   Cause: Ignorance clouds our perception and sets the cycle in motion.

2. **Volitional Formations** (*saṃskāra*)
   Intentional actions (karma) shaped by ignorance.
   Effect: These karmic actions/formations plant seeds for future experiences.
3. **Consciousness** (*vijñāna*)
   Awareness that results from volitional actions.
   Effect: Consciousness carries karmic imprints into the next life.
4. **Name-and-Form** (*nāma-rūpa*)
   The mental and physical components of existence.
   Cause: Consciousness gives rise to a conditioned mind and body.
5. **Six Sense Bases** (*ṣaḍāyatana*)
   The faculties of sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, and thought.
   Effect: Name-and-form develops sensory capacities.
6. **Contact** (*sparśa*)
   The interaction of sense faculties with their objects.
   Cause: Contact arises when the six sense bases engage with the external world.
7. **Feeling** (*vedanā*)
   The sensations of pleasure, pain, or neutrality from contact.
   Effect: Feeling influences how we react emotionally to experiences.
8. **Craving** (*tṛṣṇā*)
   The desire for pleasurable experiences or the aversion to unpleasant ones.
   Cause: Feelings lead to clinging or rejection.
9. **Clinging** (*upādāna*)
   Intense attachment to desires and objects.
   Effect: Craving matures into grasping, entrenching karmic patterns.
10. **Becoming** (*bhava*)
    The mental and physical energies creating future existence.
    Cause: Clinging builds the momentum for rebirth.
11. **Birth** (*jāti*)
    Entry into a new existence.
    Effect: Becoming ripens into actual physical birth.
12. **Aging and Death** (*jarā-maraṇa*)
    The inevitable decay and cessation of life.
    Effect: Birth culminates in suffering, reinforcing the cycle of *saṃsāra*.

Interdependence Beyond the Twelve Links

Dependent arising extends beyond the twelve links. It explains the nature of all phenomena, emphasising that nothing exists inherently (*svabhāva*). Instead:

- **Phenomena depend on causes and conditions**: A tree grows because of soil, water, sunlight, and a seed.
- **Phenomena depend on their parts**: A car exists only because of its engine, wheels, and other components.
- **Phenomena depend on designation and cognition**: A 'car' exists because we assign meaning to its assembly.

Practical Applications in Daily Life

1. **Understanding Suffering**
   Dependent arising helps us see how suffering arises due to attachment, aversion, and ignorance.
2. **Breaking the Cycle**
   By identifying and uprooting ignorance, we can disrupt the chain of causation, leading to liberation.
3. **Emptiness of Self**
   Reflecting on dependent arising reveals the absence of a permanent, independent self, fostering wisdom and compassion.

Meditations on Dependent Arising

1. **Contemplation of Causes and Effects**
   Reflect on how your current experiences arise from past actions and conditions. Consider how your actions now shape future outcomes.
2. **Analysis of Interdependence**
   Examine objects or situations in your life, deconstructing them into their causes, parts, and dependencies.
3. **The Emptiness of Inherent Existence**
   Meditate on how phenomena lack independent existence, arising only through interdependence.

Using Dependent Arising in Practice

- When experiencing anger, trace the conditions that led to it. This helps dismantle reactive patterns.
- Observe how craving leads to clinging and suffering. By recognising this, you can weaken the grip of desire.
- Apply this understanding in interpersonal relationships to cultivate empathy and reduce conflict.

Dependent Arising as a Middle Way

The Buddha taught dependent arising as the Middle Way, avoiding two extremes:

1. **Eternalism**: The belief in an eternal, unchanging self.
2. **Nihilism**: The belief that nothing exists at all.

Dependent arising reconciles these views by affirming the conditional, impermanent, and interdependent nature of existence.

By deeply understanding dependent arising, one gains insight into the nature of reality, paving the way to liberation from suffering.

Forward and Reverse Cycles

Here's a **fully expanded explanation** of **Dependent Arising (Pratītya-samutpāda)** with special emphasis on:

1. The **forward cycle** of the Twelve Links: how ignorance gives rise to suffering and rebirth;
2. The **reverse cycle**: how breaking the chain leads to liberation and the end of suffering.

Overview of Dependent Arising

Dependent Arising is the principle that all phenomena arise in dependence upon causes and conditions. Nothing exists independently or inherently. The Buddha encapsulated this with the phrase:
"When this exists, that arises; when this ceases, that ceases."
It is the cornerstone of Buddhist thought, linking ethics, psychology, philosophy, and liberation.

I. Dependent Arising and the Twelve Links (Forward Cycle)

The **forward cycle** shows how saṃsāric existence continues, lifetime after lifetime. Each link is both the result of the previous and the condition for the next. This cycle is traditionally divided into **three lifetimes**:

Previous Life

1. **Ignorance** (*Avidyā*)
   Not knowing the true nature of reality — particularly, ignorance of impermanence, suffering, no-self, and emptiness.
   ➤ Example: Believing that the self is permanent, we act out of attachment and aversion.
2. **Volitional Formations** (*Saṃskāra*)
   Karmic actions created under the influence of ignorance — mental, verbal, and physical.
   ➤ These karmic imprints plant seeds that carry over into future lives.
   → *These two belong to the past life and condition rebirth.*

Present Life

3. **Consciousness** (*Vijñāna*)
   Specifically, the **relinking consciousness** (*paṭisandhi-viññāṇa*) that enters the womb at conception. It also includes the ongoing stream of consciousness.
   ➤ This is the result of past karma and the vehicle for carrying karmic seeds.
4. **Name-and-Form** (*Nāma-rūpa*)
   The psycho-physical organism — 'name' being the mental aggregates (feeling, perception, intention, contact, and attention), and 'form' being the physical body.
   ➤ This is the embryo's development: mind and body shaped by karma.
5. **Six Sense Bases** (*Ṣaḍāyatana*)
   The six faculties: eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind.
   ➤ These develop from name-and-form and allow interaction with the world.
6. **Contact** (*Sparśa*)
   The meeting of a sense organ, a sense object, and consciousness (e.g., eye + visible object + visual consciousness = contact).
   ➤ Contact creates the platform for experience.
7. **Feeling** (*Vedanā*)
   The pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral sensation that arises from contact.
   ➤ Feeling is a key point — it is where craving is often triggered.
8. **Craving** (*Tṛṣṇā*)
   The thirst or desire for pleasure, existence, or non-existence.
   ➤ "I like this, I want it." Or: "I hate this, make it go away."
   ➤ Craving feeds the emotional momentum of saṃsāra.
9. **Clinging** (*Upādāna*)
   A more intense form of craving: attachment to views, sensual pleasure, rituals, or identity.
   ➤ "This is *mine*, this is *me*."
   ➤ This deepens our karmic entrapment.
10. **Becoming** (*Bhava*)
    The karmic drive that shapes the next existence — includes both:

- **Karmic potential (active becoming)** and
- **Existential process (passive becoming)**
  ➤ This is the final push toward rebirth.

Future Life

11. **Birth** (*Jāti*)
    The actual arising of a new being in a new realm, due to all the accumulated conditions.
    ➤ Can refer both to literal birth and the arising of a mental/emotional identity (e.g., "I am angry").
12. **Aging and Death** (*Jarā-maraṇa*)
    The inevitable decline and death that follow birth, bringing sorrow, lamentation, and despair.
    ➤ This completes the cycle of suffering.

II. Reverse Cycle of Dependent Arising (Cessation)

The **reverse cycle** demonstrates how to stop the cycle — how liberation (*nirvāṇa*) becomes possible. By **removing each condition**, the next cannot arise.
We begin at the end and work backward:

Present Results Cease

12. **If there is no birth**,
    then there is **no aging and death**, no sorrow, no lamentation, no suffering.
13. **If there is no becoming**,
    then there is **no new birth**.
14. **If there is no clinging**,
    then **becoming** has no fuel.
15. **If there is no craving**,
    there is nothing to cling to.
16. **If there is no feeling**,
    no craving arises.
17. **If there is no contact**,
    there is no feeling.
18. **If there are no six sense bases**,
    contact doesn't arise.
19. **If there is no name-and-form**,
    there are no faculties.
20. **If there is no consciousness**,
    name-and-form cannot develop.
21. **If there are no karmic formations**,
    there is no conditioned consciousness.
22. **If there is no ignorance**,
    no karmic volitions arise.
23. **Thus, with the cessation of ignorance, the entire wheel of suffering stops.**

III. How to Use This Understanding in Practice

1. Meditative Reflection

- Watch how your thoughts and emotions arise: identify feeling → craving → clinging → suffering.
- Use insight meditation to penetrate the links and dissolve their force.

2. Ethical Conduct and Karma

- Guard actions of body, speech, and mind to avoid creating harmful volitional formations.

3. Wisdom and Emptiness

- Realise that because all these links are dependently arisen, they are **empty of inherent existence**.
- As Nāgārjuna says:
  "That which is dependently arisen, we call empty."

4. Compassion

- Seeing that all beings are caught in this cycle, we generate compassion — the wish for all beings to be free from suffering.

IV. Summary Diagram (Causal Chain)

Forward (saṃsāric birth and suffering):

Ignorance → Karmic Formation → Consciousness → Name-and-Form → Six Senses → Contact → Feeling → Craving → Clinging → Becoming → Birth → Aging & Death

Reverse (liberation from saṃsāra):

No Ignorance → No Karmic Formation → No Consciousness→ No Name-and-Form → No Six Senses → No Contact → No Feeling → No Craving → No Clinging → No Becoming → No Birth → No Aging & Death

V. Final Thought

Dependent Arising is more than a philosophical theory. It is a profound tool for transformation. By understanding the **causal interdependence** of all things:

- We dismantle the illusion of a fixed self;
- We stop grasping at permanence and control;
- We begin to unravel the roots of suffering.

To see dependent arising is to see the Dharma.
To see the Dharma is to see the Buddha.
(*MN 28, Mahāhatthipadopama Sutta*)

Seals: Four Seals

The issue of distinguishing Buddhists from non-Buddhists existed in olden times as it does now. In ancient India, this was usually done on the basis of philosophical views regarding the nature of the self and phenomena. A convenient and concise way to delineate Buddhist views is according to the four seals as found in the *King of Concentration Sūtra.* People accepting the four seals are considered Buddhists by view, and those accepting the Three Jewels as their ultimate source of refuge are considered Buddhists by conduct. The **four seals** are:

(1) all conditioned phenomena are transient,
(2) all polluted phenomena are duḥkha (unsatisfactory) in nature,
(3) all phenomena are empty and selfless, and
(4) nirvāṇa is true peace.

See HHDL's Foundation of Buddhist Practice

Transitory Collections: View of the Transitory Collections

Definition

The "View of the Transitory Collections" (*satkayadristi* in Sanskrit) refers to a delusion about the nature of self. It is the false belief that the Five Aggregates (form, sensation, perception, mental formations, and consciousness) make up a single, enduring "I" or "self." This view leads individuals to attach to these aggregates as if they possessed an intrinsic, permanent self. However, each aggregate is understood to be impermanent and empty of inherent identity. Clinging to this erroneous view fuels attachment, aversion, and suffering within the cycle of saṃsāra.

Antidote: Study and Reflection on the Emptiness of Self

The primary antidote to the View of the Transitory Collections is the deep understanding of the emptiness of self. Practitioners must study and reflect on the teachings that dismantle the illusion of a permanent self by revealing the emptiness of the aggregates individually and as a whole. Recommended methods include:

1. **Study of the Emptiness of Self**: Reading foundational Buddhist texts on selflessness, such as Nagarjuna's *Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way*, clarifies the distinction between the aggregates and an imagined "self."
2. **Analytical Meditation on Selflessness**: Systematically analyse each aggregate, recognising that none hold a personal identity. This helps counter the tendency to identify these components as "me" or "mine."
3. **Reflection on Dependent Arising as it Relates to Self**: Through understanding how the aggregates arise in dependence upon various causes and conditions, one can see that they are empty of any self-essence.

Meditations to Overcome the View of the Transitory Collections

1. **Meditation on Non-Self**
   - Focus on each aggregate, examining its impermanent and dependent nature. Contemplate that *form* is transient, *sensation* shifts, *perception* is conditioned, *mental formations* are variable responses, and *consciousness* is momentary. This practice reveals that no aggregate contains a true "self."
   - Gradually, come to see that these aggregates, individually nor in combination, form an enduring "I." This lessens attachment to the concept of a fixed self.
2. **Contemplation on the Emptiness of Self**
   - Visualise the aggregates as processes without an independent self. Use analytical questioning to deepen this understanding, asking, "If a self exists, where is it within or beyond the aggregates?" This approach reveals that no inherent self exists among them, reducing the delusion of "me" and "mine."
3. **Dependent Arising in Relation to Self**
   - Reflect on how each aggregate depends on causes and conditions, thus possessing no inherent self. Seeing perception, sensation, and consciousness as momentary and contingent challenges the belief in an enduring "I."

Daily Life Practices for Eliminating the View of the Transitory Collections

1. **Consistent Mindfulness of Non-Self in All Activities**
   Throughout daily life, actively question and observe the sense of "I" that arises in thoughts, speech, and actions. Each time an attachment or aversion emerges, recognise it as a habitual reaction to the false belief in a solid self. Remind yourself that this "self" is only a construct based on changing aggregates. This vigilance is vital for weakening the hold of the self-concept and paving the way for spontaneous bodhichitta.
2. **Practice Compassion with Awareness of Emptiness**
   Approach others with compassion while recognising their emptiness of inherent self. When offering kindness or assistance, reflect that, just as there is no intrinsic "self" within you, others, too, are free from such a fixed self. This view diminishes attachment to the "I" as the doer of good and strengthens the wish for all beings, empty of self, to be free from suffering.
3. **Acts of Generosity Grounded in Selflessness**
   In acts of giving, consciously reflect on the emptiness of both giver and receiver. Allow the understanding of non-self to guide your generosity, using each opportunity to dismantle the illusion of a doer and receiver. This undermines the concept of self, cultivating an attitude of genuine altruism essential for bodhisattvas.
4. **Moment-to-Moment Reflection on Interdependence**
   Reflect on how your thoughts, feelings, and actions are contingent upon conditions and interconnections. By continuously examining this interdependence, you weaken the view of self as independent or solid. This habit supports the natural emergence of bodhichitta, as it lessens fixation on oneself and opens the mind to the interconnected welfare of others.

Conclusion

For those in the middle stage of the Buddhist path (aspiring to break completely from saṃsāra and awaken spontaneous bodhichitta) eliminating the concept of self is essential. This practice transforms the mind's habitual self-centredness, enabling the deep compassion and wisdom necessary to reach the stage of a bodhisattva. By diligently applying mindfulness, compassion, and generosity rooted in selflessness, practitioners lay the groundwork for bodhichitta to arise spontaneously, ultimately supporting the path toward enlightenment for the benefit of all beings.

Thirty-Seven Factors of Enlightenment vs. Thirty-Seven Practices of a Bodhisattva

Thirty-Seven Factors of Enlightenment (bodhipākṣikā dharmas)

- A classic list from the Buddhist sutras.
- Found in both the Śrāvakayāna and the Mahāyāna traditions.
- Represents the **structural supports** for attaining awakening: mindfulness, concentration, effort, wisdom, etc.

- Universally recognised across all Buddhist schools as the **systematic framework of practice**.

Grouped into Seven Sets:

1. Four Foundations of Mindfulness
2. Four Right Abandonments (or Efforts)
3. Four Bases of Miraculous Power
4. Five Faculties
5. Five Powers
6. Seven Factors of Enlightenment
7. Noble Eightfold Path

Thirty-Seven Practices of a Bodhisattva (Gyalse Thogme Zangpo, 14th c.)

- A Tibetan lojong (mind-training) text.
- Written as **37 verses of pith instructions** for everyday practice of a bodhisattva.
- Focuses on compassion, patience, giving up self-cherishing, transforming difficulties, and dedicating merit.
- Widely studied and memorised in Tibetan monasteries; often used as an entry text for bodhisattva conduct.

Themes of the Practices:

- Renunciation of worldly concerns
- Cultivating compassion for all beings
- Training in patience and generosity
- Seeing all phenomena as dream-like (emptiness)
- Turning adversity into the path
- Dedicating merit for the welfare of others

📊 Comparison Chart

Aspect	Thirty-Seven Factors of Enlightenment	Thirty-Seven Practices of a Bodhisattva
Origin	Early Buddhist sutras (shared by all traditions)	Tibetan lojong text by Gyalse Thogme Zangpo (14th c.)
Form	Seven sets of qualities/practices (systematic framework)	37 verses of pith instructions (practical guidelines)
Scope	Universal path structure: mindfulness, effort, concentration, wisdom	Specific to Mahāyāna bodhisattva training
Emphasis	Doctrinal: factors that support the attainment of awakening	Ethical & practical: how to live as a bodhisattva
Use	Common to Śrāvakayāna and Mahāyāna; studied as part of lamrim	Memorized and applied in daily conduct by Tibetan Buddhists
Focus	Balance of wisdom and method through systematic cultivation	Transforming every situation into the path of compassion

✅ Key Difference

- **Thirty-Seven Factors/Practices to Attain Enlightenment** = canonical framework from the sutras → structural “map” of enlightenment factors.

- **Thirty-Seven Practices of a Bodhisattva** = Tibetan lojong text → practical advice in verse for bodhisattva conduct.

They are **completely different lists** — one is doctrinal/systematic, the other is a standalone practice text.
MindMap

Summary
Although both lists contain thirty-seven points and aim at enlightenment, they are **not the same**. The *Thirty-Seven Factors* are an ancient framework of practice, common to all schools, mapping the qualities needed for awakening. The *Thirty-Seven Practices* are a Tibetan Mahāyāna lojong poem, offering concise instructions for how a bodhisattva should think, act, and train in everyday life.

Both are invaluable, but one is **structural and universal**, the other **practical and Mahāyāna-specific**.

Mind, Afflictions, and Their Antidotes

Afflictions, Kleshas (delusions), Mind and their Antidotes

In Buddhism, *delusions* (Sanskrit: *kleshas*) are mental states or afflictions that cloud our perception of reality, causing suffering and keeping us trapped in the cycle of *saṃsāra* (the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth). These delusions distort our understanding of ourselves, others, and the world around us, leading to negative emotions, unwholesome actions, and continued suffering.

Main Types of Afflictions

There are many afflictions in Buddhism, but the three root afflictions or "poisons" are considered the primary causes of all other afflictions:

1. **Ignorance (Delusion of Not Knowing)**
   - Ignorance is the fundamental misunderstanding of reality. It refers to our failure to perceive things as they truly are, particularly the truth of *impermanence*, *interdependence*, and *emptiness* (lack of inherent existence). It is the root cause of all other delusions because it gives rise to a false sense of self (ego-clinging or self-grasping). “Ignorance” is the grasping at intrinsic existence, the fundamental ignorance that is at the root of our unenlightened existence.
2. **Attachment (Desire or Craving)**
   - Attachment is the delusion that arises when we cling to things, people, or experiences, falsely believing that they can provide lasting happiness. It manifests as desire or craving and leads to suffering because what we cling to is impermanent and cannot provide lasting satisfaction. “I will be happy when I get that.”
3. **Aversion (Hatred or Anger)**
   - Aversion is the delusion that causes us to reject or push away things we dislike, whether they are experiences, people, or situations. It manifests as anger, hatred, or hostility, leading to suffering for ourselves and others.

Additional Delusions

While ignorance, attachment, and aversion are the primary delusions, many others stem from them. Some of the more common ones include:

4. **Pride (Ego or Arrogance)**
   - Pride is the delusion of an inflated sense of self-worth or superiority. It arises from ignorance of the true nature of the self and leads to showing off, selfishness, self-satisfaction, superiority, competition, jealousy, and isolation.
5. **Jealousy (Envy)**
   - Jealousy is the delusion of resentment or envy when others have what we desire (should have) or achieve something we covet. It leads to feelings of inferiority, discontent, and hostility toward others.
6. **Doubt**
   - Doubt is a delusion characterised by indecisiveness or lack of faith, particularly in the teachings of the Buddha and the path to enlightenment. It can prevent a person from fully committing to spiritual practice.

How Delusions Cause Suffering

Delusions distort our perception of reality, leading to:

- **Unwholesome actions**: Driven by ignorance, attachment, aversion, pride, jealousy & doubt we engage in actions that harm ourselves & others, creating negative karma.
- **Unhappiness**: Delusions create a constant state of dissatisfaction and mental agitation. Even when we get what we want, attachment causes us to fear losing it, (it soon turns out to be unsatisfying, leading to another round of craving) and aversion makes us suffer when things don't go our way.
- **Rebirth in Samsara**: Delusions perpetuate the cycle of *saṃsāra*, as they lead to karmic actions that result in continued rebirth and suffering.

The Path to Overcoming Delusions

Buddhism teaches that delusions can be overcome through wisdom, ethical conduct, and meditation.

- **Understand reality**: By gaining insight into the true nature of reality, particularly the concepts of *emptiness, non-intrinsic & interdependence*, we can eliminate ignorance.
- **Cultivate mindfulness and introspective alertness**: Meditation helps us recognise delusions as they arise, giving us the space to respond skilfully rather than react based on our afflictions. A constant off-cushion practice.
- **Develop compassion and wisdom**: These are antidotes to attachment, aversion, and ignorance. Bodhichitta (great compassion, seeking enlightenment for all sentient beings) helps us see beyond our deluded self-interest and aspire to help all beings.

By working to reduce and ultimately remove these delusions, one progresses on the path toward enlightenment, where the mind is free from all afflictions and suffering.

Afflictions: Six Root Afflictions

These six are called root afflictions because they are primary causes of cyclic existence and are the root or cause of the auxiliary afflictions. They are the basis for all distorted conceptions and emotional conflict. Sometimes the last root affliction, afflictive views, is subdivided to make ten afflictions.

1. ***Attachment (rāga)*** **arises based on projecting or exaggerating the attractiveness of an object within cyclic existence (people, things, ideas, places, and so forth). It wishes for, takes a strong interest in, and clings to that object.**
2. ***Anger (pratigha)*** **arises based on projecting or exaggerating the unattractive qualities of an object or person. It agitates the mind through being unable to bear or through wanting to harm that object or person. It arises in reference to someone who harms us, the suffering itself, or the cause of the harm.**
3. ***Arrogance (māna)*** **is based on the view of a personal identity that apprehends an inherently existent "I" or mine. It strongly grasps an inflated or superior image of ourselves.**
4. ***Ignorance (avidyā)*** **is a state of unknowing brought about by the mind being unclear about the nature of things such as the four truths of the**

āryas, karma and its results, and the Three Jewels. This definition is held in common by all Buddhist tenet systems, although each system has its own unique way of defining ignorance. This will be discussed in depth later.

5. ***Deluded doubt (vicikitsā)*** **is indecisive wavering that tends toward an incorrect conclusion about important points such as karma and its results, the four truths, and the Three Jewels.**
6. ***Afflictive views (dṛṣṭi)*** **are either an afflictive intelligence (corrupt understanding) that regards the aggregates as being inherently "I" or mine or, in direct dependence on such a view, an afflictive intelligence that develops further mistaken conceptions.**
   a. **The *view of a personal identity* (*satkāyadṛṣṭi*) is an afflictive intelligence that, when referring to the conventional "I" or mine, grasps it to be either inherently "I" or mine. It is called "intelligence" in the sense that it analyses something.[12] It is the root of saṃsāra and acts as the basis for all afflictions.**
   b. **The *view of extremes* (*antagrāhadṛṣṭi*) is an afflictive intelligence that, when referring to the "I" or mine grasped by the view of a personal identity, regards them in an absolutist or nihilistic fashion. It prevents us from finding the view of the middle way free from extremes.**
   c. **The *view holding wrong views as supreme* (*dṛṣṭiparāmarśa*) is an afflictive intelligence that regards other afflictive views as the best views. It increases our attachment to other afflictive views.**
   d. **The *view of rules and practices* (*śīlavrataparāmarśa*) is an afflictive intelligence that believes purification of mental defilements occurs by engaging in ascetic practices, inferior codes of ethical conduct, and mistaken practices that are inspired by wrong views.[13] It is the basis for wasting time on incorrect modes of practice that do not lead to our spiritual goals.**
   e. ***Wrong views* (*mithyādṛṣṭi*) is an afflictive intelligence that denies the existence of something that in fact exists (or example, karma and its effects, past and future lives, and the Three Jewels) or that believes a divine creator or primal substance to be the cause of sentient beings. It functions to prevent us from engaging in virtue and to lead us to create non-virtue.**

Twenty Auxiliary Afflictions

The twenty auxiliary afflictions are branches of the root afflictions and similarly disturb the mind. They are: **wrath, resentment, spite, jealousy, cruelty, miserliness, haughtiness, restlessness, concealment, lethargy,**

[12] "View of a personal identity" is also translated as "view of the transitory collection" or "view of the perishing aggregates, " which are more literal translations of the Tibetan term. Here "aggregates" and "collection" refer to the five psychophysical aggregates. They are perishing and transitory because they change in each moment. According to the lower schools, the aggregates are the observed object of the view of a personal identity, whereas according to the Prāsaṅgikas, the aggregates are the basis of designation of the "I", and the mere "I" is the observed object of the view of a personal identity. The lower schools say the view of a personal identity grasps the person to be self-sufficient and substantially existent.

[13] Translators from Pāli often translate this term as "view of rules and rites" and explain it as meaning dogmatic clinging to ethical precepts and religious observances.

laziness, lack of faith, forgetfulness, non-introspective awareness, pretension, deceit, lack of integrity, inconsideration for others, heedlessness, and distraction.

Ignorance (Avidyā) and Wisdom (Prajñā)

Ignorance is the fundamental affliction and the root of saṃsāra. It is the blindness that obscures reality and misapprehends persons and phenomena as existing inherently — solid, independent, and self-sufficient. In this way, ignorance projects a false appearance of permanence and autonomy, concealing the truth of dependent origination. From this basic distortion arise all other afflictions: attachment, anger, pride, jealousy, doubt, and the unending stream of karmic actions that bind beings to cyclic existence.

Ignorance functions in several modes. It can be simple unawareness, such as not knowing the Four Noble Truths. It can be distorted ignorance, actively believing in false ideas — for example, thinking the self is permanent or worldly pleasures are ultimate. There is innate ignorance, the instinctive clinging to "I" and "mine" carried over from beginningless time. There is also philosophical ignorance, learned and reinforced by systems that deny karma, rebirth, or emptiness. However it manifests, ignorance perpetuates suffering by concealing emptiness and falsifying reality.

The direct antidote to ignorance is wisdom. Wisdom (prajñā) is the penetrating awareness that realises selflessness and emptiness. Where ignorance grasps at inherent existence, wisdom reveals that all things arise dependently, conditioned by causes and conditions, and therefore lack any essence of their own. Wisdom develops progressively: first through conceptual understanding using analysis and reasoning; then through stabilisation in meditation; and finally through direct, non-conceptual realisation of emptiness on the path of seeing. Only this direct wisdom cuts the root of saṃsāra.

In practice, the remedies for ignorance are many. Study and reflection on Madhyamaka reasoning undermines false views. Analytical meditation investigates the nature of self and phenomena. Contemplation on dependent origination brings conviction that emptiness and causality are inseparable. Mindfulness in daily life helps catch the instinctive tendency to reify experiences. The union of calm abiding (śamatha) and special insight (vipaśyanā) produces the stable, penetrating wisdom needed to uproot ignorance.

Thus, ignorance and wisdom stand as opposites: ignorance conceals, distorts, and binds; wisdom uncovers, corrects, and liberates. The journey from saṃsāra to liberation is nothing other than the gradual displacement of ignorance by wisdom.

1. Definition of Ignorance

- **Ignorance (avidyā)** is the fundamental misunderstanding of reality.
- In the Buddhist context, it refers specifically to the **misapprehension of persons and phenomena as existing inherently**, i.e., as independent, solid, and self-sufficient.
- It is the **root affliction**: from ignorance arise attachment, aversion, pride, jealousy, and all karmic actions.
- Tsongkhapa identifies ignorance as **grasping at inherent existence** (*svabhāva-grāha*), the view that things exist from their own side.

2. Modes of Ignorance

- **Obscuring ignorance**: simple unawareness, lack of knowledge (e.g. not knowing the Four Noble Truths).**Distorted ignorance**: active misapprehension (e.g. believing the self is permanent, believing saṃsāra can bring lasting happiness).
- I**nnate ignorance**: natural, instinctive clinging to "I" and "mine."
- **Philosophical ignorance**: learned through mistaken systems that reinforce self-grasping (e.g. eternalist or nihilist views).

3. Function and Consequences

- Ignorance **binds beings to saṃsāra**: it distorts perception and produces karma.
- It **conceals the nature of emptiness** and projects solidity and autonomy onto what is dependent and conditioned.
- As long as ignorance is active, samsaric rebirth continues.

4. Antidote: Wisdom

- **Wisdom (prajñā)** is the direct antidote to ignorance.
- It is defined as the mind that realises **selflessness (anātman)** and **emptiness (śūnyatā)**.
- Wisdom corrects the false superimposition created by ignorance by recognizing that all phenomena arise dependently (*pratītyasamutpāda*) and lack inherent existence.

Levels of Wisdom

- **Conceptual wisdom**: reasoning analysis leading to inferential understanding of emptiness.
- **Meditative wisdom**: stabilising this understanding in meditation, leading to certainty.
- **Direct wisdom**: non-conceptual realization of emptiness (on the path of seeing), which cuts the root of saṃsāra.

5. Practical Remedies

- **Study and reflection** on Madhyamaka reasoning (e.g. Nāgārjuna's refutation of intrinsic nature).
- **Analytical meditation**: investigate whether the "self" exists as one with the aggregates, or separate from them.
- **Cultivation of dependent origination**: train to see everything as arising in dependence on causes and conditions.
- **Mindfulness in daily life**: catch the instinctive "solidifying" tendency — e.g., when anger arises, notice how the mind makes the object seem absolutely bad or fixed.
- **Union of śamatha and vipaśyanā**: a calm mind, stabilised by concentration, applied to subtle analysis, produces penetrating wisdom.

Wrong Views (Mithyā-dṛṣṭi)

Wrong views are hardened distortions of ignorance. They are among the six root afflictions and are especially dangerous, because they block the very entrance to the path. Whereas ignorance can be a vague not-knowing, wrong views are actively held misconceptions — ideas that deny karma, rebirth, liberation, or the very possibility of enlightenment. In this way, wrong views not only mislead the mind but also justify

harmful actions, cut the basis of ethical conduct, and undermine faith in the Three Jewels.

There are many forms of wrong view. Some deny cause and effect, claiming actions have no consequences. Eternalist views grasp at a permanent, unchanging soul or self. Nihilist views deny rebirth, karma, or the possibility of liberation. Other wrong views mistake non-virtue for virtue, elevating harmful practices as though they were paths to freedom. The most extreme deny the existence of past and future lives, enlightenment, or the Three Jewels altogether. These views are particularly destructive because they uproot the very motivation to practice Dharma.

The antidote to wrong views is right view. This begins with confidence in karma and the Three Jewels, but matures into analytical insight into dependent origination and emptiness. Faith and study provide provisional remedies, while reasoning and debate correct subtle distortions. Contemplation on karma reaffirms moral responsibility. Meditation on impermanence undermines eternalist clinging; contemplation on dependent origination dismantles nihilist denial. Association with qualified teachers ensures proper guidance, while vigilance against rigidity and sectarianism helps prevent new wrong views from forming.

In this way, wrong views are more than simple errors: they are powerful obstacles that bar the door to the path. But when challenged by reasoning, reflection, and authentic Dharma, they can be transformed into stepping-stones toward right view. By establishing right view, the practitioner strengthens faith, stabilises ethical conduct, and lays the foundation for the wisdom that leads to liberation.

1. Definition

- Wrong views are **distorted conceptual outlooks** that deny or misconstrue the truth of karma, rebirth, liberation, or the nature of reality.
- Tsongkhapa classifies them under the six root afflictions, arising from ignorance but taking the specific form of a hardened belief.

2. Types of Wrong Views

1. **Denial of cause and effect (karma)**: believing actions have no consequences, or that results are random.
2. **Eternalism**: believing in a permanent, unchanging self or soul.
3. **Nihilism**: denying rebirth, denying moral causality, or denying the possibility of liberation.
4. **Misapprehension of path**: regarding non-virtue as virtue, or harmful practices as the way to liberation.
5. **Extreme wrong view**: rejecting the existence of past and future lives, the possibility of enlightenment, or the validity of the Three Jewels.

3. Function and Consequences

- Wrong views are considered the **most dangerous afflictions** because they **block the very entrance to the path**.
- Unlike ordinary attachment or anger, which may still leave room for moral restraint, wrong views can **justify harmful actions** and cut the basis of practice.
- They distort faith, undermine ethics, and obstruct the development of wisdom.

4. Antidote: Right View (Samyag-dṛṣṭi)

- The antidote to wrong views is cultivating **right view** through correct reasoning and reliance on authentic sources.
- **Faith in the Three Jewels** and confidence in the law of cause and effect are the provisional antidotes.
- **Analytical reasoning and study** of the Middle Way teachings uproot deeply held wrong views.
- **Association with qualified teachers** provides corrective influence.

5. Practical Remedies

- **Contemplation on karma**: reflect daily on how specific actions yield specific results.
- **Meditation on impermanence**: undermines eternalist clinging.
- **Reflection on dependent origination**: undermines nihilist denial of causality.
- **Debate and reasoning practice**: Tibetan monastic method trains students to uproot wrong views by logical consequence.
- **Guarding against sectarianism or rigidity**: remembering that wrong views often arise from clinging to partial truths.

Mind: Self-cherishing Mind

The **self-cherishing mind** is considered one of the most significant obstacles to spiritual growth and is the root of suffering. The self-cherishing mind is essentially the habit of prioritising one's own needs, desires, and well-being over others'. It creates a strong sense of ego and attachment to the self, leading to suffering, negative emotions, and harmful actions. This inner enemy reinforces the delusion of a separate, permanent self and perpetuates the cycle of saṃsāra (the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth).

What is the Self-Cherishing Mind?

The self-cherishing mind is the mindset that constantly thinks, "I am more important than others." It drives selfishness, competition, jealousy, pride, anger, and attachment. According to the Mahayana teachings, this mind is the main cause of all suffering because it leads to:

- **Craving**: Constantly seeking pleasure for oneself.
- **Aversion**: Avoiding anything that causes discomfort or inconvenience.
- **Delusion**: Believing that one's own happiness is separate from the happiness of others.

The self-cherishing mind can manifest in both subtle and overt ways. For example, we might feel envy when others succeed, frustration when we don't get what we want, or hurt when someone criticises us. These are all expressions of self-cherishing, which causes us to react to situations with negativity and keeps us trapped in the ego's grip.

Why is the Self-Cherishing Mind an Enemy?

In Mahayana Buddhism, the self-cherishing mind is described as the "inner enemy" because it stands in direct opposition to bodhichitta; the mind of awakening, which is motivated by compassion for all beings.

The self-cherishing mind:

- **Blocks Compassion**: When we focus on our own needs, we neglect the suffering of others and are less likely to act compassionately.
- **Reinforces the Ego**: It strengthens our attachment to the concept of an independent, unchanging self, which is a delusion.
- **Causes Suffering**: By constantly seeking our own pleasure and avoiding discomfort, we create attachment, which inevitably leads to suffering when things don't go as we wish.
- **Hinders Enlightenment**: Enlightenment, or Buddhahood, arises from wisdom and compassion. The self-cherishing mind keeps us bound to saṃsāra and obstructs the development of these qualities.

Recommended Meditations to Overcome the Self-Cherishing Mind

The antidote to the self-cherishing mind is the cultivation of **bodhichitta** (the altruistic intention to achieve enlightenment for the benefit of all beings) and the realisation of **emptiness** (understanding that the self does not exist as a separate, permanent entity). Here are several powerful meditations to help overcome the self-cherishing mind:

1. Equalising Self and Others

This meditation helps you to see that all beings, including yourself, have the same wish for happiness and the same wish to avoid suffering.

- Sit quietly and think about how, just like you, all beings want to be happy and free from suffering.
- Visualise someone you care about and reflect on their wish for happiness.
- Now, visualise someone you have difficulty with and remind yourself that they too want to be happy and free from suffering.
- Finally, imagine all beings, including strangers, and cultivate the same feeling toward them, equalising your concern for yourself and others.

2. Exchanging Self with Others

This is a more advanced practice often taught in the context of **lojong** (mind-training). It reverses the ordinary self-cherishing attitude by imagining what it would be like to take on the happiness and suffering of others.

- Start by meditating on compassion for yourself, recognising that your suffering is painful and that you wish to be free from it.
- Then extend that compassion to others, imagining that you are taking on their suffering and giving them your happiness in return.
- You can use a visualisation where, as you breathe in, you absorb the suffering of others, and as you breathe out, you send them love, compassion, and peace. **(Tonglen)**
- This meditation helps weaken the habitual self-centred thinking and strengthens empathy and concern for others.

3. Tonglen (Taking and Giving Meditation)

Tonglen is a powerful meditation where you visualise taking in the suffering of others and giving out happiness and positive qualities.

- Visualise someone who is suffering and as you inhale, imagine drawing their suffering into yourself in the form of black smoke, dissolving your self-cherishing mind.
- As you exhale, imagine sending them happiness, well-being, and peace in the form of bright, radiant light.
- Expand this practice to include first all people you know, then all individuals and then all sentient beings. By doing this, you cultivate compassion and weaken the grasp of the self-cherishing mind.

4. Meditation on Emptiness

Realising the emptiness of the self is crucial to overcoming the self-cherishing mind.

- Meditate on how the sense of "I" is just a label and doesn't exist inherently.
- Analyse how this "I" that you cherish so much is dependent on causes and conditions, and is constantly changing.
- Reflect on the interdependent nature of all phenomena, which will help weaken the illusion of a solid, separate self.

Daily Life Activities to Weaken the Self-Cherishing Mind

In addition to meditation, here are practical activities you can incorporate into daily life to destroy the self-cherishing mind: [Note: any self-cherishing in your motivation destroys any virtue.]

1. Acts of Generosity

Engage in selfless giving without expecting anything in return. Whether it's giving your time, resources, or even a smile, these acts help weaken attachment to self. Generosity directly opposes the self-cherishing mind because it trains you to put the needs of others first. [See note above.]

2. Mindful Speech and Listening

Practice speaking with kindness and listening deeply to others. Often, self-cherishing manifests in wanting to be heard or wanting to win an argument. Instead, focus on truly understanding others' perspectives without immediately trying to inject your own opinions or experiences.

3. Taking on Tasks that Benefit Others

In group settings or at home, consciously choose to do tasks that benefit others rather than prioritising your own comfort. For example, if you're doing household chores, think about how it helps your family, not just yourself. [See note above.]

4. Rejoicing in Others' Success

When you notice envy or jealousy arising because of someone else's success, deliberately practice rejoicing in their happiness. This helps counter the competitive, self-centred mind.

5. Patience with Difficult People

When faced with difficult people or situations, instead of reacting with anger or frustration, view them as teachers who are showing you where your self-cherishing mind is still strong. Practicing patience helps weaken the ego's need for control and superiority. [See note above.]

6. Dedication of Merits

At the end of any positive action or meditation, dedicate the merits (positive energy) for the benefit of all sentient beings rather than keeping them for yourself. This practice helps loosen the tight grip of self-cherishing and expands your mind to include the welfare of others. [See note above.]

Conclusion

The self-cherishing mind is the root of much of our suffering and stands in the way of developing true compassion and wisdom. Through meditations like **equalising and exchanging self with others**, **tonglen**, and the realisation of **emptiness**, as well as daily activities like acts of generosity, mindful speech, and patience, we can gradually dismantle this inner enemy. By shifting our focus from self-centredness to altruism, we move closer to enlightenment and the ultimate cessation of suffering.

Enemies: Inner Enemies

The term *inner enemies* usually refers to the afflictive mental states (*kleshas*, sometimes translated as "poisons") that disturb the mind and create suffering. Unlike outer enemies, who may harm our body or possessions, inner enemies undermine our happiness, obstruct wisdom, and perpetuate saṃsāra. Traditionally, the main ones are **ignorance, attachment, and anger**, but many related forms (such as pride, jealousy, selfishness, and laziness) are seen as their branches.

1. What Are Inner Enemies?

- **Definition**: Inner enemies are mental states that enslave us, distort perception, and compel unwholesome actions. They are "enemies" because they rob us of freedom, peace, and compassion.
- **Why they are worse than outer enemies**: Outer enemies can harm us only temporarily. Inner enemies follow us across lifetimes, ensuring continued dissatisfaction and rebirth.

2. Recognising Inner Enemies

- **Selfishness/self-centredness**: The habit of prioritising "me and mine" at the expense of others. It manifests as defensiveness, entitlement, or indifference to others' welfare.
- **Anger/aversion**: Harsh speech, irritation, resentment, the urge to hurt or punish.
- **Ignorance/delusion**: Clinging to things as if they existed independently and permanently; mistaking the impermanent for permanent, the painful for pleasant, the selfless for a self.
- **Pride**: Inflated sense of self, superiority, or unwillingness to learn.
- **Attachment/craving**: Insatiable grasping at people, possessions, praise, or identity.
- **Jealousy/envy**: Resentment at others' success; competitiveness that poisons joy.

- **Laziness/spiritual sloth**: Putting off practice, dullness of mind, or being drawn away by distractions.

A **practical recognitio**n method is to ask throughout the day: *"What is my mind doing right now? Is this thought cultivating harmony, or tightening the grip of 'me'?"*

3. Antidotes

The Buddha taught that every affliction has a direct antidote:

- **Selfishness** ⟶ *Bodhichitta* (altruistic intention to benefit all beings).
- **Anger** ⟶ *Patience and compassion* (seeing the other as suffering too).
- **Ignorance** ⟶ *Wisdom* (especially the insight into emptiness) The action, actor, & object of the action are like an illusion, a dream: just a combination of causes and conditions.
- **Pride** ⟶ *Humility and rejoicing in others' virtues*.
- **Attachment** ⟶ *Mindfulness of impermanence* (all things change; grasping is futile).
- **Jealousy** ⟶ *Mudita* (rejoicing in others' success/happiness).
- **Laziness** ⟶ *Diligence* (reflecting on death, precious human life, and opportunity).

4. Practical Solutions in Daily Life

- **Mind training (lojong)**: Transform difficult situations into practice. For example, if insulted, view it as a chance to practice patience rather than fuel resentment.
- **Pausing**: When a strong affliction arises, pause and breathe. Create a gap before reacting. Ask: *"Will this thought bring benefit if I follow it?" :Will it help the situation and others"*
- **Journaling triggers**: Record when anger, pride, or jealousy arose. Over time, patterns emerge, showing where vigilance is needed.
- **Reframing others**: See people not as enemies but as teachers. Those who challenge us reveal our weak spots.

5. Meditations

1. **Analytical meditation**: Choose one affliction, e.g. anger. Reflect: What does it feel like? How do I behave under its influence? What harm has it caused? Then meditate on its antidote, e.g. patience.
2. **Tonglen (giving and taking)**: On the in-breath, imagine taking others' suffering (including their afflictions). On the out-breath, offer love, patience, clarity. This directly counteracts self-cherishing.
3. **Emptiness meditation**: Examine the angry "I." Where is it? In body, mind, feelings? Analysis reveals no solid, permanent self; just a collection of causes and conditions. When the "enemy-I" is seen as empty, afflictions loosen.
4. **Four immeasurables**: Loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, equanimity. These four attitudes directly weaken selfishness, jealousy, and anger.

6. A Suggested Daily Practice

- **Morning**: Set intention: "Today, may I guard my mind as my most precious possession."
- **Daytime**: Use *mindfulness bells* (phone reminders, pauses at meals) to check: "Am I under the influence of an inner enemy right now?"
- **Evening**: Review the day. Rejoice in moments of virtue; regret harmful actions without guilt; resolve to do better tomorrow.

- **Formal meditation**: Alternate between cultivating bodhichitta, practicing patience, and probing the nature of self.

7. The Deeper View

Śāntideva in *The Way of the Bodhisattva* famously says that outer enemies are limited—they die or leave us. But inner enemies return endlessly until uprooted. To conquer them is the greatest heroism. In Vajrayana imagery, deities are often depicted subduing demons; these demons are none other than our own anger, pride, and grasping, transformed into wisdom.

Obscurations

Obscurations refer to mental and emotional hindrances that cloud the mind, preventing the realisation of ultimate truth and obstructing one's spiritual progress. There are two main types of obscurations:

1. Obscurations of Afflictions (Klesha Obscurations)

These are the emotional and mental defilements or afflictive emotions (*kleshas*) that disturb the mind and fuel suffering. Common examples include:

- **Desire** (attachment or craving)
- **Hatred** (anger or aversion)
- **Ignorance** (delusion, particularly about the nature of reality)
- **Pride** (ego-clinging or arrogance)
- **Jealousy** (envy)

These obscurations lead to negative actions and reinforce the cycle of *saṃsāra* (the cycle of suffering and rebirth). By cultivating wisdom, ethical conduct, and mental discipline, these obscurations can be purified.

2. Obscurations of Knowledge (Cognitive Obscurations)

These obscurations are subtler and relate to ignorance of the true nature of reality. Even after overcoming gross afflictions, these obscurations prevent one from realising the nature of phenomena as they truly are ie, their emptiness (*shunyata*) or lack of inherent existence. Cognitive obscurations include:

- **Dualistic perception** (the tendency to see things as separate and independent, rather than interdependent and empty of intrinsic self)
- **Conceptual grasping** (clinging to ideas or intellectual understanding, which prevents direct realisation)

These obscurations are more challenging to remove and require deep meditation on emptiness and interdependence. Removing cognitive obscurations is key to achieving Buddhahood or complete enlightenment.

Other Obscurations:

In some teachings, especially Mahayana and Vajrayana, additional obscurations are mentioned, such as:

- **Obscurations of habitual tendencies**: deeply ingrained karmic habits that continue to cloud the mind even after significant progress has been made.
- **Obscurations of subtle duality**: lingering, subtle distinctions between subject and object in advanced meditative states.

Path to Purifying Obscurations

The primary tools to remove obscurations are the *Three Higher Trainings;* ethical discipline, concentration (meditative stability), and wisdom (insight into the nature of reality). Practices such as meditation, ethical conduct, lojong (mind training), and cultivating *Bodhichitta* (the mind of awakening) are crucial for overcoming these obscurations.

Overcoming Delusions

To overcome delusions in Buddhism, various practices are employed to cultivate insight, mindfulness, and ethical conduct. Here are key methods to eliminate the root delusions of ignorance, attachment, and aversion, along with specific practices aimed at addressing each:

1. Overcoming Ignorance

Ignorance is considered the root of all delusions, and it refers to our mistaken understanding of the nature of reality and self. To overcome it, we must develop *wisdom* through the following practices:

a. Study and Reflection on the Dharma (Scriptural Study)

- **Method**: Engage in the study of Buddhist teachings, particularly the concepts of *impermanence*, *emptiness* (*shunyata*), and *interdependence*.
- **Purpose**: By reflecting deeply on these teachings, we counteract ignorance by understanding that all things are impermanent, lack inherent existence, and arise due to causes and conditions.
- **Practice**: Read texts like *The Heart Sutra*, *Nagarjuna's Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way*, or commentaries on *emptiness*. Reflect on these teachings until their truth becomes clear in your mind.

b. Vipassana (Insight Meditation)

- **Method**: Engage in *Vipassana* meditation, a practice of insight that leads to a direct realisation of the nature of reality.
- **Purpose**: Through sustained observation of your mind, thoughts, and feelings, you see their impermanent, non-self nature. This helps dissolve ignorance and leads to wisdom.
- **Practice**: Meditate on the nature of thoughts, emotions, and experiences as arising and passing phenomena without clinging to them. Eventually, this reveals their empty, non-substantial nature.

c. Analytical Meditation

- **Method**: Engage in a structured meditation where you examine concepts such as impermanence or selflessness.
- **Purpose**: Analytical meditation allows you to use reasoning to break down false views. For example, you might contemplate how the self is not a permanent, independent entity but instead a composite of changing factors.
- **Practice**: Analyse questions "What is the self?" and "Where is it?" while meditating, recognising that the self cannot be found as an independent entity, thus loosening the grip of ego-clinging.

2. Overcoming Attachment

Attachment or craving is the tendency to cling to things, people, or experiences, falsely believing they can bring lasting happiness. To counter this delusion, one cultivates detachment and generosity.

a. Mindfulness of Impermanence

- **Method**: Practice mindfulness of impermanence, observing that all things change and that clinging to them causes suffering.
- **Purpose**: When you see clearly that everything is subject to change (relationships, possessions, and even your body) attachment loses its hold because you no longer believe that clinging to impermanent things will lead to lasting happiness.
- **Practice**: Meditate on the impermanence of everything around you. Consider how objects of attachment (like possessions or relationships) are not stable and will eventually change or fade.

b. Meditation on Death and Impermanence

- **Method**: Contemplate your own mortality and the fleeting nature of life.
- **Purpose**: This reduces attachment by reminding you that worldly concerns (status, wealth, and pleasure) are temporary and cannot provide real security or happiness.
- **Practice**: Reflect on the certainty of death and the uncertainty of its timing. This practice, far from being morbid, helps you detach from trivial concerns and focus on what truly matters.

c. Generosity and Letting Go

- **Method**: Practice generosity, the deliberate act of giving up material possessions, time, or energy for the benefit of others.
- **Purpose**: Generosity counters attachment by encouraging you to let go and appreciate the joy of giving. It cultivates a mindset of abundance and non-attachment.
- **Practice**: Engage in acts of giving, whether material or emotional. Let go of something you're attached to and observe the sense of freedom it brings.

3. Overcoming Aversion

Aversion or anger is the mind’s tendency to push away or reject things we don’t like. To overcome it, practices are centred on cultivating patience and compassion.

a. Loving-Kindness Meditation (Metta)

- **Method**: Practice *Metta* meditation, in which you cultivate unconditional love and kindness for yourself and others.
- **Purpose**: Loving-kindness directly counteracts aversion and anger by generating positive, warm feelings toward others, including those you find difficult to love.
- **Practice**: Begin by wishing yourself well, then extend that wish to loved ones, acquaintances, and eventually to difficult people and all beings: "May you be well and happy. May you be free from suffering. May you be peaceful and at ease."

b. Patience and Tolerance

- **Method**: Cultivate patience through mindfulness, especially when dealing with challenging situations or people.
- **Purpose**: Patience neutralises anger by allowing you to pause, reflect, and respond skilfully rather than reacting in anger. It helps you see difficult situations as opportunities for growth.
- **Practice**: When feeling anger or frustration, practice pausing and observing the feeling without acting on it. Reflect on how anger harms both you and others and how patience leads to peace.

c. Tonglen (Giving and Taking Meditation)

- **Method**: Practice *Tonglen*, a meditation where you mentally take on the suffering of others and give them your happiness and well-being.
- **Purpose**: This counteracts aversion by developing compassion and empathy for others, even those you perceive as adversaries.
- **Practice**: Visualise taking in others' suffering with each in-breath and sending out your love and happiness with each out-breath. This shifts your focus from self-centredness to a compassionate concern for others.

4. Overcoming Pride

Pride or arrogance arises when we have an inflated sense of self-worth. It can be diminished through humility and a realistic understanding of ourselves.

a. Meditation on Interdependence

- **Method**: Reflect on the interdependence of all things, including how your abilities, achievements, and well-being depend on others.
- **Purpose**: This meditation undermines pride by showing that no one is truly independent; our lives and successes are the result of many causes and conditions, not just our personal effort.
- **Practice**: Contemplate how your education, skills, and even your survival are interconnected with others, from teachers and parents, doctors and peacekeepers (police, magistrates) to the farmers who grow your food. This cultivates humility.

b. Service to Others

- **Method**: Engage in selfless acts of service, especially in ways that don't seek recognition or reward.
- **Purpose**: Humility is fostered by placing others' needs before your own, thereby reducing the ego's grip and challenging pride.
- **Practice**: Volunteer your time, energy, or resources to help others without expecting any acknowledgment or praise.

5. Overcoming Jealousy

Jealousy is the feeling of envy when others possess something desirable or have been successful, or achieved something. To overcome it, we cultivate *mudita*, or sympathetic joy.

a. Sympathetic Joy (Mudita)

- **Method**: Practice *Mudita*, which is the joy in others' happiness and success.
- **Purpose**: This practice directly opposes jealousy by encouraging you to feel genuine happiness for others' good fortune, rather than resenting it.
- **Practice**: When someone achieves something you desire, mentally rejoice in their success. Repeat to yourself, "May their happiness continue. May they be blessed with even more success."

Conclusion

Overcoming delusions is a gradual process that involves a combination of meditation, ethical conduct, and wisdom. As one progresses on the path, delusions weaken, and the mind becomes clearer, more compassionate, and ultimately liberated. Each delusion has

specific antidotes, but mindfulness, wisdom, and compassion are overarching tools that dismantle all delusions.

Daily Practice to Overcome Delusions

Here's a suggested daily practice to incorporate methods for overcoming delusions such as ignorance, attachment, aversion, pride, and jealousy. This routine is designed to be practical and adaptable based on your time and experience level:

Morning Practice: Setting the Intention

1. **Refuge and Bodhichitta Prayer (5-10 minutes)**
   - Begin your day by reciting the *Refuge and Bodhichitta Prayer* to set your intention for the day. This will remind you to take refuge in the Three Jewels (Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha) and cultivate the wish to attain enlightenment for the benefit of all beings.
   - "I take refuge until I am enlightened
     in the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha.
     By my practice generosity and other perfections,
     May I become a Buddha for the benefit of all sentient beings."
2. **Set an Intention for the Day (2-3 minutes)**
   - Before starting your day, mentally set an intention to work on a specific delusion. For example:
     - If you struggle with anger, you might say, "Today, I will practice patience and be mindful of my reactions."
     - If attachment is an issue, you can say, "Today, I will practice letting go of things that I desire."
     - If jealousy arises, say, "Today, I will rejoice in the success and happiness of others."

Midday Practice: Mindfulness of Delusions

3. **Mindfulness Meditation (10-15 minutes)**
   - Sit quietly and practice mindfulness meditation to observe your thoughts and feelings without judgment. Focus on watching how delusions such as attachment, anger, pride, or jealousy arise in your mind.
   - When a delusion arises, acknowledge it and observe its effects on your mind and body. Don't engage with it or suppress it; just notice it and return to the breath.
   - This practice builds awareness of your mental patterns, helping you catch delusions as they form.
4. **Quick Check-in Throughout the Day (1-2 minutes each)**
   - At various points in the day (morning, afternoon, and evening), take a short pause to check in with yourself. You can ask yourself:
     - "Am I feeling attached to anything?"
     - "Is there anger or irritation present in my mind?"
     - "Am I feeling jealous of someone?"

- Acknowledge whatever emotions or delusions are present, and apply antidotes if needed. For example, if you notice jealousy, silently practice *Mudita* by wishing the person happiness.

Afternoon Practice: Analytical Meditation and Reflection

5. **Analytical Meditation (10-15 minutes)**
   - Choose a specific delusion (e.g., attachment, aversion, or pride) to work on each week. Each day, spend time doing *analytical meditation* where you reflect on the nature of that delusion.
     - For attachment: Contemplate the impermanence of the things you are attached to. Ask yourself, "Will this bring lasting happiness?"
     - For anger: Reflect on the harmful effects of anger and the benefits of patience. How has anger hurt you and others in the past?
     - For pride: Meditate on the interdependent nature of all things, realising that your successes are due to countless factors, not just your effort.
   - Allow insights to arise naturally as you contemplate. This will gradually weaken the grip of delusions.
6. **Compassion Practice: Tonglen Meditation (5-10 minutes)**
   - Practice *Tonglen*, where you breathe in the suffering of others and breathe out happiness and well-being. Focus on sending compassion to people you may have anger or aversion toward, as well as those who are struggling with delusions.
   - Example: If you feel resentment toward someone, visualise breathing in their suffering (symbolising their pain and delusions) and breathing out peace and kindness toward them.

Evening Practice: Reflection and Dedication

7. **Evening Reflection (5-10 minutes)**
   - Before bed, reflect on your day. Ask yourself:
     - "Did delusions arise today? What were they?"
     - "How did I respond to attachment, anger, or jealousy?"
     - "Was I able to apply the antidotes?"
   - Rejoice in your progress and also note any areas for improvement. Be kind to yourself; this is a gradual path.
8. **Dedication of Merit (2-3 minutes)**
   - Dedicate the merit you've accumulated from your practice to all sentient beings. This helps cultivate *Bodhichitta* and solidifies your intention to use your spiritual progress for the benefit of others.
   - You can say:"By this merit, may all beings attain the happiness of enlightenment. May all obstacles and suffering be cleared away, and may all beings be free from delusions."

Weekly Practice: Intensive Compassion and Wisdom

9. **Loving-Kindness Meditation (Metta) (15-20 minutes)**
   - At least once a week, do a longer session of *Metta* (loving-kindness) meditation, where you focus on sending unconditional love and kindness to all beings.

- Start with yourself, then gradually expand to loved ones, acquaintances, difficult people, and all sentient beings. Repeat phrases such as:"May I be happy. May I be free from suffering. May I be peaceful and at ease.
  May [?] be happy. May they be free from suffering. May they be peaceful & at ease."

10. Study of the Dharma (15-20 minutes)

- Set aside time weekly to study Buddhist texts , commentaries and teachings. Focus on subjects like *emptiness*, *impermanence*, *dependent origination*, and commentaries on the antidotes to delusions. Understanding these teachings deepens your wisdom and ability to overcome delusions.
- Recommended texts include:
  - *The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching* by Thich Nhat Hanh (a general introduction)
  - *The Four Noble Truths* by H.H. the Dalai Lama
  - *The Way of the Bodhisattva* by Shantideva

Summary of the Daily Practice:

- **Morning**: Recite Refuge and Bodhichitta Prayer, set an intention for the day.
- **Midday**: Practice mindfulness meditation & periodically check your emotions.
- **Afternoon**: Engage in analytical meditation on specific delusions & practice *Tonglen*.
- **Evening**: Reflect on your day and dedicate your merit for the benefit of all beings.

This routine balances mindfulness, insight, and compassion, addressing delusions systematically and integrating these practices into everyday life.

Eliminating Faults

Special Method (Four Opponent Powers). This is the structured way to **eliminate faults** (non-virtue, downfalls, & the afflictive habits behind them) so the causes of misery are cut at the root.

Here's how it works and how you apply it:

1. **Reliance** (sometimes called "dependence"): Re-establish a wholesome relationship by taking refuge in the Three Jewels and generating bodhicitta—this reconnects you to method and resets your motivation.
2. **Regret** (not guilt): Clearly acknowledge the specific fault and its consequences in karma and mind. Regret energises change; guilt paralyses it.
3. **Remedy:** Apply an antidote practice—e.g., Vajrasattva (100-syllable mantra with visualisation), the **Thirty-Five Buddhas of Confession** (from the **Sūtra of the Three Heaps**), prostrations, recitation, or meditation on emptiness. These directly weaken and purify the karmic imprints.
4. **Resolve:** Make a realistic, time-bound determination not to repeat the fault; specify the scope ("for the next day/week I will…") so it's doable and sincere.

A simple daily application (10–15 minutes):

- Sit; **Reliance**: refuge + bodhicitta.
- **Regret:** review the day; name the fault(s) plainly.
- **Remedy:** 21–108 Vajrasattva mantras or prostrate while reciting the **Thirty-Five Buddhas** names; end with a short contemplation on emptiness of actor, act, and fault.
- **Resolve:** state your commitment not to repeat, with a clear time frame.
- **Dedicate** the merit.

This is **swift, complete purification when all four are present.** Recommended coupling it with powerful remedies like the Thirty-Five Buddhas or Vajrasattva.

Training in Ethics and Conduct

Ethical Conduct

Ethical conduct (*sila*) is a foundational training that goes beyond simple adherence to rules. It encompasses a commitment to purifying one's actions, speech, and livelihood and is designed to create harmony within oneself and with others, supporting the path toward liberation.

Core Aspects of Ethical Conduct

Ethical conduct is indeed more than just the Five Precepts and includes the principles found in the Eightfold Path and the Bodhisattva Vows:

1. **The Five Precepts**
   The Five Precepts are a basic ethical framework for lay practitioners:
   - To abstain from killing
   - To abstain from stealing
   - To abstain from sexual misconduct
   - To abstain from false speech
   - To abstain from intoxicants

   These precepts help lay practitioners develop self-restraint and minimise harm to oneself and others, serving as the first step in ethical discipline.
2. **Right Speech, Right Action, and Right Livelihood**
   Ethical conduct includes Right Speech, Right Action, and Right Livelihood, which form the foundation of the Noble Eightfold Path. Each of these elements is about cultivating conduct that supports one's practice and benefits others:
   - **Right Speech** involves abstaining from lying, gossiping, harsh language, and divisive speech. It encourages truthful, kind, and constructive communication.
   - **Right Action** encompasses avoiding harm to living beings, refraining from taking what is not given, and practicing sexual responsibility.
   - **Right Livelihood** entails choosing a way of life that does not harm others, avoiding professions linked to violence, deceit, or exploitation.

   Together, these form an ethical framework that guides practitioners toward a life that supports spiritual development while reducing harm.
3. **Ethical Discipline and the Bodhisattva Vows**
   For Mahayana practitioners following the Bodhisattva Path, ethical conduct includes a broader commitment known as the Bodhisattva Vows. These vows emphasise altruism, compassion, and non-harming for the benefit of all beings and include specific commitments to avoid actions that would harm others. While lay precepts focus on personal restraint, the Bodhisattva Vows focus on acting for the welfare of all sentient beings, addressing more subtle aspects of ethical conduct such as patience, generosity, and diligence in helping others.
   In this context, ethical conduct expands to include:
   - Avoiding harmful thoughts and intentions, such as anger and aversion.
   - Acting with an altruistic motivation, moving beyond personal benefit to benefit others.
   - Developing patience, compassion, and tolerance, which prevent destructive emotions from arising.
4. **Addressing Anger, Aversion, Grasping, and Craving**
   Ethical conduct also includes mental discipline to restrain negative mental states, such as anger, aversion, grasping, and craving, which are seen as root causes of

unwholesome actions. Ethical conduct involves training the mind to recognise and let go of these states to prevent them from influencing actions and speech.

This aspect of ethical conduct involves practicing positive qualities, such as:

- **Compassion and loving-kindness**, which counteract aversion and anger.
- **Contentment and non-attachment**, which reduce grasping and craving.
- **Patience and tolerance**, which prevent impulsive actions rooted in negative emotions.

These mental disciplines are cultivated alongside the outward practices of ethical conduct, recognising that actions are often expressions of inner mental states. By purifying the mind, one can more easily uphold ethical discipline in a holistic way.

Importance and Scope of Ethical Conduct

Ethical conduct serves as the foundation for concentration and wisdom by creating a stable, non-harming basis from which the mind can achieve tranquility and insight. It's a holistic approach encompassing both external actions and internal intentions, from basic precepts to the deeper, compassionate commitments of the Bodhisattva vows. This comprehensive approach ensures that ethical conduct is not limited to rule-following but becomes a transformative practice aimed at purifying one's intentions, actions, and relationships with others on the path toward enlightenment.

Morality: Three Types of Morality

In Buddhism, the "three types of morality" refer to three categories of ethical conduct that are essential for spiritual development and the practice of the path leading to enlightenment. These are part of the Noble Eightfold Path and are essential components of the Buddhist practice. The three types of morality are:

1. **Sīla (Moral Conduct or Virtue)**:
    - This refers to ethical conduct and virtuous behavior. It is the foundation of the Buddhist path and involves refraining from actions that cause harm to oneself and others. Sīla is typically expressed through the observance of precepts.
    - The Five Precepts are the basic ethical guidelines for lay Buddhists and include:
        1. Refrain from killing any living being.
        2. Refrain from taking what is not given (stealing).
        3. Refrain from sexual misconduct.
        4. Refrain from false speech (lying).
        5. Refrain from intoxicants that cloud the mind.
2. **Samādhi (Concentration or Mental Discipline)**:
    - This involves developing mental concentration and focus. It is cultivated through meditation practices that calm the mind and enhance clarity and awareness.
    - Samādhi includes practices like mindfulness (sati) and the development of one-pointedness of mind (samatha). This type of morality helps to stabilize and purify the mind, making it more receptive to deeper insights and wisdom.
3. **Paññā (Wisdom or Insight)**:

- This is the cultivation of wisdom and understanding of the true nature of reality. It involves the development of insight into the nature of existence, suffering, and the path to liberation.
- Wisdom in Buddhism is often associated with understanding the Four Noble Truths and the Three Marks of Existence (impermanence, suffering, and non-self). It also involves the practice of right view and right intention, which are components of the Noble Eightfold Path.

Together, these three types of morality [ethical conduct (sīla), mental discipline (samādhi), and wisdom (paññā)] form an integrated approach to living a moral and meaningful life. They support each other in the journey towards enlightenment, with ethical conduct providing the foundation for mental discipline, which in turn supports the development of wisdom.

Vinaya, the

The *Vinaya* is one of the three main divisions of the Buddhist canon, known as the *Tripitaka* (Three Baskets), and it serves as **the disciplinary code for monastic life**. It outlines the ethical and practical guidelines that govern the behaviour of monks (*bhikkhus*) and nuns (*bhikkhunis*), ensuring the smooth functioning of the monastic community (*sangha*) and supporting the spiritual progress of its members. The word *Vinaya* translates to “discipline” or “training.”

Components of the Vinaya

The *Vinaya* contains both rules but also explanatory contexts, procedural guidelines, and advice for monastics. It is divided into three key components:

1. **Prātimokṣa Rules**
   The *Prātimokṣa* section lists specific rules of conduct for monastics, divided into categories based on the severity of transgressions. These rules help prevent unwholesome actions and support the cultivation of ethical conduct (*śīla*). Examples include:
   - **Pārājika**: Four rules, the breaking of which leads to expulsion from the sangha (e.g., sexual intercourse, theft, killing a human, and false claims of spiritual attainments).
   - **Sanghādisesa**: Thirteen rules requiring formal meetings and disciplinary actions for resolution, such as inappropriate physical contact or harmful speech.
   - **Sekhiya**: Rules about decorum, behaviour, and etiquette, such as how to eat mindfully or interact with laypeople respectfully.

   The number of rules varies by tradition:

   Theravāda Tradition: 227 rules for monks and 311 for nuns.

   Mahayana and Vajrayana Traditions: Adaptations with additional Bodhisattva-related guidelines.
2. **Khandhaka (Chapters)**
   This section provides practical instructions for monastic life and community procedures. Topics include:
   - The ordination process for new monks and nuns.
   - Guidelines for monastic life, such as appropriate clothing, alms collection, and dealing with illness.
   - Procedures for resolving disputes within the sangha.
3. **Parivāra (Appendices)**
   A later compilation summarising and analysing the rules, providing a study guide for understanding and applying the *Vinaya*. It often includes cross-references, explanations, and clarifications of rules.

Rules vs. Words of Advice or Instruction

The *Vinaya* offers more than just prescriptive rules; it also provides broader advice and guidelines that reflect the Buddha's teachings on living a disciplined and harmonious life.

1. **Rules in the Vinaya**
   These are specific directives that must be followed by monastics. They regulate behaviour to avoid harm, cultivate mindfulness, and ensure the integrity of the sangha. For example:
   - Refraining from causing harm to others, whether physically or verbally.
   - Observing rules of decorum in public to maintain respect for the sangha.
   - Avoiding attachment to possessions or indulgence in luxuries.
2. **Advice and Instructions in the Vinaya**
   Beyond the rules, the *Vinaya* includes guidance on ethical living and the philosophy underlying the monastic life. Examples include:
   - **Mindfulness in Daily Life**: Encouraging monastics to be fully present while eating, walking, or speaking.
   - **Harmony in the Community**: Advice on resolving disputes, fostering mutual respect, and supporting one another's spiritual practice.
   - **Simplicity and Detachment**: Recommendations on living minimally and focusing on spiritual growth rather than material concerns.
   - **Compassion and Service**: Emphasising the importance of caring for the sick and showing kindness to others.

Purpose and Importance of the Vinaya

The *Vinaya* serves multiple purposes:

1. **Maintaining Ethical Conduct**: The rules help monastics avoid unwholesome actions that generate negative karma and obstruct spiritual progress.
2. **Preserving Harmony in the Sangha**: The procedural guidelines promote unity, fairness, and effective governance within the monastic community.
3. **Setting an Example for Laypeople**: The disciplined lifestyle of monastics inspires confidence and respect from lay practitioners, encouraging their own spiritual practice.
4. **Supporting Liberation**: By regulating external behaviour and cultivating inner discipline, the *Vinaya* creates a supportive framework for meditative concentration (*samadhi*) and wisdom (*prajna*), leading to enlightenment.

Summary

The *Vinaya* is more than a code of rules; it is a comprehensive guide for ethical and harmonious living within the monastic community. It combines prescriptive regulations with practical advice and philosophical teachings, ensuring that monastics can focus on their spiritual development while serving as exemplary models for lay practitioners. By adhering to the *Vinaya*, monastics create conditions for their own liberation and contribute to the stability and integrity of the Buddhist tradition.

Virtuous Actions, ten

The *Ten Virtuous Actions* are **not** just "avoid the Ten Non-Virtuous Actions." They are the *positive counterparts* — actively cultivating wholesome actions in body, speech, and mind.
If the Ten Non-Virtuous are "things to refrain from," the Ten Virtuous are "things to *do*." So rather than simply *not* killing, lying, or thinking with ill will, they involve actively protecting life, speaking truthfully, and cultivating kindness.

The Ten Virtuous Actions

(Organised into body, speech, and mind — each the positive counterpart of its non-virtuous twin.)

Body (3)

1. **Protecting life** (opposite of killing)
   - Respect and cherish all forms of life; help others survive and thrive; engage in acts of rescue and care.

- Example: Feeding the hungry, nursing the sick, releasing captured animals.

2. **Practicing generosity** (opposite of stealing)
   - Freely give material aid, time, and support without expecting return.
   - Example: Offering food, resources, or knowledge in a spirit of kindness.
3. **Sexual responsibility** (opposite of sexual misconduct)
   - Act with respect and integrity in relationships; honour commitments; protect others from harm.
   - Example: Maintaining fidelity, fostering trust, and respecting boundaries.

Speech (4)

4. **Truthful speech** (opposite of lying)
   - Speak honestly, reliably, and with integrity.
   - Example: Admitting mistakes instead of hiding them.
5. **Reconciliation and harmony** (opposite of divisive speech)
   - Use words to heal divisions, bring people together, and restore peace.
   - Example: Mediating between quarrelling friends.
6. **Gentle, kind speech** (opposite of harsh speech)
   - Speak kindly, encouragingly, and respectfully.
   - Example: Offering comfort to someone in distress.
7. **Meaningful and beneficial speech** (opposite of idle gossip)
   - Speak in ways that are purposeful, uplifting, and lead to benefit.
   - Example: Sharing wisdom, practical help, or Dharma teachings.

Mind (3)

8. **Generous attitude** (opposite of covetousness)
   - Cultivate delight in others' good fortune; wish for their continued success.
   - Example: Feeling joy when a colleague is promoted.
9. **Goodwill and compassion** (opposite of ill will)
   - Hold benevolent wishes for all beings; want them to be free from suffering.
   - Example: Offering prayers or practical help to those in trouble.
10. **Right view** (opposite of wrong view)
    - Understand karma, impermanence, and interdependence; have faith in the path to liberation.
    - Example: Recognising that actions have consequences and living accordingly.

Key point

They're **active, intentional virtues**, not just absences of wrongdoing.
Merely refraining from harm is the starting point; cultivating the opposite qualities is what transforms your mindstream and accumulates *merit*.

two-column comparison

two-column comparison of the Ten Non-Virtuous vs Ten Virtuous Actions, with examples so you can see exactly how one transforms into the other.

Non-Virtuous Action	Virtuous Action (Positive Counterpart)	Example of Virtuous Action
1. Killing – taking life	**Protecting life** – value and protect life, aid survival	Rescuing an injured animal; feeding the hungry
2. Stealing – taking what is not given	**Practicing generosity** – give freely and honestly	Donating food, clothing, or time to those in need
3. Sexual misconduct – harming through sexual behaviour	**Sexual responsibility** – respect and honour commitments	Being faithful in relationships; protecting others from exploitation
4. Lying – deceiving others	**Truthful speech** – honest, trustworthy communication	Admitting a mistake openly; speaking truth without harm

5. Divisive speech – creating disharmony	**Reconciliation & harmony** – uniting others	Mediating disputes; encouraging reconciliation
6. Harsh speech – speaking cruelly	**Gentle, kind speech** – words that soothe and uplift	Comforting a friend; offering encouragement
7. Idle gossip – pointless, distracting talk	**Meaningful & beneficial speech** – purposeful and helpful	Sharing useful information; teaching Dharma
8. Covetousness – craving others' possessions	**Generous attitude** – rejoicing in others' success	Feeling happy when others prosper
9. Ill will – wishing harm	**Goodwill & compassion** – wishing others well	Wishing an enemy to find peace and happiness
10. Wrong view – denying karma or moral causality	**Right view** – understanding karma, impermanence, interdependence	Acting with awareness that actions have consequences

Ten Non-virtuous Actions

The "ten negative actions of body, speech and mind" (also ten non-virtuous actions) are a set of ethical guidelines that highlight actions considered harmful and detrimental to one's spiritual and moral development. (They are fully covered in Chapter 14 part 2")

Negative Actions of Body:

1. **Killing (taking life)**: This refers to intentionally causing harm or death to any sentient being, including humans, animals, or insects.
2. **Stealing (taking what is not given)**: This involves the act of taking someone else's property without their consent or stealing in any form.
3. **Sexual misconduct**: Engaging in sexual activities that harm others or violate ethical norms, such as adultery or sexual exploitation.

Negative Actions of Speech:

1. **Lying (false speech)**: Deliberately speaking falsehoods or spreading misinformation with the intent to deceive others.
2. **Divisive speech (sowing discord)**: Creating conflicts or divisions among individuals or groups through harmful speech.
3. **Harsh speech (hurtful speech)**: Speaking in a way that is harsh, hurtful, or disrespectful to others, including using offensive language.
4. **Idle gossip (frivolous speech)**: Engaging in meaningless or idle talk that serves no constructive purpose and may harm others or spread rumours.

Negative Actions of Mind:

1. **Covetousness (greed):** Experiencing excessive desire or attachment for material possessions, wealth, or the belongings of others.
2. **Ill-will (hatred)**: Feeling anger, hatred, or hostility towards others and harbouring harmful intentions.
3. **Wrong views**: Holding distorted or erroneous beliefs that go against Buddhist teachings, such as denying the law of karma, rebirth, or the Four Noble Truths.

These ten negative actions are seen as obstacles to spiritual progress and can lead to negative consequences, both in this life and in future rebirths. Buddhist ethics emphasise refraining from these actions and cultivating their positive counterparts, non-harming, honesty, loving-kindness and wisdom.

The mantra ***Om Mani Padme Hum*** (pronounced in Tibetan as "Om Mani Padme Hung") is among the most famous and widely recited mantras in Buddhism, especially within the **Tibetan Mahāyāna tradition**. It is associated with **Avalokiteśvara** (Tibetan: *Chenrezig*), the Bodhisattva of Compassion, who embodies the infinite compassion of all Buddhas. This six-syllable mantra is believed to contain the entire essence of the Buddha's teachings.

Worldly Dharmas: Eight Worldly Dharmas

The "**Eight Worldly Dharmas**" (or "Eight Worldly Winds" or "Eight Concerns") refer to common emotional responses and preoccupations that bind people to saṃsāra (the cycle of suffering and rebirth). These worldly dharmas are centred on attachment to pleasure and aversion to pain, and they represent a key source of suffering. The Buddha taught that by understanding and overcoming these attachments and aversions, one can develop equanimity and inner peace. They are grouped into four pairs of opposites, reflecting the things people typically desire and fear:

1. **Gain and Loss**: **(Wealth and Poverty)**
   - **Gain**: Attachment to acquiring material possessions, wealth, or status.
   - **Loss**: Aversion to losing possessions, money, or reputation.

   People often seek gain and fear loss, which leads to suffering when things don't go as desired.
2. **Pleasure and Pain**:
   - **Pleasure**: Attachment to physical or mental comfort, satisfaction, and sensory enjoyment.
   - **Pain**: Aversion to discomfort, suffering, or unpleasant experiences.

   Desire for constant pleasure & avoidance of pain keeps individuals trapped in cycles of craving & dissatisfaction.
3. **Praise and Blame**:
   - **Praise**: Attachment to receiving approval, admiration, or recognition from others.
   - **Blame**: Aversion to criticism, disapproval, or being blamed for mistakes.

   Being overly concerned with praise and blame causes emotional ups and downs, as people's opinions are unpredictable and out of one's control.
4. **Fame and Disgrace**:
   - **Fame**: Attachment to reputation, recognition, or being well-known.
   - **Disgrace**: Aversion to shame, embarrassment, or loss of respect in the eyes of others.

   Preoccupation with maintaining a good reputation or fearing disgrace can lead to anxiety & inauthentic behaviour.

How They Cause Suffering

The Eight Worldly Dharmas are distractions that keep people focused on external conditions rather than cultivating wisdom and compassion. When one is attached to gain, pleasure, praise, and fame, and constantly trying to avoid their opposites (loss, pain, blame, and disgrace), the mind becomes agitated and restless. These preoccupations strengthen the ‘self’ ego and keep you trapped in cycles of desire and aversion.

The Bodhisattva Path

Bodhisattva Vows and Bodhichitta

The **Vow of Bodhichitta** and the **Bodhisattva Vow** are closely related but not exactly the same.

1. Vow of Bodhichitta

The **Vow of Bodhichitta** (*bodhichitta samvara*) refers to the formal commitment to cultivate and maintain **bodhichitta**, the altruistic aspiration to attain enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings. It is the foundation of the Bodhisattva path and can be taken by anyone, even before formally taking the Bodhisattva Vow.

There are two types of **bodhichitta**:

- **Aspiring Bodhichitta**: The heartfelt wish to become enlightened for the sake of all beings.
- **Engaged Bodhichitta**: The commitment to actively work toward enlightenment through the practice of the six perfections (paramitas).

Taking the **Vow of Bodhichitta** strengthens one's resolve to never abandon the path of awakening and to consistently generate bodhichitta in thought, speech, and action.

Consider that we are surrounded by all the beings in the universe and generate compassion for them. Think of the Buddha and feel great devotion to him. Now, with compassion and devotion, pray, "May I attain Buddhahood!" and recite:

Teachers, Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, listen!
Just as all the Buddhas of the past
Have brought forth the awakened mind,
Likewise, for the benefit of beings
I will bring to birth the awakened mind. (x3)

When we recite these lines for the third time, at the words, "I will bring to birth the awakened mind," think that you have generated this bodhichitta in the depth of your hearts, in the very marrow of your bones, and that you will never go back on this promise.

Traditionally we now recite the last nine verses of the chapter

26.
"Today my life has given fruit.
This human state has now been well assumed.
Today I take my birth in Buddha's line,
And have become the Buddha's child and heir.
27.
"In every way, then, I will undertake
Activities befitting such a rank.
And I will do no act to mar
Or compromise this high and faultless lineage.
28.
"For I am like a blind man who has found
A precious gem inside a heap of dust.
For so it is, by some strange chance,
That bodhichitta has been born in me.
29.
"This is the supreme draft of immortality
That slays the Lord of Death, the slaughterer of beings,
The rich unfailing treasure-mine
To heal the poverty of wanderers.
30.
"It is the sovereign remedy
That perfectly allays all maladies.
It is the tree that gives relief
To those who wander wearily the pathways of existence.
31.
"It is the universal bridge that saves
All wandering beings from the states of loss,
The rising moon of the enlightened mind
That soothes the sorrows born of the afflictions.
32.
"It is the mighty sun that utterly dispels
The misty ignorance of wandering beings,
The creamy butter, rich and full,

That's churned from milk of holy teaching.
33.
"Living beings! Wayfarers upon life's paths,
Who wish to taste the riches of contentment,
Here before you is the supreme bliss.Here, O ceaseless travelers, is your fulfillment!
34.
"And so, today, within the sight of all protectors,
I summon beings, calling them to Buddhahood.
And, till that state is reached, to every earthly joy!
May gods and demigods and all the rest rejoice!"

Now that we have taken this vow, we should try to be good human beings in our daily lives. We should not, for example, pretend to be very nice while we are in this tent and start fighting with each other as soon as we get out! We should from now on try to have a positive and kind mind: we are going to be happy in life. I really think that the future depends on the quality of one's mind, on a good mind. So we must try to be good people and be good examples for those around us. The initiative to be like this has to come from each one of us individually.

2. The Bodhisattva Vow

The **Bodhisattva Vow** is a formal vow taken in the Mahayana Buddhist tradition by those who commit to following the path of a **Bodhisattva**, dedicating their life to the liberation of all beings. It includes not only maintaining **bodhichitta** but also engaging in the **Bodhisattva practices**, such as the **six paramitas** (generosity, discipline, patience, diligence, meditation, and wisdom).

The vow typically includes commitments such as:

- Never abandoning any sentient being.
- Never giving up on enlightenment, no matter how difficult the path.
- Training in the vast methods of a Bodhisattva to skilfully help others.

When taking the Bodhisattva Vow, one explicitly commits to **engaged bodhichitta**, meaning they not only cultivate the wish to attain enlightenment but also take practical steps toward realising it.

Key Difference:

- The **Vow of Bodhichitta** is primarily about cultivating the **intention** of enlightenment for all beings.
- The **Bodhisattva Vow** includes this intention but extends to **actively practicing** the Bodhisattva's way of life.

In some traditions, the **Vow of Bodhichitta** is taken first, followed later by the **Bodhisattva Vow** when one is ready for a deeper commitment.

How to Take or Renew the Vow of Bodhichitta and the Bodhisattva Vow

Taking or renewing these vows is a powerful way to reaffirm your commitment to the Bodhisattva path. Below is a **step-by-step guide** to formally taking or refreshing these vows in daily life.

1. Taking or Renewing the Vow of Bodhichitta

The **Vow of Bodhichitta** focuses on generating the heartfelt aspiration to attain enlightenment for the benefit of all beings.

Preparation:

- Find a quiet space where you can sit comfortably in meditation.
- Take a few deep breaths and center your mind.
- Reflect on the **suffering of all beings** and the interconnectedness of life.
- Generate strong **compassion and love**, recognizing that your enlightenment is necessary to help others.

The Vow of Bodhichitta:

You can take this vow **privately or in the presence of a teacher**. Recite the following:

"From this moment onward, until I attain full enlightenment,
I generate the supreme bodhichitta,
Vowing to attain Buddhahood for the sake of all sentient beings.
No matter how difficult the path,
I will never abandon my intention to bring all beings to awakening."
After reciting, **sit in meditation** for a few moments, letting the commitment settle deeply into your heart.

Daily Practice to Maintain Bodhichitta:

- Each morning, **renew your aspiration** by repeating the vow.
- Throughout the day, remind yourself:
  - *"Whatever I do, may it benefit all beings."*
  - *"May I transform all difficulties into opportunities to grow in wisdom and compassion."*
- At night, review your actions:
  - *Did I act with kindness and wisdom today?*
  - *Did I lose sight of bodhichitta? If so, how can I strengthen it tomorrow?*

If you ever feel discouraged, remember **Shantideva's words**:
"As long as space endures, as long as sentient beings remain,
Until then, may I too remain, to dispel the miseries of the world."

2. Taking or Renewing the Bodhisattva Vow

The **Bodhisattva Vow** is a deeper commitment where you not only generate bodhichitta but also engage in the **practices of a Bodhisattva**, including the **Six Perfections** *(Generosity, Discipline, Patience, Diligence, Meditation, Wisdom)*.

Preparation:

- Spend some time contemplating the **great Bodhisattvas** such as Avalokiteshvara, Manjushri, and Samantabhadra.
- Reflect on the vast **suffering of beings** and how you can dedicate yourself to their liberation.
- Feel **joy and determination** in committing to the Bodhisattva path.

The Bodhisattva Vow:

Traditionally, this vow is taken in the presence of a teacher. However, if a teacher is not available, you can **visualize the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas** in front of you and take the vow sincerely.
Recite:
"With the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas as my witness,
I take the vow to attain full enlightenment
And to work tirelessly for the liberation of all sentient beings.
I vow to uphold the conduct of a Bodhisattva,
To develop boundless compassion and wisdom,
And to never abandon even a single being.
From now until enlightenment, I dedicate my life to the benefit of all."
Sit in **meditation** for a while, feeling the depth of this commitment.

3. Daily Renewal and Practice

Morning Renewal:

Each morning, **renew your vow** by repeating it aloud or silently in your heart.

Daily Actions to Strengthen Your Vow:

1. **Generosity**: Offer help, time, or resources to others.
2. **Ethical Conduct**: Keep commitments and act with integrity.
3. **Patience**: Remain calm and compassionate in difficulties.
4. **Diligence**: Engage enthusiastically in Dharma practice.
5. **Meditation**: Train the mind in wisdom and mindfulness.
6. **Wisdom**: Study and contemplate the nature of reality.

Evening Reflection:

Before bed, reflect:

- **Did I act with wisdom and compassion today?**
- **Where did I fall short, and how can I improve?**
- **Did I dedicate my actions to the welfare of others?**

If mistakes were made, **don't feel discouraged**—simply **renew your vow** with sincerity and continue practicing.

4. What If I Break My Vow?

It is natural to occasionally fall short. The key is **not to abandon the path** but to **restore your vow** as soon as you recognize a lapse.

Restoring the Vow:

1. **Recognize** where you strayed.
2. **Generate regret** (not guilt—just a sincere wish to improve).
3. **Reaffirm your vow** by reciting it again with renewed dedication.

A short **prayer for renewal**:
"Though I may have faltered today,
I reaffirm my Bodhisattva Vow.
May my mind remain vast as the sky,
May my compassion be boundless as the ocean,
And may I tirelessly work for the benefit of all beings."

5. Final Dedication of Merit

At the end of any vow-taking or renewal, dedicate the merit:
"May whatever merit I have gained from this practice
Be dedicated to the awakening of all beings.
May bodhichitta flourish and never diminish,
And may all beings swiftly attain enlightenment."

Conclusion

Both the **Vow of Bodhichitta** and the **Bodhisattva Vow** are profound commitments that guide us toward full enlightenment. Regularly renewing these vows helps **strengthen resolve, purify obstacles, and deepen wisdom and compassion**.

Daily Practice Schedule for Cultivating the Bodhisattva Vow

This structured daily schedule helps integrate the **Vow of Bodhichitta** and the **Bodhisattva Vow** into everyday life, reinforcing wisdom and compassion while strengthening your commitment to benefiting all beings.

 Morning Practice: Setting the Intention

1. Recite the Bodhisattva Aspiration

Upon waking, take a moment to reaffirm your commitment:
"From this moment onward, until I attain full enlightenment, I generate the supreme bodhichitta, vowing to attain Buddhahood for the sake of all sentient beings. No matter how difficult the path, I will never abandon my intention to bring all beings to awakening."

2. Contemplation of the Bodhisattva Path

- Reflect on the **suffering of all beings** and your aspiration to relieve it.
- Consider one area where you can apply **more patience, generosity, or wisdom** today.

3. Silent Meditation (5–10 minutes)

- Focus on your breath while visualizing a golden light of **compassion and wisdom** radiating from your heart to all beings.
- Let the mind settle in clarity before beginning your day.

🌞 Daytime Mindfulness Practices

1. Practicing the Six Perfections in Daily Life

Throughout the day, actively cultivate these qualities:

- **Generosity** (Dana): Give kindness, help, or resources.
- **Ethical Conduct** (Sila): Maintain honesty and integrity.
- **Patience** (Kshanti): Stay calm and understanding in challenges.
- **Diligence** (Virya): Engage wholeheartedly in positive actions.
- **Meditation** (Dhyana): Maintain awareness and mindfulness.
- **Wisdom** (Prajna): See the impermanent, interdependent nature of all things.

2. Mindfulness Checkpoints

At key points in the day, briefly check in:

- **Midday Reflection:** Am I acting with **wisdom and compassion**?
- **Before a Difficult Task:** Take **three deep breaths** and recall your vow: *"May this action benefit all beings."*
- **Before Speaking:** Ask: *"Is this true? Is this kind? Is this necessary?"*

3. Transforming Obstacles into the Path

When challenges arise:

- **Pause** before reacting impulsively.
- **Reframe** difficulties as opportunities to cultivate **patience and compassion**.
- **Dedicate** struggles for the benefit of others: *"May all beings facing this difficulty be freed from suffering."*

🌙 Evening Reflection & Dedication

1. Reviewing the Day

Before bed, take a few minutes to reflect:

- **Did I uphold my vow today?** Where did I succeed? Where can I improve?
- **Did I cultivate wisdom and compassion in difficult moments?**
- **What small habit can I refine tomorrow?**

2. Renewing the Bodhisattva Vow

Recite:

"Though I may have faltered today, I reaffirm my Bodhisattva Vow. May my mind remain vast as the sky, my compassion boundless as the ocean, and my efforts ceaseless in benefiting all beings."

3. Dedication of Merit

End the day by dedicating any positive energy gained:

"May whatever merit I have gained from this practice be dedicated to the awakening of all beings. May bodhichitta flourish and never diminish, and may all beings swiftly attain enlightenment."

Additional Notes for Deepening the Practice

- **Weekly Retreat:** Dedicate at least one extended meditation session per week to contemplating bodhichitta.
- **Journaling:** Keep a log of daily reflections to track progress and insights.
- **Group Practice:** If possible, engage in discussion or practice with fellow practitioners to support each other.
- **Compassion Visualisation:** Regularly visualise suffering beings receiving your compassion and transforming into light.

By consistently following this schedule, the **Bodhisattva Vow becomes a living, breathing force** in your daily life, deepening your path toward enlightenment.

Bodhisattva Training: Tsongkhapa's combined method of Bodhisattva Training

Lama Tsongkhapa skilfully combined the two methods of **Seven Points of Cause and Effect** and **Equalising and Exchanging Self and Others** into a comprehensive practice for cultivating **bodhichitta** (the altruistic intention to achieve enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings). In Tsongkhapa's system, these two methods are not viewed as contradictory but rather as complementary paths that, when combined, provide a powerful, holistic approach to developing compassion and wisdom on the bodhisattva path.

The **Seven Points of Cause and Effect** focuses primarily on generating compassion by recognising the kindness of all beings and developing a deep sense of responsibility to alleviate their suffering. On the other hand, **Equalising and Exchanging Self and Others** emphasises dismantling the self-centred mind by cultivating the understanding that one's own happiness is no more important than that of others, and by learning to prioritise others' welfare. By combining these two approaches, Tsongkhapa creates a method that targets both the **emotional aspect** (compassion) and the **cognitive aspect** (equalising self and others) of bodhichitta, ultimately reinforcing and deepening the practitioner's altruistic motivation. Here is a detailed summary and explanation of how these methods are integrated.

Combining the Two Methods

The integration of these two methods in Tsongkhapa's teachings follows a specific sequence, with **Equalising and Exchanging Self and Others** often being applied after practicing the **Seven Points of Cause and Effect**. The two methods together can be described as addressing:

1. **The Emotional Aspect (Compassion)**: This is where the Seven Points of Cause and Effect plays a major role. It generates genuine compassion by reflecting on the kindness of others and the desire to repay that kindness. The goal here is to develop a heartfelt emotional connection to all beings, recognising their suffering and generating a sincere wish to free them from it.
2. **The Cognitive Aspect (Wisdom)**: Equalising and Exchanging Self and Others introduces a more intellectual analysis of the self and others, helping to break down the deeply ingrained habit of self-cherishing. This method works to challenge and transform the practitioner's habitual ego-driven perspective by logically dismantling the sense of separation between oneself and others.

How Tsongkhapa Combined the Two Approaches

1. Start with the Seven Points of Cause and Effect

The **Seven Points of Cause and Effect** is typically practiced first because it helps create a foundation of compassion, which softens the mind and prepares it for the more radical transformation that comes from exchanging self and others.

Here is a brief review of the process:

1. **Recognise all sentient beings as having been your mother**: You begin by acknowledging that all beings have, in some past life, been your mother. This contemplation helps cultivate a sense of connection to all beings.
2. **Remember the kindness of all mothers**: Once you recognise that all beings have been your mother, you reflect on the immense kindness they have shown you. This step deepens the emotional bond with others.
3. **Generate the wish to repay their kindness**: Feeling gratitude for the kindness of others, you naturally develop the desire to repay them by helping alleviate their suffering.
4. **Develop love**: You cultivate a genuine wish for all beings to experience happiness.
5. **Develop compassion**: You generate the wish for all beings to be free from suffering, seeing their pain as unbearable.

6. **Develop the extraordinary intention**: This is the resolve to take personal responsibility for freeing all beings from suffering. You commit to becoming a bodhisattva, a being who seeks enlightenment for the benefit of others.
7. **Develop bodhichitta**: Finally, you generate the aspiration to achieve enlightenment so that you can help all sentient beings attain liberation.

This sequence helps to develop deep emotional qualities such as love, compassion, and the strong commitment to help others. Once these qualities are established, the practice shifts to **Equalising and Exchanging Self and Others** to challenge the intellectual and cognitive biases of the self-centred mind.

2. Apply Equalising and Exchanging Self and Others

Now, after generating compassion through the Seven Points, you practice **Equalising and Exchanging Self and Others**, which provides a cognitive reorientation to see others' happiness and suffering as equally important as your own.

Here's how the practice proceeds:

1. **Equalise yourself with others**: Start by recognising that your own happiness is not more important than that of others. Reflect on how everyone, just like you, desires happiness and freedom from suffering. Develop the understanding that there is no logical basis for valuing your own well-being over others'.
   - **Reflection**: Why should I consider my happiness more important than others' happiness? Do others not suffer in the same way as I do? This kind of self-inquiry helps break down the self-cherishing mind.
2. **Exchange self and others**: After equalising yourself and others, you move on to mentally "exchange" your habitual self-centredness with concern for others. Instead of always seeking to benefit yourself, you train your mind to seek the benefit of others first. This involves imagining taking on others' suffering and giving them your happiness, which is a central aspect of the **Tonglen** meditation practice.
   - **Reflection**: Visualise that when you inhale, you take in the suffering of others, absorbing it and removing it from them. When you exhale, you send out love, happiness, and peace to all beings. This exercise helps dismantle the habitual tendency to put oneself first and builds a sense of compassion and responsibility for others.

3. Alternate Between Both Methods

The real power of Tsongkhapa's system comes from alternating between the **emotional development** from the Seven Points of Cause and Effect and the **cognitive transformation** from Equalising and Exchanging Self and Others.

For example:

- One day you may spend time reflecting on the kindness of others (from the Seven Points of Cause and Effect) to strengthen your emotional connection to all beings.
- Another day you may focus on mentally exchanging your own happiness with that of others (from Equalising and Exchanging Self and Others), challenging the ingrained self-centred attitude.

By alternating between the two approaches, you gradually develop both the **emotional capacity** (compassion and love) and the **intellectual understanding** (the equality between self and others) necessary for bodhichitta.

How the Combined Approach Leads to Bodhichitta

Together, these two methods help a practitioner develop a **complete, unshakable bodhichitta** that includes both heartfelt compassion and profound wisdom:

1. **Emotional Maturity**: The Seven Points of Cause and Effect ensures that your bodhichitta is grounded in deep love, gratitude, and compassion for all beings. This emotional maturity is essential because it gives the motivation to work for others' benefit.

2. **Cognitive Clarity**: Equalising and Exchanging Self and Others ensures that your bodhichitta is based on a clear understanding of reality. It dismantles the ego's attachment to self-importance, enabling you to act without the hindrance of selfishness.
3. **Unified Path**: By combining these two methods, Tsongkhapa's approach creates a balanced and powerful path toward bodhichitta. You become capable of both emotionally caring for all beings and intellectually understanding why their happiness and suffering are just as important as your own.

Conclusion

Lama Tsongkhapa's **combined approach** of the Seven Points of Cause and Effect with **Equalising and Exchanging Self and Others** offers a well-rounded method for generating bodhichitta. By working on both the emotional and cognitive levels, practitioners develop a compassionate, altruistic mind capable of working for the benefit of all beings while reducing the hold of self-cherishing and egotism. The end result is a bodhisattva's mind, infused with the intention to attain enlightenment, not for oneself, but for the liberation of all sentient beings from suffering.

Cause and Effect: Seven Points of Cause and Effect

Lama Tsongkhapa's explanation of the Seven Points of Cause and Effect is a profound meditation method from the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, specifically from the Lamrim (Graduated Path to Enlightenment) teachings. This method is designed to cultivate **bodhichitta;** the altruistic mind aimed at achieving enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings. The seven points are intended to help practitioners gradually develop deep compassion and the realisation of interconnectedness with all beings. Lama Tsongkhapa, the founder of the Gelug school of Tibetan Buddhism, elaborated on this teaching to provide a systematic approach to cultivating bodhichitta.

Here is a detailed explanation of the **Seven Points of Cause and Effect**:

1. Recognising All Sentient Beings as Your Mother (Seeing All Beings as Having Been Your Mother)

This first point is based on the Buddhist understanding of **cyclic existence** (saṃsāra) and rebirth. According to this view, all sentient beings have been reborn countless times, and in the course of these rebirths, each being has at some point been your mother.

- **Reflection**: In this step, meditate on the idea that every being has been your mother in a past life, and consider the care and affection a mother typically provides. Reflect on the nurturing and selfless love your mother has shown you in this life, and then extend that recognition to all sentient beings.
- **Purpose**: This meditation breaks down the barriers of seeing others as separate or distant and helps create a sense of closeness and connection with all beings.

2. Remembering the Kindness of All Mothers

Once you recognise that all beings have been your mother, the next step is to reflect on the boundless kindness they have shown you.

- **Reflection**: Recall the loving care your mother has provided for you; feeding, protecting, and nurturing you without expectation of reward. Then, imagine that all sentient beings have treated you with the same love and compassion when they were your mother in previous lifetimes.
- **Purpose**: This reflection cultivates gratitude toward all beings, reinforcing the understanding that every sentient being has cared for you with unconditional love at some point.

3. Wishing to Repay Their Kindness

Having recognised and reflected on the immense kindness of all sentient beings (as your mother), the natural response should be a deep desire to repay their kindness.

- **Reflection**: Consider how much effort your mother, and by extension all beings, has put into your well-being. Let a sense of gratitude and responsibility arise, leading to the wish to repay this kindness by helping them in their suffering.
- **Purpose**: This step generates a strong motivation to help others and cultivates the altruistic intention to benefit all beings.

4. Developing Love (Seeing All Beings with Love)

In this step, you focus on developing **love** for all sentient beings. Love in the Buddhist sense is the wish for all beings to experience happiness and the causes of happiness.

- **Reflection**: After generating the desire to repay the kindness of all beings, meditate on love by contemplating that just as you wish for happiness, so does every sentient being. Extend your wish for happiness to all beings, seeing them as loveable and deserving of happiness.
- **Purpose**: This point fosters an unbiased, universal love for all sentient beings, breaking down the distinctions between friend, enemy, and stranger.

5. Developing Great Compassion

While love is the wish for beings to be happy, **compassion** is the wish for them to be free from suffering. This step is about feeling a deep empathy for the suffering of all beings and a strong desire to relieve them of that suffering.

- **Reflection**: Reflect on the pervasive suffering of all sentient beings. Consider their physical, emotional, and spiritual pains, as well as their entrapment in the cycle of saṃsāra. Meditate on how unbearable their suffering is and develop the strong wish to free them from it.
- **Purpose**: Great compassion is an essential foundation for bodhichitta. It strengthens the resolve to help all beings attain liberation from suffering.

6. Developing the Extraordinary Intention (Taking Responsibility)

In this step, you cultivate the **extraordinary intention** to personally take responsibility for helping all beings achieve freedom from suffering. This is the crucial turning point from general compassion to the deep commitment necessary for bodhichitta.

- **Reflection**: After developing great compassion, ask yourself, "Who will free all these beings from suffering?" Realise that you must take on this responsibility yourself. Generate the resolve that you will work for the liberation of all beings, no matter how long it takes.
- **Purpose**: This point intensifies your commitment and leads to the determination that you will dedicate your life to the welfare of others, reinforcing the bodhisattva path.

7. Developing Bodhichitta

The final step is the culmination of all the previous points: the development of **bodhichitta**; the aspiration to achieve enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings.

- **Reflection**: Bodhichitta is the realisation that in order to help all beings effectively, you must first achieve enlightenment yourself. This is not an ordinary desire for personal liberation but the wish to attain full Buddhahood so that you can lead others out of suffering.
- **Purpose**: Bodhichitta is the central motivation of the bodhisattva path. It represents the mind fully committed to the welfare of all beings, and the intention to attain enlightenment becomes inseparable from the goal of helping others.

Explanation of Cause and Effect

The reason this method is called the "Seven Points of Cause and Effect" is that each point naturally leads to the next:

- Recognising all beings as having been your mother (1) leads to remembering their kindness (2).
- Remembering their kindness leads to the wish to repay it (3).
- The wish to repay their kindness develops into love for all beings (4).

- Love naturally grows into compassion (5), which deepens into the extraordinary intention to take responsibility for others' suffering (6).
- Finally, this extraordinary intention gives rise to bodhichitta (7).

Recommended Meditations for the Seven Points

Here are suggestions for integrating the Seven Points of Cause and Effect into your meditation practice:

1. **Meditation on the Kindness of Beings**: Sit quietly and contemplate each of the seven points in sequence, beginning with recognising that all beings have been your mother. Visualise specific people or animals to help make the meditation more concrete.
2. **Compassion Meditation**: Spend time focusing on the suffering of others. As you visualise their suffering, allow a feeling of deep compassion to arise, and commit to helping them be free from their pain.
3. **Bodhichitta Meditation**: After cultivating love and compassion, conclude your session by reaffirming your bodhichitta intention. Visualise yourself as a bodhisattva, actively working for the benefit of all beings.
4. **Daily Life Practice**: Throughout your day, remind yourself that everyone you meet has been your mother in past lives. Try to approach others with gratitude and a desire to be of service. When difficulties arise, use them as opportunities to practice compassion and patience, reinforcing the teachings.

Daily Activities to Strengthen Bodhichitta

Incorporating the Seven Points of Cause and Effect into daily life can deepen the practice:

- **Generosity**: Offer your time, energy, or resources to help others, even in small ways. This will reinforce the intention to repay the kindness of others.
- **Patience and Compassion**: In challenging situations, remind yourself that the other person has been your mother and is suffering. Respond with patience and compassion instead of irritation or anger.
- **Dedication of Merits**: At the end of any virtuous activity, dedicate the positive energy (merit) to the enlightenment of all sentient beings, reinforcing your bodhichitta.

Conclusion

Lama Tsongkhapa’s Seven Points of Cause and Effect are a powerful method for cultivating bodhichitta. By deeply reflecting on the interconnectedness of all beings and developing compassion, you can gradually overcome selfishness and generate the wish to attain enlightenment for the benefit of all beings. This path is at the heart of the Mahayana Buddhist tradition and leads to both personal liberation and the ability to help others on their spiritual journey.

Equalising and Exchanging Self and Others

The practice of **equalising and exchanging self and others** is a profound method in Mahayana Buddhism for developing **bodhichitta**, the mind of awakening, which is characterised by the aspiration to achieve enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings. This method helps to uproot the deep-seated tendency to prioritise one’s own well-being over others, which is the primary cause of selfishness, suffering, and attachment. It works by training the mind to see the equality between oneself and others, and then cultivating the ability to mentally “exchange” one’s own happiness and suffering with that of others.

This method is emphasised in texts such as **Shantideva’s "Guide to the Bodhisattva’s Way of Life"** (Bodhisattvacharyavatara) and has been further elaborated by Tibetan masters like **Lama Tsongkhapa**. The practice of equalising and exchanging self and others is an essential step in cultivating the **bodhisattva’s** motivation and compassion.

1. Equalising Self and Others

The first step in this practice is to realise that there is no valid reason to regard oneself as more important than others. The delusion of self-importance is a significant source of suffering because it leads to attachment, anger, jealousy, and all sorts of mental afflictions. Equalising self and others is about understanding that both oneself and all other beings equally want happiness and seek to avoid suffering.

Key Reflections for Equalising Self and Others:

- **All beings, including yourself, want happiness and freedom from suffering**: Just as you wish to be free from suffering and experience happiness, so do all other sentient beings. There is no difference in the basic wish for happiness between yourself and others. Your happiness is not more important than anyone else's.
- **Everyone's suffering is equal in significance**: There is no inherent reason to place more value on your own pain than on the suffering of others. The suffering of all sentient beings is equally painful to them, just as your suffering is painful to you. Therefore, from a larger perspective, it makes no sense to prioritise your suffering over the suffering of others.
- **The self-cherishing mind is a source of all negative emotions**: The idea that you are more important than others strengthens the ego and creates separation. This leads to harmful emotions like anger, jealousy, and greed. By seeing others as equally important, these emotions can be diminished.
- **Interdependence of happiness**: Your happiness is deeply interconnected with the happiness of others. You cannot truly be happy if others around you are suffering. Recognising this interconnectedness helps break down the illusion of separateness.

This reflection helps weaken the deep habit of self-cherishing and prepares the mind for the next step: exchanging self and others.

2. Exchanging Self and Others

The second stage, **exchanging self and others**, involves going beyond the recognition of equality and actively **reversing the self-centred attitude**. In this practice, you mentally exchange your habitual focus on your own happiness with the happiness and suffering of others. This is a radical transformation of the ordinary way we experience life. Instead of prioritising yourself, you prioritise others' happiness and well-being.

Key Steps in Exchanging Self and Others:

- **Imagine taking on others' suffering**: In this practice, you begin to visualise or imagine taking on the suffering of others. When you encounter someone who is suffering (whether it is physical pain, emotional distress, or difficult circumstances) visualise that you are taking their suffering onto yourself. You "exchange" their suffering with your comfort. This is not to feel overwhelmed by suffering but to cultivate deep compassion and empathy.
- **Imagine giving your happiness to others**: Along with taking on their suffering, you also imagine giving others your happiness. When you experience joy, peace, or comfort, you offer it to others in your mind, wishing that they experience the same well-being. This cultivates love and generosity.
- **Breaking the cycle of self-centred thinking**: By continuously engaging in this mental exchange, you break the habitual cycle of thinking about yourself first. You begin to cultivate a sense of joy and fulfilment from seeing others happy, and a willingness to alleviate their suffering.

The Purpose of Exchanging Self and Others:

The practice of exchanging self and others serves to uproot **self-cherishing** (the habit of putting oneself above others) which is the root of saṃsāric suffering. In contrast, the bodhisattva path is based on the understanding that all beings are interconnected, and that one's own happiness is inextricably linked to the happiness of others.

This method helps develop the **mind of great compassion** and the **extraordinary intention** to liberate all beings from suffering. It prepares the practitioner to adopt the **bodhisattva vow;** the commitment to work for the benefit of all beings.

Tonglen Practice (Giving and Taking Meditation)

A powerful meditation that is often used in conjunction with this method is **Tonglen**, the practice of "giving and taking."

Tonglen Meditation Steps:

1. **Start with compassion for yourself**: Begin by focusing on your own suffering. Recognise how painful it is and wish for it to be alleviated. This step helps you develop the foundation of self-compassion, which is necessary for generating compassion for others.
2. **Visualise taking in others' suffering**: As you breathe in, visualise taking in the suffering of others—whether it's a particular person, a group of people, or all sentient beings. Imagine their suffering as dark smoke or a heavy cloud, and breathe it in deeply, taking it into your heart. As the suffering enters your heart, imagine it dissolving your self-cherishing attitude.
3. **Visualise giving happiness**: As you breathe out, visualise giving happiness, comfort, and love to others. Imagine that your breath carries away bright, healing light or soothing energy, which reaches those in need and alleviates their suffering. Picture the recipients becoming peaceful and happy as they receive your well-being.
4. **Extend this to all beings**: Eventually, extend this visualisation to include all beings. As you breathe in, you take in the suffering of all sentient beings; as you breathe out, you give all beings happiness and peace.

The practice of **Tonglen** directly challenges the self-centred mind and cultivates the opposite; compassion and the desire to bring happiness to others. It helps weaken the ego and generates the altruistic intention needed for bodhichitta.

The Benefits of Equalising and Exchanging Self and Others

1. **Weakening of Self-Cherishing**: By consistently practicing this method, the deep-rooted habit of putting oneself first gradually weakens. Self-cherishing is recognised as the source of suffering, and as this self-centredness decreases, the mind becomes more open and compassionate.
2. **Development of Universal Compassion**: Exchanging self and others leads to the cultivation of genuine compassion for all beings. This compassion is not selective; it extends equally to friends, enemies, and strangers. The practitioner becomes motivated by the wish to free all beings from suffering.
3. **Strengthening of Bodhichitta**: Ultimately, this practice generates **bodhichitta**, the mind of enlightenment. Bodhichitta is the wish to attain Buddhahood for the benefit of all sentient beings. By reversing the self-centred attitude and adopting an other-centred one, the practitioner moves closer to the realisation of enlightenment.
4. **Interconnectedness**: Exchanging self and others helps to break down the illusion of separateness. It fosters a deeper understanding of **interdependence** and the realisation that one's happiness is intertwined with the well-being of others.
5. **Equanimity**: This practice also helps develop **equanimity**, a state of mind that remains calm and balanced, regardless of external circumstances. Equanimity arises because the practitioner no longer clings to their own happiness or seeks to avoid their own suffering at the expense of others.

Conclusion

The method of **equalising and exchanging self and others** is a transformative practice in Mahayana Buddhism. It challenges the deeply ingrained habit of self-cherishing, the source of suffering, and replaces it with compassion and concern for others. By recognising the equal value of oneself and others, and then exchanging self-focused thoughts with thoughts focused on the well-being of others, practitioners can develop bodhichitta and follow the path of the bodhisattva, whose ultimate goal is the enlightenment of all sentient beings.

Through practices like **Tonglen** and other meditations on compassion, this method becomes a practical way to cultivate the altruistic intention to help all beings and to dissolve the ego's grip on the mind. It is a profound and essential practice for anyone on the bodhisattva path.

Daily-Life Integration of "Exchanging Self and Other"

Below is a detailed expansion of **point 4 (Daily-life integration)**, offering explicit, practical guidance on what exactly to watch for in your mind stream. This daily-life practice, though challenging, is profoundly transformative if diligently applied.

What to Watch For: Signs and Subtle Whispers

Integrating the powerful meditation practice of exchanging self and other into daily life requires close attention to your mind's subtle movements. Pride, superiority, envy, jealousy, rivalry, and judgmental attitudes seldom announce themselves openly. Instead, they emerge quietly, almost unnoticed, subtly shaping your interactions. To truly neutralise these mental enemies, you must become highly sensitive to even the slightest hints or whispers in your mental continuum.

Below is a practical guide to help you identify and counteract these subtle mental afflictions:

1. Pride and Superiority

What to watch for:

- Subtle feelings of being special, exceptional, or somehow superior.
- Inner narratives comparing yourself favourably against others ("I wouldn't have made that mistake," or "I am more disciplined, intelligent, or ethical than they are").
- An instinctive desire for recognition, praise, or admiration.

How to counteract:

Immediately remind yourself of the inherent equality and interconnectedness of all beings. Mentally adopt the perspective of someone looking down on your present self (the meditation scenario). Notice how uncomfortable pride feels when experienced from the receiving end. Instantly, humbly, replace superiority with gratitude for others' contributions and abilities.

2. Envy and Jealousy

What to watch for:

- Discomfort or subtle irritation when witnessing others' good fortune or success.
- A subtle sinking feeling or disappointment upon hearing good news about someone else.
- Private internal narratives diminishing the achievements or happiness of others ("They didn't really deserve that," or "Why not me?").

How to counteract:

Consciously practice sympathetic joy (*mudita*), intentionally celebrating others' successes in your mind. Force yourself gently, but firmly, to mentally express happiness for them. Revisit the meditation scenario vividly: imagine yourself as the envious person suffering due to envy. Let that experience dissolve envy and transform it into genuine appreciation.

3. Rivalry and Competitiveness

What to watch for:

- Constant comparison, measuring yourself against others in mundane or spiritual matters.
- Quiet satisfaction in others' setbacks or quietly feeling threatened by others' accomplishments.
- Impulse to downplay others' achievements to yourself or others subtly.

How to counteract:

Immediately recognise the inner pain rivalry creates. Vividly imagine experiencing this from the rival's perspective. Then purposefully affirm and acknowledge others' good qualities and successes in your mind or verbally if appropriate. Replace rivalry with genuine cooperative intent—wish and support their progress.

4. Judgmental Mind

What to watch for:
- Constant subtle evaluations or critiques of others' behaviour, appearances, decisions, or lifestyle.
- Habitual internal commentary that categorises people negatively or harshly.
- Instinctive assumption of moral or intellectual high ground.

How to counteract:
Immediately reflect upon how flawed and limited all beings (including yourself) are. Remind yourself that everyone acts according to their karma and conditioning, just as you do. Consciously extend compassion and understanding toward their difficulties, challenges, and struggles, realising judgment only increases isolation and suffering.

5. Defensiveness and Irritation

What to watch for:
- Internal resistance or agitation when receiving feedback, criticism, or disagreement.
- Impulses to justify yourself defensively, even subtly and internally.
- Quick irritation or impatience with others' actions or words.

How to counteract:
Practice immediate patience and humility. Recognise defensiveness as a direct sign of self-cherishing. Remind yourself of the teaching that the enemy you see is created by your own mind. Thank internally the person providing criticism or disagreement for helping you overcome your inner enemies.

6. Subtle Self-centredness

What to watch for:
- Implicit assumption that your beliefs, preference, actions, comfort or convenience takes priority over others'.
- Internal resentment or subtle annoyance when your preferences or comfort are compromised, even slightly.
- A habitual inclination to ensure your interests or wishes are fulfilled before others'.

How to counteract:
Immediately bring to mind the meditation on exchanging self and other. Clearly visualise how it feels from another person's perspective when overlooked or neglected. Replace self-centred impulses with intentional actions and thoughts that prioritise the comfort and happiness of others.

Practical Hints for Daily Application

- **Mindfulness Alarms:**
  Set regular mental "alarms" to check your mental state frequently throughout the day. Ask yourself quietly, "What am I thinking or feeling now? Is pride, envy, judgment, or defensiveness present?"
- **Instant Countermeasures:**
  At the slightest sign of negativity, immediately recall the meditation vividly and replace negative thoughts with positive, compassionate intentions. Be relentless—do not let negativity gain even a moment's foothold.
- **Reflection and Accountability:**
  Each evening, briefly reflect on your day's mental activity. Note honestly where subtle self-centred thoughts arose, and deliberately plan how to counteract them tomorrow.
- **Cultivate Deep Humility:**
  Regularly remind yourself of your own faults, shortcomings, and limitations. Such self-awareness naturally tempers pride and judgmental attitudes.
- **Silent Blessings:**
  In social interactions, silently and sincerely wish happiness and freedom from suffering to

everyone you encounter. This gradually replaces subtle judgmental thoughts with compassionate intentions.

Additional Resources for Further Study

- **"Working with Anger" by Thubten Chodron**
  Practical methods to identify subtle anger, pride, and jealousy as they arise.
- **"Mind Training (Lojong)" teachings by Chögyam Trungpa or Geshe Chekawa's "Seven Points of Mind Training"**
  Directly applicable daily-life practices for overcoming subtle afflictions and cultivating profound compassion.
- **"The Way of the Bodhisattva" by Shāntideva (Padmakara Translation)**
  Chapters 5 and 8 offer practical guidance on exchanging self and other and guarding the mind.
- **"How to Practice" by H.H. the Dalai Lama**
  Specific sections on integrating compassion into daily interactions and subtle self-monitoring.

Final Encouragement

Daily-life integration is undoubtedly challenging—but it is also extraordinarily effective. By carefully monitoring even subtle shifts in your mental continuum, you can intercept and gradually weaken destructive mental patterns, creating profound and lasting inner transformation. Be patient and persistent. Over time, vigilance combined with compassion transforms every moment of life into profound spiritual practice.

References and Further Reading:

For deeper insights into practical applications of this teaching:

•**Shāntideva's *Bodhicaryāvatāra* (The Way of the Bodhisattva)** translated by the Padmakara Translation Group: particularly chapters on patience, introspection, and meditation.

•**Geshe Lhundub Sopa's *Steps on the Path to Enlightenment***: provides detailed explanations on transforming negative emotions, exchanging self and others, and methods for developing bodhichitta.

•**H.H. the Dalai Lama's *Practicing Wisdom***: extensive commentary on Shāntideva's teachings, offering clear guidance and practical meditation advice.

In short, although Appendix 3 clearly outlines a practice that might initially appear simple, successful implementation requires patience, emotional honesty, and continuous reflective practice. The profound transformation promised by exchanging self and other is precisely proportional to the sincere effort and consistency practitioners bring to this meditative exercise.

Bodhisattva levels (ten Bhūmis)

- The bhūmis describe qualities maturing rather than rigid steps; each later level includes and surpasses the earlier ones.
- While each is "paired" with a perfection, all ten perfections are cultivated throughout; the pairing highlights what especially flowers at that stage.
- Language varies slightly across translations; the renderings above are the most common and will align well with most commentarial sources.

1) Pramuditā — "Very Joyous" (Generosity / dāna)

The bodhisattva's first non-conceptual realization of emptiness makes awakening feel irrevocably possible, giving rise to great joy. Generosity becomes spontaneous and vast—time, attention, teachings, and protection are offered without anxiety or pride. Fear of loss and tight self-concern noticeably loosen.

2) Vimalā — "Stainless" (Ethical discipline / śīla)
Conduct becomes naturally spotless: precepts are kept without strain, and even subtle self-serving habits are purified. Moral clarity sharpens; remorse and confusion about right action fade. One's mere presence tends to calm harm and encourage virtue in others.

3) Prabhākarī — "Luminous (Radiant)" (Patience / kṣānti)
Like a lamp, the Dharma's light "shines" through steady forbearance. Anger and resentment rarely take hold; adversity, criticism, and difficult beings become workable. There is a warm, unhurried patience toward truth itself—willingness to look, learn, and stay present.

4) Arciṣmatī — "Blazing (Flaming)" (Joyous effort / vīrya)
Courageous energy "blazes": diligence is tireless yet balanced, free of grim pushing. Discouragement and laziness lose their grip; one maintains long, even arcs of practice and service. Others are heartened by this fearless, cheerful perseverance.

5) Sudurjayā — "Difficult to Conquer" (Concentration / dhyāna)
Attention becomes a precise, stable instrument; subtle agitation and dullness are mastered. Deep samādhi is available at will, and the mind can rest or investigate for as long as needed. This stability makes compassionate activity more accurate and timely.

6) Abhimukhī — "Face-to-Face (Manifest)" (Wisdom / prajñā)
Reality is met "face-to-face": insight into emptiness and dependent-arising is refined, flexible, and free of extremes. Wisdom no longer conflicts with compassion; skillful responses arise without inner debate. Subtle clinging to views and identities loosens markedly.

7) Dūraṅgamā — "Far-Going" (Skillful means / upāya)
Compassion travels "far": one can meet beings across dispositions, cultures, and needs with just-right methods. There's an ease in switching approaches—teaching, silence, protection, humor, ritual—guided by an intuitive sense of benefit.

8) Acalā — "Immovable (Unshakable)" (Aspiration / praṇidhāna)

Unshakable resolve: vows and intentions are like bedrock, unaffected by praise/blame, gain/loss, ease/difficulty. Samādhi remains steady even amid intense activity. Long-range aspirations guide countless precise, everyday choices.

9) Sādhumatī — "Excellent Intelligence" (Spiritual powers / bala)
Extraordinary discernment and strength: the capacity to teach, diagnose obstacles, and orchestrate conditions expands dramatically. Timely interventions become common; one's understanding reaches effortlessly into many fields and vehicles of Dharma.

10) Dharmameghā — "Cloud of Dharma" (Knowledge / jñāna)
Like a rain-cloud, Dharma pours forth unimpeded. The last veils to omniscience thin; compassion and wisdom express as spontaneous, ceaseless benefit without residue of self-reference. Buddhahood is imminent.

Note:
- Bhūmis 1–6: perfect the classic six perfections (1-6).
- Bhūmis 7–10: extend to the four higher perfections: skilful means, aspiration, power, knowledge.
- Five paths alignment: 1st bhūmi = Path of Seeing; 2nd–10th = Path of Meditation; after the 10th comes No-More-Learning (Buddhahood).

Meditation and Mind Training

Preparatory Practices: Six Preparatory Practices

In Tibetan Buddhist practice, the **"six preparatory practices"** (sometimes called the **six preliminary steps for meditation**) are foundational elements that help prepare the mind for effective and transformative meditation. These practices create the right mental environment and motivation before formal meditation begins. The statement you found refers to these as the context for cultivating **immeasurable equanimity**—a calm, unbiased attitude toward all beings.

Here are the **six preparatory practices**, as taught especially in the **Lamrim (Stages of the Path)** tradition:

1. Clean the place where you will meditate

This refers to physically cleaning and arranging the space to be conducive for meditation. It symbolizes purifying the mind and shows respect for the Dharma. It can also include setting up a shrine or arranging representations of the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha.

2. Make offerings to the holy beings

This includes placing offerings (such as water bowls, flowers, incense, etc.) on the altar. The act of offering helps cultivate generosity and reverence. These offerings are made not because enlightened beings *need* anything, but to train our own mind in devotion and merit accumulation.

3. Sit in correct posture and take refuge and generate bodhichitta

Once seated, you go through a short internal process:

- **Taking refuge** in the Three Jewels (Buddha, Dharma, Sangha), affirming your reliance on them.
- **Generating bodhichitta**, the altruistic intention to attain enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings.
  This is a critical mindset to establish before entering into Mahayana meditation.

4. Visualize the field of merit and make prostrations

You visualize the “field of merit,” typically an assembly of enlightened beings including your guru at the center, surrounded by Buddhas, bodhisattvas, and lineage masters. You then perform physical or mental prostrations, cultivating humility, reverence, and respect.

5. Purify negativities by practicing the four opponent powers

You perform a short purification practice based on:

1. **Regret** for past non-virtuous actions.
2. **Reliance** on the Buddha and the wish to return to a virtuous path.
3. **Resolution** not to repeat the action.
4. **Remedial action**, such as reciting mantras or engaging in virtuous acts.
   This clears obstacles and allows the meditation to go deeper.

6. Accumulate merit by making mandala offerings and requesting teachings

You symbolically offer the entire universe (often with a mandala plate or visualisation) to the Buddhas. You may also request teachings and guidance, internally supplicating the guru and lineage masters for inspiration.

Application to Your Quote

“Before a meditation session we practice the type of immeasurable equanimity that was explained for persons of small and intermediate spiritual capacity in the context of the six preparatory practices.”

This means that even before meditating on **immeasurable equanimity** (one of the Four Immeasurables), we cultivate the mind through these six steps. For **small and intermediate capacity** practitioners (those aiming for good rebirth or liberation), equanimity at this stage means **overcoming attachment to friends and aversion to enemies**, seeing all beings as equal in wanting happiness and not suffering.

So the quote suggests that you bring this **even-mindedness** (free from bias) as part of your motivation and mental tone before starting deeper meditation.

Meditations - the 10 most important

Here are **the ten most important meditations** to concentrate on, selected for their centrality to Mahāyāna practice and their power to transform the mind. These are core meditations for cultivating renunciation, bodhichitta, wisdom, and overcoming the delusions that trap us in saṃsāra:

1. Meditation on Emptiness

Purpose: To uproot ignorance, the root of all suffering.

Practice: Analyse the self and phenomena as dependently originated and lacking inherent existence.

Effect: Dissolves ego-clinging and helps realise the wisdom of emptiness — the direct antidote to delusion.

2. Equalising and Exchanging Self and Others

Purpose: To dismantle the self-cherishing mind.

Practice: Realise that all beings want happiness just as you do. Then imagine reversing the roles — take others’ suffering, give your happiness (see also *Tonglen*).

Effect: Cultivates deep compassion and altruism, central to generating bodhichitta.

3. Tonglen (Taking and Giving)

Purpose: To train in compassion by exchanging self for others.

Practice: Breathe in the suffering of others as dark smoke; breathe out love and joy as bright light.

Effect: Weakens ego, builds courage, and expands compassion for all beings.

4. Meditation on Death and Impermanence

Purpose: To reduce attachment and create urgency for practice.

Practice: Reflect daily on the certainty of death and the uncertainty of its time.

Effect: Leads to deeper renunciation and prioritisation of spiritual goals.

5. Analytical Meditation on the Nature of the Self

Purpose: To deconstruct the illusion of a permanent, independent "I".

Practice: Search for the self in body, mind, and aggregates; realise it’s a conceptual construct.

Effect: Weakens self-grasping and supports emptiness realisation.

6. Meditation on the Sufferings of Samsara

Purpose: To generate genuine renunciation.

Practice: Contemplate the sufferings of birth, aging, sickness, death, loss, and the

dissatisfaction of impermanence.
Effect: Shifts the mind away from craving saṃsāric pleasures and toward liberation.

7. Loving-Kindness Meditation (Metta)

Purpose: To counter anger and aversion.
Practice: Begin with yourself, then extend loving wishes to friends, strangers, enemies, and all beings: “May you be happy, may you be free from suffering…”
Effect: Builds universal goodwill and dismantles hostility.

8. Compassion Meditation on the Lower Realms

Purpose: To generate deep compassion and motivate the bodhisattva path.
Practice: Visualise beings suffering in hell, hungry ghost, and animal realms. Reflect on their pain without judgment.
Effect: Strengthens resolve to free all beings and reveals the full scope of saṃsāric suffering.

9. Mindfulness of Delusions (Midday Awareness Practice)

Purpose: To catch afflictions as they arise.
Practice: Watch for anger, pride, jealousy, etc., during the day. Apply specific antidotes.
Effect: Builds inner discipline and clarity; disrupts habitual patterns.

10. Bodhichitta Motivation and Dedication (Morning and Evening Practice)

Purpose: To align all actions with the path of awakening.
Practice: In the morning, generate the intention to benefit all beings. At night, dedicate all virtue to their enlightenment.
Effect: Transforms daily life into the path; strengthens resolve to become a bodhisattva.

These ten meditations cover the full arc of Mahāyāna practice — from developing renunciation and insight to cultivating bodhichitta and compassionate action. They are mutually reinforcing and should be cycled through regularly, depending on your immediate needs and challenges.

 Weekly Meditation Schedule

Here is a **structured weekly meditation schedule** that incorporates the **ten key meditations**. It is designed to balance analytical insight, compassion, renunciation, and daily mindfulness, while allowing for deepening over time. The structure follows the traditional Tibetan *Lamrim* progression and aligns with the *bodhisattva path* from both attached documents.

Each day includes:

- A short **Morning Motivation**
- A 20–30 minute **Core Meditation**
- A brief **Evening Dedication**

You can adjust session length based on your availability.

MONDAY – Emptiness & Wisdom

Theme: Realising the lack of inherent self

- **Morning**: “Today, may I see through the illusion of self and reduce ego-clinging.”
- **Core Meditation**: *Analytical meditation on the self*
  Where is the "I"? Is it in the body, the mind, or somewhere else? Can it be found independently of the aggregates?
  Evening: “Whatever understanding I gained today, may it help liberate all beings from delusion.”

TUESDAY – Death & Impermanence

Theme: Cutting attachment by seeing impermanence

- **Morning**: "Everything changes. May I not cling to what is passing."
- **Core Meditation**: *Contemplation on death and impermanence*
  Reflect on the certainty of death, uncertainty of timing, and the uselessness of worldly distractions at death.
  Evening: "May my awareness of impermanence inspire urgent practice and benefit all beings."

WEDNESDAY – Suffering of Samsara & Renunciation

Theme: Turning away from cyclic existence

- **Morning**: "Today I remember: Samsara has no true happiness."
- **Core Meditation**: *Contemplation on the sufferings of saṃsāra*
  Reflect on suffering in each realm and even the unsatisfactoriness of temporary pleasures.
  Evening: "May my disillusionment with saṃsāra lead to compassion and freedom."

THURSDAY – Self vs Others

Theme: Undermining self-cherishing

- **Morning**: "All beings wish to be happy just like me."
- **Core Meditation**: *Equalising and exchanging self and others*
  First, see others' suffering as equal to your own; then imagine exchanging places with them.
  Evening: "May I think less of myself and more of others, always."

FRIDAY – Tonglen

Theme: Taking suffering, giving joy

- **Morning**: "Today I open my heart to others' suffering."
- **Core Meditation**: *Tonglen practice*
  Inhale others' pain as black smoke into your self-cherishing; exhale joy and peace as radiant light.
  Evening: "May all suffering be absorbed into compassion and transformed."

SATURDAY – Loving-Kindness (Metta)

Theme: Replacing anger with love

- **Morning**: "Today I choose love over irritation, patience over reaction."
- **Core Meditation**: *Metta meditation*
  "May I be happy. May I be peaceful. May [loved one / stranger / enemy / all beings] be happy and peaceful."
  Evening: "Whatever love I cultivated today, may it grow and extend to all beings."

SUNDAY – Reflective Review & Bodhichitta

Theme: Review, rejoice, and strengthen motivation

- **Morning**: "May this life be of benefit. May I become a Buddha for others."
- **Core Meditation**: *Review the week's practices*
  What meditations were strongest? Where was self-cherishing strong? Rejoice in progress, renew your bodhichitta vow.
  Evening Dedication:
  "By the virtue of this week's effort, may all beings be freed from suffering. May I never forget bodhichitta."

💡 Tips for Success

- **Set a consistent time** each day — morning is ideal for motivation; evening for dedication.
- Use a **meditation journal** to reflect briefly on each day's insight or obstacle.
- If pressed for time, reduce meditation to 10–15 minutes but keep the **intention strong**.
- Revisit **Chapter 1 of The Bodhisattva Guide** regularly to re-inspire enthusiasm.

Calm Abiding: Śamatha

Śamatha (Sanskrit: शमथ, Pāli: समथ, Chinese: 止) is a form of Buddhist meditation that translates to "calm abiding" or "tranquility." It is one of the two main types of Buddhist meditation practices, the other being Vipassanā (insight meditation).

Key Aspects of Śamatha Meditation:

1. **Objective:**
- The primary goal of Śamatha meditation is to develop a calm, concentrated, and tranquil mind. It aims to cultivate a state of mental stability and peace by focusing the mind on a single object or point of attention.

2. **Technique:**
- Practitioners typically focus on a single object, such as the breath, a visual object (like a candle flame), a sound (such as a mantra), or even an abstract concept (like loving-kindness).
- The practice involves sustaining attention on this chosen object and gently bringing the mind back whenever it wanders.

3. **Stages of Development:**
- **Initial Concentration:** In the beginning, the mind is highly distracted and restless. Practitioners work on gradually lengthening periods of sustained attention.
- **Access Concentration:** As practice deepens, distractions lessen, and the practitioner experiences a state of concentration where the mind is more settled.
- **Full Concentration:** Eventually, practitioners can reach a state of complete absorption in the object of meditation, known as jhāna (Pāli) or dhyāna (Sanskrit), which are deep states of meditative absorption.

4. **Benefits:**
- Develops mental clarity, focus, and stability.
- Reduces stress and anxiety by calming the mind.
- Provides a foundation for deeper insight practices, such as Vipassanā, by stabilising the mind and preparing it for more profound explorations of reality.

5. **Integration with Vipassanā:**
- While Śamatha focuses on calming the mind, Vipassanā aims at gaining insight into the true nature of phenomena, particularly the impermanence, suffering, and non-self aspects of existence.
- Often, Śamatha and Vipassanā are practiced together, with Śamatha serving as the foundation that enables deeper Vipassanā practice.

Traditional Instructions:

1. **Posture:** Sit in a comfortable and stable posture with a straight back. The traditional lotus or half-lotus position is often recommended, but any posture that allows for alertness and comfort is acceptable.

2. **Breath Awareness:** A common method in Śamatha meditation is to focus on the breath, noticing the sensations of breathing in and out.
3. **Mindfulness and Relaxation:** Cultivate a balance between relaxation and alertness. Avoid excessive tension and strive for a relaxed but attentive state.
4. **Dealing with Distractions:** Gently acknowledge distractions without judgment and return attention to the meditation object.

Śamatha is an essential practice in many Buddhist traditions, including Theravāda, Mahāyāna, and Vajrayāna, each incorporating it into their broader meditation and spiritual practices.

Mind Training (Lojong): Seven-Point

This is a core practice in Tibetan Buddhism that focuses on cultivating bodhichitta (the aspiration to attain enlightenment for the sake of all beings) through transforming difficulties into spiritual growth.

Overview of Seven-Point Mind Training

Lojong, or mind training, is a practical approach developed primarily by Geshe Chekawa (1102–1176 CE), based on earlier teachings from Atisha (982–1054 CE). It emphasises transforming ordinary experiences, especially hardships, into opportunities to develop compassion, wisdom, and altruism. This is achieved by shifting our habitual self-centred perspective to a profound concern for the welfare of others.

The Seven-Point Mind Training consists of seven core points, each subdivided into various maxims or slogans that guide practitioners toward deep spiritual realization through everyday life.

Detailed Summary and Analysis of the Seven Points

Point 1: The Preliminaries

This first point establishes foundational practices necessary for successful mind training:

- **Reflection on precious human life**
- **Contemplation of impermanence and death**
- **Contemplation of karma (actions and their results)**
- **Recognition of the suffering inherent in saṃsāra (cyclic existence)**

Analysis:

These contemplations orient practitioners by making clear the urgency and value of spiritual practice, fostering motivation and sincerity. Understanding life's fragility and our fortunate circumstances inspires us to utilise our life meaningfully.

Point 2: The Main Practice—Training in Bodhichitta

The heart of Lojong practice revolves around two types of bodhichitta:

- **Ultimate Bodhichitta**

  - Cultivating wisdom realising emptiness (lack of inherent self-existence).
  - Seeing clearly the illusory nature of phenomena and self.
- **Conventional (Relative) Bodhichitta**
  - The compassionate aspiration and active commitment to benefit others.
  - Training methods like Tonglen (taking and sending), where one takes on the suffering of others mentally and sends out happiness and virtue.

Analysis:
Ultimate bodhichitta dismantles the illusion of inherent self and phenomena, addressing the root of ignorance. Relative bodhichitta directly counters self-centredness, developing compassion and altruism. Together, they form a comprehensive approach to awakening.

Point 3: Transforming Adversity into the Path of Awakening
This point instructs practitioners on leveraging life's challenges as catalysts for spiritual growth:
- **View difficult circumstances as opportunities** to deepen compassion and wisdom.
- **Realise that hardships exhaust negative karma** and test spiritual resolve.
- **Practice gratitude toward those who cause trouble,** seeing them as spiritual teachers.

Analysis:
Rather than avoiding difficulties, the practice reframes challenges positively. This point is transformative because it empowers practitioners to remain resilient, compassionate, and wise in the face of adversity, thus accelerating spiritual maturation.

Point 4: Applying the Practice Throughout One's Entire Life
The slogans under this point advise integrating lojong seamlessly into daily life:
- **Maintain continuous awareness and vigilance of one's mind and intentions.**
- **Keep practice steady regardless of external circumstances.**
- **Remain committed in both good and bad times,** cultivating equanimity and constancy.

Analysis:
The power of mind training comes from persistent and consistent application, transforming everyday interactions into spiritual practice. It fosters stability, resilience, and integration of Dharma into ordinary living.

Point 5: Measuring Progress in Mind Training
This point outlines ways practitioners can assess their spiritual advancement:
- **Reduced self-centredness and attachment** indicates authentic growth.
- **Increased patience and compassion,** even during provocations or difficult times.

- **Steadfastness in practice** despite life's ups and downs.

Analysis:
It provides concrete indicators of genuine spiritual transformation, focusing attention on internal change rather than external validation. This helps practitioners stay honest and accountable in their practice.

Point 6: Commitments of Mind Training
Practitioners commit to specific guidelines to strengthen their practice:
- **Avoid using lojong for selfish gain or personal fame.**
- **Avoid being inconsistent or hypocritical** in one's spiritual commitments.
- **Practice with sincerity and humility,** never making a spectacle of one's spirituality.

Analysis:
Commitments safeguard the authenticity of practice, ensuring lojong genuinely serves spiritual awakening rather than becoming another egoic pursuit. Integrity and humility are thus essential in maintaining the purity and effectiveness of the training.

Point 7: Guidelines or Advice for Mind Training
This final point provides practical instructions to support daily application:
- **Always train with joyfulness,** maintaining a sense of humour and openness.
- **Practice sincerely, but not excessively strictly,** avoiding rigidity.
- **Stay consistent, relaxed, and balanced,** letting practice become natural and unforced.

Analysis:
These guidelines emphasise balance, joy, and naturalness, underscoring the idea that spiritual practice should lead to greater happiness, not tension or anxiety. Cultivating a relaxed yet consistent approach makes sustained growth more attainable and enjoyable.

Additional Sections for Seven-Point Mind Training

Constantly Watching, Guarding, and Training the Mind

An essential aspect of effective lojong practice is maintaining vigilant awareness of one's own mind. The tradition strongly emphasises mindfulness and introspection as indispensable tools in training the mind:
- **Continuous Mindfulness:**
  - Maintain awareness of mental states, emotions, intentions, and responses throughout each day.
  - Notice immediately when negative emotions such as anger, jealousy, pride, or attachment arise.
  - Immediately recognise shifts toward negativity or distraction to avoid reinforcing harmful habits.
- **Vigilant Introspection:**

  - Regularly pause throughout daily activities to check mental states.
  - Develop a habit of asking: “What am I feeling or thinking right now? Is this thought or emotion constructive or destructive?”
  - Become skilful at recognising the subtle beginnings of negative patterns, stopping them before they escalate.
- **Guarding the Mind:**
  - Protect your mind from harmful influences by avoiding situations, thoughts, or associations that foster negative mental states.
  - Intentionally cultivate environments, friendships, and activities that support spiritual goals and positive mental habits.
  - Recognise and abandon mental afflictions as soon as they appear, rather than allowing them to gain strength.

Analysis:
Continuous mindfulness and vigilant introspection anchor the lojong practice deeply into daily life, transforming ordinary situations into meaningful spiritual opportunities. By remaining constantly attentive, practitioners not only reduce harmful thoughts and actions but also nurture an increasingly clear and compassionate mind. This level of self-awareness fosters deep emotional and spiritual maturity and serves as the foundation for profound internal transformation.

Battling the Self-Cherishing Mind
At the core of lojong training is the direct confrontation with the self-cherishing mind—the habitual belief that one's own happiness and suffering matter more than that of others. This selfish attitude is recognised as the primary cause of suffering and spiritual stagnation.

- **Identifying Self-Cherishing:**
  - Notice how self-cherishing manifests through self-pity, arrogance, jealousy, competitiveness, or the belief that one deserves special consideration.
  - Be honest in recognising the deep-seated preference toward oneself, noticing subtle biases in your attitudes and interactions.
- **Combatting Self-Cherishing through Tonglen Practice:**
  - Regularly engage in the practice of Tonglen (taking and giving) to intentionally reverse self-centred attitudes.
  - Visualise taking on the suffering of others, dissolving your self-centred attitudes and offering your own happiness and virtue back to them.
  - Deliberately place the happiness of others above your own comfort or convenience in daily interactions.
- **Cultivating Genuine Humility and Compassion:**
  - Repeatedly reflect on the interconnectedness of all beings, recognising your dependence on others.
  - Develop a profound appreciation for those around you, especially difficult individuals who provide opportunities to overcome self-centredness.
  - Actively replace self-centred behaviours with compassionate, altruistic actions.

Analysis:
Self-cherishing is the fundamental obstacle to genuine spiritual realization and authentic compassion. By purposefully challenging and dismantling this tendency, practitioners cultivate a heart genuinely dedicated to the welfare of others. Battling self-cherishing requires courage, humility, and persistent effort, but it leads to immense spiritual growth and the development of a deeply fulfilling and meaningful life.

Integrating These Points into Daily Lojong Practice
These additional dimensions—**constant mental vigilance and overcoming self-cherishing**—complement and strengthen the Seven-Point Mind Training by making it explicit how practitioners should actively monitor their inner states and directly confront the root cause of suffering: ego-driven attachment and aversion.

Practitioners who embrace these practices experience transformative spiritual growth, integrating lojong seamlessly into all aspects of life, allowing ordinary moments to become extraordinary opportunities for spiritual advancement.

By incorporating these two essential practices, Seven-Point Mind Training becomes not merely theoretical or occasional, but a vibrant, continuous discipline that leads to profound compassion, wisdom, and lasting happiness.

Importance and Practical Relevance
Seven-Point Mind Training is uniquely relevant to contemporary life. It doesn't require withdrawal from society; rather, it leverages real-world situations to nurture profound spiritual development. Its transformative power arises precisely because it turns daily difficulties into pathways toward awakening, compassion, and wisdom.

By systematically shifting perspective from self-centredness to altruism, lojong transforms mundane life into meaningful spiritual practice. It provides clear methods to measure progress, maintain sincerity, and cultivate joy throughout one's spiritual journey.

Conclusion: Core Essence and Impact
The Seven-Point Mind Training offers a practical and powerful framework to awaken and sustain bodhichitta—both ultimate wisdom and profound compassion. Its significance lies in its universal applicability, turning everyday moments into opportunities for deep spiritual growth.

At its essence, lojong is a radical shift in orientation from self-grasping to altruism, offering transformative practices that deeply alter how practitioners relate to life's inevitable challenges. Through continuous application, it ultimately leads to genuine compassion, wisdom, and inner peace, benefiting both the practitioner and those around them.

Recommended Further Reading:
- "The Great Path of Awakening" by Jamgon Kongtrul Lodro Thaye
- "Training the Mind and Cultivating Loving-Kindness" by Chögyam Trungpa
- "Advice from a Spiritual Friend" by Geshe Rabten and Geshe Dhargyey
- "Mind Training: The Great Collection" translated by Thupten Jinpa

These works offer comprehensive commentary and practical insights to deepen one's understanding and application of the Seven-Point Mind Training.

Mindfulness and introspective alertness

How they cooperate to defeat afflictions and delusions, the “great inner enemy.”

What they are (and are not)

Mindfulness is the faculty that *remembers* what you are doing and *keeps the mind placed* on what you have decided is virtuous or meaningful: the breath, the analysis of selflessness, an ethical precept, the bodhisattva intention. Its flavour is steady, gentle “holding.” It’s not analysis and it’s not tension; it’s the stable hand on the rudder.

Introspective alertness is the *quality control* that periodically *checks the mind itself*: “Am I still on the object? Has excitement or dullness crept in? Is self-cherishing narrating again? Is irritation tightening the chest?” Its flavour is light, quick, and diagnostic. It doesn’t fix; it *notices* so that you can apply or relax antidotes.

A classic image: mindfulness is the **doorkeeper** who keeps the right guest inside; alertness is the **spy** who patrols the corridors and reports trouble early. Another: mindfulness is the leash on the elephant-mind; alertness is the **mahout’s watchfulness** that feels the first wobble.

Why these two are necessary to defeat afflictions

Afflictions (attachment, anger, pride, jealousy, ignorance, and the self-cherishing they serve) arise when the mind gives **inappropriate attention** to their bait (“He disrespected me,” “I must have that,” “I am the real owner of these perceptions”). In the very moment of that turn, *memory* of the path is lost and the mind becomes unguarded.

- **Mindfulness** prevents that first loss. It remembers “what I’m doing and why” and keeps the mind with the chosen object or intention (e.g., “seeing all as dependently arisen,” “keeping silence,” “cultivating goodwill”).
- **Alertness** catches *quality shift* (coarse or subtle laxity, agitation, tightening, rationalisation, self-cherishing) before they harden into a full afflictive episode. Caught early, they are easy to release; caught late, they sweep us.

In Tsongkhapa’s training logic (and Shāntideva’s, Asaṅga’s, Kamalaśīla’s), this pair is the beating heart of both **ethics** (guarding behaviour), **concentration** (stabilising attention), and **wisdom** (keeping insight vivid without drifting into rationalisation or dull blankness).

How they work together moment-to-moment

Think in loops:

1. **Set:** Intention clarifies the object and purpose ("Today I will hold the breath lightly and regard thoughts as passing weather," or "I will meet everyone as a teacher and practice patience.").
2. **Place:** Mindfulness *puts* and *keeps* attention there; breath, sensations, analysis, or vow.
3. **Check:** Alertness scans for two families of fault:
   - **Excitation** (speeding toward objects, rumination, fantasy).
   - **Laxity** (heaviness, dimness, pleasant stupor; also the subtle kind where you're stable but clarity has degraded).
4. **Adjust:** On the basis of alertness' report, you **apply** or **release**:
   - **For excitation:** soften effort, shorten the breath, relax the chest/eyes, recall mortality and the smallness of the trigger, return.
   - **For laxity:** brighten the object (sharpen sensation detail), open the chest/eyes, recall the preciousness of this rare human life, stand up if needed.
5. **Re-place:** Mindfulness re-stabilises.

This is the micro-mechanism that, repeated hundreds of times a day, rewires the habit loops that feed the kleshas.

The five faults and eight antidotes (why this pair sits at the core)
The classical map:

- **Faults**: laziness; forgetting the object; laxity/excitation; non-application; over-application.
- **Antidotes**: faith, aspiration, effort, pliancy (against laziness); **mindfulness** (against forgetting); **alertness** (against laxity/excitation); **application** (timely antidotes); **equanimity** (stop meddling when balance returns).

Notice how **mindfulness** and **alertness** are the central, operational antidotes: they're what you actually deploy dozens of times each sit and each day.

In formal meditation
Shamatha (calm abiding). Choose a neutral, non-provocative object (breath at nostrils or abdomen). Let **mindfulness** hold it with about 30–40% effort; firm enough not to drift, soft enough not to clamp. Every 10–20 seconds, **alertness** glances in: clear or dim? tight or scattered? If off, correct briefly; if on, don't fiddle. Over time you'll learn to detect **subtle laxity** (stable but slightly hazy) and **subtle excitation** (stable but a faint forward pull). Alertness is trained to feel these micro-textures.

Analytic meditation (insight). When analysing, e.g., the "I," use reason to deconstruct the mind's habit of solidifying things; once a fresh, non-unsolidified sense dawns (dependently designated, empty of own-being), **mindfulness** *holds* that understanding; **alertness** *checks* for two slip-ups: (1) losing the analysis and spacing out; (2) solidifying the insight itself ("Ah! This is the truly existing emptiness!"). The moment either is detected, return to analysis or soften the grasp.

In daily life (the bodhisattva battlefield)

- **Ethics as continuous meditation**. Mindfulness remembers your commitments (precepts, bodhisattva vows). Alertness detects the precursors to breach: voice

tightening before harsh speech, greed tingling behind "just checking the news," the pride-pose of needing to be right. Because alertness reports early, you can *redirect behaviour* before karma is planted.

- **Self-cherishing counter-narrative.** Make "selfing" a named phenomenon. Mindfulness remembers: "I'm practicing equalising and exchanging self/others." Alertness flags the first "Why me?" swell. On the flag, do a one-breath exchange: "May their pain be eased; may my comfort be shared." This swaps the fuel line before anger or grasping ignite.
- **Emptiness in motion.** Mindfulness keeps a light frame of dependent arising ("this is appearances + causes + labels"). Alertness catches the instant something seems solid-from-its-own-side (a face, a word, a diagnosis). The catch dissolves fixation a notch; you respond more flexibly.

Affliction-by-affliction: what to watch and what to place

- **Anger/aversion**. *Watch*: heat rising, jaw/eyes tightening, rehearsing wrongs. *Place*: sensations in the body + kindness phrases; or quickly contemplate the other's suffering and your own future regret. Alertness will note when the flame drops from "grip" to "glow"; that's your cue to release effort and simply stay kind.
- **Attachment/craving**. *Watch*: forward lean, tunnel vision, bargaining thoughts. *Place*: impermanence and consequence; or the bare sensation of wanting as an object (curiosity, not suppression). Alertness notes when wanting loses its "must" edge; return to the breath.
- **Pride**. *Watch*: inflation of self-image, subtle contempt, comparison loops. *Place*: dependence on countless others (food, clothes, ideas), shared human fragility, specific gratitude. Alertness catches the first micro-flinch of superiority and you immediately widen the frame.
- **Jealousy**. *Watch*: scanning for others' advantage, sourness at their joy. *Place*: sympathetic joy (rejoicing) and the logic that their success harms nothing real in you. Alertness flags the next "yeah-but"; return to rejoicing.
- **Ignorance/solidification**. *Watch*: heavy dull neutrality, "that's just how it is." *Place*: dependent arising contemplation; brighten the mind. Alertness catches the slide into blankness masquerading as calm.

Don't lose mindfulness

Mindfulness is not occasional; it must be continuous. The moment it lapses, afflictions rush in and dismantle your Dharma: attention slides to inappropriate objects, self-cherishing takes the mic, and actions go off course. **Treat this as a live hazard.** At the first hint of tightening, rumination, or dimness, halt; re-place the mind on the chosen object or intention; then apply the precise antidote; soften for agitation, brighten for laxity, widen the view for grasping.

If a breach has already occurred, acknowledge it cleanly and repair it on the spot with the four strengths:

(1) regret; honest sorrow for the harm done;
(2) reliance; reestablish refuge and bodhicitta;
(3) remedy; a specific corrective act or practice;
(4) resolve; a clear, realistic commitment not to repeat.

Rebuild continuity immediately with small, winnable placements and resume vigilant care. Remember: mindfulness keeps the mind placed; introspective alertness checks quality. Together they guard the gate. Study the bodhisattva practices so you always

know what to adopt and what to abandon, and bind mindfulness to that knowledge so remembering actively guides every choice.

Common confusions

- **Mindfulness ≠ hyper-focus.** If you're clenched, that's attachment to performance. Ease by 10% and lengthen the exhale.
- **Alertness ≠ self-criticism.** It reports without scolding. If the checking voice is harsh, label that as agitation; soften and return.
- **Not only "on the cushion."** The gold is in groceries, emails, family conversations, queues. Treat each as lab time.

A compact training plan you can adopt tomorrow

Morning (10–20 min)

1. Re-affirm bodhicitta: "Today may I relieve suffering and its causes."
2. 8–12 minutes calm-abiding on breath. Train the pair deliberately: hold, check, adjust, re-hold.
3. 3–5 minutes analytic contemplation on **emptiness of self**: find the seeming owner of experience; fail to locate an independent essence; settle in dependent designation; then **remember** that frame for the day.

Daytime (micro-practices)

- Choose a cue (unlocking phone, standing, doorways). On the cue: one breath of **remembering** (mindfulness), one second of **scan** (alertness), one small **adjust**.
- Use **if-then** statements: "If I feel heat in the face → I soften belly/voice and postpone replies by one breath." "If I feel the scroll-urge → three breaths, then decide."

Evening (5–10 min)

- Brief review in three passes: what was remembered; what alertness caught early; what slipped past.
- Apply the **four strengths** in miniature when you slipped: regret (clean, not shame), reliance (refuge/bodhichitta), remedy (plan for tomorrow's cue), resolve (realistic, concrete).

Over weeks you'll notice the sequence shortening: the mind strays for seconds, not minutes; afflictions peak at "urge" rather than "episode"; ethical guardrails feel natural; analytic insight is easier to keep *in mind* without strain. That is exactly the pair doing their job: **mindfulness keeps you on the lane; alertness keeps you out of the ditch**.

Reliable Cognizers

Here is a detailed explanation of the four types of reliable cognizers in Buddhist epistemology, including their definitions, importance, and examples:

1. Direct Reliable Cognizers

Definition:

A **direct reliable cognizer** is a type of consciousness that apprehends its object directly, without any conceptual overlay or inference. It is non-deceptive and free from error in its apprehension.

Explanation:

This type of cognition includes sensory perceptions (e.g., visual, auditory, tactile) and certain types of mental perceptions (e.g., direct experiences in meditative states). It operates without the mediation of concepts or reasoning, directly apprehending the object as it appears.

Importance:

Direct reliable cognizers are foundational for validating sensory experiences and for grounding our knowledge in direct observation. They are essential for confirming the reality of phenomena as they appear to us.

Example:

- Seeing a red flower with your eyes and recognising its colour as red is an example of a direct reliable cognizer.
- A meditator in deep concentration directly realising the nature of impermanence through introspection is another example.

2. Inferential Reliable Cognizers

Definition:

An **inferential reliable cognizer** is a type of conceptual consciousness that correctly apprehends its object through a process of reasoning or inference.

Explanation:

This cognition relies on valid reasoning, logical deductions, or syllogisms to establish knowledge. It is particularly important for understanding phenomena that cannot be directly perceived, such as subtle truths or abstract concepts.

Importance:

Inferential reliable cognizers are crucial for advancing beyond the limitations of direct perception, especially in philosophical reasoning and the understanding of deeper truths like emptiness (śūnyatā).

Example:

- Concluding that fire is present on a distant hill upon seeing smoke is an example of an inferential reliable cognizer. The reasoning is based on the syllogism: "Where there is smoke, there is fire; smoke is present; therefore, fire is present."
- Understanding the concept of interdependent origination (pratītyasamut-pāda) through reasoning is another example.

3. Reliable Cognizers Based on an Example

Definition:

A **reliable cognizer based on an example** is a type of conceptual understanding that arises from observing an example or instance that illustrates a general principle.

Explanation:

This cognition uses specific instances or analogies to help understand a broader concept. It plays a transitional role, guiding the mind from the particular to the general through the power of examples.

Importance:

This type of cognition is valuable for teaching and learning, as it simplifies complex ideas by grounding them in familiar or relatable examples.

Example:

- Observing the impermanence of a flower wilting over time and using this as an example to understand that all compounded phenomena are impermanent.
- Learning about the vastness of space by comparing it to the vastness of the ocean.

4. Reliable Cognizers Based on Authoritative Testimony

Definition:

A **reliable cognizer based on authoritative testimony** is a type of conceptual consciousness that relies on the trustworthy words of an authoritative source, such as a realised teacher or sacred scripture.

Explanation:

This cognition operates under the assumption that the source of information is reliable and free from error. It is particularly useful for understanding phenomena that are beyond ordinary perception or reasoning, such as karmic consequences or the existence of other realms.

Importance:

Reliable testimony is indispensable for gaining access to knowledge that cannot be directly perceived or easily inferred. It serves as a guide, especially in spiritual practice, where personal experience of ultimate truths may still be absent.

Example:

- Believing in the law of karma and its effects based on the teachings of the Buddha.
- Trusting the description of meditative experiences given in a text like the *Lamrim* (Stages of the Path).

Summary of Importance:

These types of reliable cognizers together form the basis for valid knowledge in Buddhist epistemology. They help practitioners discern between valid and invalid cognition, guide their understanding of reality, and support their path toward liberation.

Understanding and utilising these cognizers allow individuals to:

- Distinguish truth from falsehood.
- Deepen their understanding of the Dharma.
- Cultivate wisdom by integrating direct experience, reasoning, examples, and teachings.

Renunciation

In Buddhism what is renunciation, how do I practice it, what am I trying to change/achieve and how can I tell that my practice is successful?

ChatGPT replied:

In Buddhism, **renunciation** is not about withdrawing from the world or rejecting pleasure out of guilt or asceticism. Rather, it is a **deep inner shift** in your attitude towards worldly life, rooted in a profound recognition of its **unsatisfactory nature (dukkha)**. It's a **turning of the mind**

away from attachment to saṃsāra (the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth) and towards liberation. This is the foundation of the path.

1. What is Renunciation?

Renunciation (*nekkhamma* in Pali, *nges 'byung* in Tibetan) means:

- **Deep disillusionment** with saṃsāric pleasures — seeing that no matter how enticing, they are ultimately unreliable, impermanent, and incapable of giving lasting satisfaction.
- **Turning the mind** away from the endless pursuit of pleasure, possessions, fame, relationships, and worldly success.
- **Aspiring for freedom** — to break free from attachment, karma, and the roots of suffering (ignorance, attachment, aversion).

It is **not repression or avoidance**, but clarity: the insight that craving leads to suffering.
"When you deeply understand that saṃsāra is like a prison with no escape through ordinary means, renunciation arises naturally — not from fear or aversion, but from wisdom."

2. What Are You Trying to Change?

You are trying to **change your habitual orientation** toward life. Specifically:

- From chasing **short-term gratification** → to seeking **true, lasting freedom**.
- From seeing saṃsāra as a playground → to seeing it as a **trap** of suffering.
- From identifying with "me and mine" → to dissolving the illusion of self and control.

This requires transforming the three **root poisons**:

- **Attachment** (grasping at pleasure)
- **Aversion** (pushing away discomfort)
- **Ignorance** (misunderstanding reality)

3. How Do I Practice Renunciation?

A. Meditative Contemplation

Practice the classic **Lamrim meditations** that gradually produce renunciation:

1. **Precious Human Life**
   Realise how rare and meaningful your life is, and how it can be wasted.
2. **Death and Impermanence**
   Contemplate that death is certain, the time is uncertain, and only your karma comes with you.
3. **The Sufferings of Samsara**
   Reflect on the suffering of the six realms, and even in human life: birth, old age, sickness, death, loss, disappointment, etc.

These contemplations **build emotional momentum** to renounce clinging.

B. Mindfulness in Daily Life

- Notice when you chase things: comfort, status, validation.
- Pause and observe: *Does this actually satisfy? Is it lasting?*
- Recognise the subtle dissatisfaction under constant craving.

C. Simplify Desires

- Voluntarily **renounce indulgences** that reinforce attachment (e.g., addictive entertainment, overconsumption).
- Practice **contentment** — not because things are bad, but because you seek something more meaningful.

D. Set Clear Intention

- Daily, **reaffirm your motivation**: "May I live not for fleeting pleasure, but for awakening, for the benefit of all beings."
- Link renunciation with **compassion and bodhichitta**: renounce suffering for yourself *and others*.

4. What Are You Trying to Achieve?

You are trying to:

- **Free the mind** from being dominated by craving and aversion.
- **Cultivate lasting inner peace** that does not depend on circumstances.
- **Create the foundation for bodhichitta** — because only a disenchanted mind turns toward awakening with urgency.
- **Approach liberation and enlightenment** — the end of suffering, the goal of the Buddhist path.

Without renunciation, even meditation and philosophy become ways to improve saṃsāra. Renunciation **gives depth** to your practice.

5. How Can I Tell That My Practice Is Working?

Signs of success:

1. **Decreasing Attachment**
   You are less pulled by sense pleasures, status, or material things. Desires weaken naturally.
2. **Disinterest in Samsaric Distractions**
   Activities you once found exciting (but meaningless) now feel hollow or tiresome.
3. **Stable Joy and Contentment**
   Your peace no longer depends on external conditions. You enjoy stillness.
4. **Spontaneous Compassion**
   Seeing others chase illusions evokes empathy rather than jealousy.
5. **Stronger Spiritual Focus**
   You value practice more than worldly gains. Your priorities shift.
6. **Increased Urgency**
   You feel the urgency to use this life meaningfully — not in panic, but in clarity.
7. **Deeper Meditation**
   Your mind is calmer, less restless. Renunciation supports concentration.

Final Thought: Renunciation Is a Joyful Freedom

Renunciation is not grim. It is the **joy of letting go**, the inner smile of someone no longer fooled by illusions.

As Shantideva writes:

> “All the joy the world contains
> Has come through wishing happiness for others;
> All the misery the world contains
> Has come through wanting pleasure for oneself.”

And as Lama Zopa says:

> “Real renunciation is the mind that sees saṃsāra as a prison and wants only to be free.”

Perfections and Powers

Perfections, Pāramitās: Six Perfections

The **Pāramitās**, also known as the **Six Perfections** in Buddhism. These are key virtues or qualities that practitioners cultivate to progress on the path to enlightenment. The Pāramitās are particularly emphasised in the Mahayana tradition and are essential for those following the Bodhisattva Path.

The Six (or Ten) Pāramitās

In their most common form, there are six Pāramitās, though some traditions expand this list to ten. Each perfection represents an aspect of the Bodhisattva's journey and provides a framework for ethical, meditative, and wisdom-based development:

1. **Dāna (Generosity)**: The selfless giving of material resources, protection, or the Dharma without attachment.
2. **Śīla (Ethical Discipline)**: Upholding moral conduct and living harmoniously with others by avoiding harmful actions.
3. **Kṣānti (Patience)**: Cultivating tolerance and endurance, particularly in the face of difficulties, suffering, or provocation.
4. **Vīrya (Diligence)**: Developing joyful effort and energy in pursuing virtuous actions and spiritual practice.
5. **Dhyāna (Meditative Concentration)**: Achieving mental focus and tranquility through meditation, preparing the mind for insight.
6. **Prajñā (Wisdom)**: Attaining deep understanding of the nature of reality, particularly the emptiness of self and phenomena.

The Ten Pāramitās (Expanded List)

In some traditions, the six are expanded to ten, adding:

7. **Upāya (Skilful Means)**: Using wisdom and compassion skilfully to guide others toward enlightenment.
8. **Praṇidhāna (Aspiration)**: Making heartfelt vows to attain enlightenment for the benefit of all beings.
9. **Bala (Spiritual Power)**: Developing inner strength and confidence in the Dharma.
10. **Jñāna (Knowledge)**: Perfecting deep and experiential knowledge of reality.

Importance of the Pāramitās

The Pāramitās are essential for Bodhisattvas because they embody the qualities needed to fulfil their aspiration to liberate all beings from suffering. By practicing these perfections, one gradually transcends self-centred habits and develops the qualities necessary for enlightenment.

The term "Pāramitā" itself can be translated as "to cross over" or "perfection," symbolising the crossing from the shore of saṃsāra (cyclic existence) to the shore of nirvana (liberation).

Powers: Four Powers

In Buddhism, the **Four Powers** are four key factors that make **purification practices** effective, particularly in the practice of **confession and purification of negative karma**. These Four Powers are essential in Vajrayana and Mahayana traditions for purifying harmful actions and ensuring that they do not ripen into suffering.

The Four Powers of Purification

These four elements work together to transform negative karma and prevent its future consequences.

1. The Power of Regret

- **Recognising and feeling sincere remorse** for negative actions committed in the past.
- This is not about guilt or self-blame, but an **honest acknowledgment** of harm caused to oneself and others.
- Example reflection: *"I deeply regret any harm I have caused through body, speech, or mind, whether knowingly or unknowingly."*

2. The Power of Reliance

- Taking **refuge in the Three Jewels** (Buddha, Dharma, Sangha) and generating **bodhichitta** (the mind of enlightenment).
- If one has harmed sentient beings, making a conscious effort to develop compassion and restore the relationship.
- Example reflection: *"I take refuge in the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, and I generate bodhichitta to purify my mind and benefit all beings."*

3. The Power of Remedy

- Engaging in **purification practices** such as reciting **mantras**, performing **prostrations**, or practicing **meditation** on emptiness and compassion.
- The **Vajrasattva mantra** is commonly used for purification:*OM VAJRASATTVA HUM* (or the full 100-syllable mantra)

- Other purification practices include reciting the **Confession to the 35 Buddhas** or engaging in **acts of virtue** such as generosity.

4. The Power of Resolve

- Making a **firm commitment** not to repeat the negative actions.
- The stronger the resolution, the more effective the purification.
- If completely avoiding the action is difficult, committing to **reducing** its occurrence over time is also beneficial.
- Example reflection: *"I vow to be mindful of my actions and refrain from harming others in the future."*

How to Apply the Four Powers in Daily Life

- **Before sleep**, review your actions from the day.
- Apply the **Four Powers** through reflection or reciting purification prayers.
- If a mistake was made, sincerely **regret it**, reaffirm **refuge and bodhichitta**, apply a **remedy** (such as a mantra), and make a **firm resolve** to improve.

Guided Meditation & Daily Practice for Applying the Four Powers

This structured meditation and daily practice guide helps integrate the **Four Powers of Purification** into your routine, ensuring effective purification of negative karma and strengthening your spiritual progress.

 Morning Preparation: Setting the Intention

- Begin with **three deep breaths**, calming the mind.
- Recite the Refuge Prayer:
  "Until I attain enlightenment, I take refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. By practicing generosity and the other perfections, may I attain Buddhahood for the benefit of all beings."

- Set the intention: *"May my actions today be guided by wisdom and compassion, and may I purify any negativity I create."*

🌙 Evening Practice: Applying the Four Powers

Each night, take a few moments to reflect and apply the **Four Powers** to purify any harmful actions committed during the day.

1. The Power of Regret (Acknowledging Harm)

- Sit in a quiet space and reflect:
  - **What negative actions did I engage in today?**
  - **Were there moments I acted out of anger, selfishness, or carelessness?**
  - **How might these actions have affected others and my own mind?**
- Generate **genuine remorse**, understanding that negative karma leads to suffering.
- Recite:
  "I sincerely regret any harm I have caused today, whether through body, speech, or mind. May my regret serve as the first step toward purification."

2. The Power of Reliance (Taking Refuge & Generating Bodhichitta)

- Take refuge in the Three Jewels:
  "I take refuge in the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, the sources of wisdom and compassion."
- Generate **bodhichitta**, the aspiration to attain enlightenment for the benefit of all beings:
  "From this moment forward, I dedicate my life to awakening, so that I may help all sentient beings be free from suffering."
- If you have harmed others, mentally visualize them and **generate compassion**:
  - Imagine their suffering dissolving in warm light.
  - Silently wish them well: *"May they be free from suffering and filled with happiness."*

3. The Power of Remedy (Engaging in Purification Practices)

- Recite purification mantras, such as:
  Vajrasattva Mantra *(short version)*:
  "OM VAJRASATTVA HUM"
  Or full 100-syllable Vajrasattva Mantra:
  "OM VAJRASATTVA SAMAYA MANUPALAYA VAJRASATTVA TENOPATISHTHA DRIDHO ME BHAVA SUTO KAYO ME BHAVA SUPO KAYO ME BHAVA ANURAKTO ME BHAVA SARVA SIDDHI ME PRAYACCHA SARVA KARMA SU CHAME TSITTAM SHREYAH KURU HUM HA HA HA HA HO BHAGAVAN SARVA TATHAGATA VAJRA MA ME MUNCHA VAJRA BHAVA MAHA SAMAYA SATTVA AH HUM PHAT"
- Alternatively, practice **prostrations** or engage in an **act of virtue** (e.g., generosity, kindness, or reciting the names of the 35 Buddhas of Confession).

4. The Power of Resolve (Making a Firm Commitment)

- Resolve not to repeat harmful actions:
  - If complete abstention is difficult, commit to **reducing** the frequency or intensity of unskillful actions.
- Recite:
  "I vow to be mindful of my actions and refrain from causing harm. May my mind be purified and may my conduct align with wisdom and compassion."
- Visualize **a bright, purifying light** dissolving all negativity, leaving your mind clear and peaceful.

🌟 Concluding Dedication

- Dedicate any merit gained from this practice to all beings:
  "May the merit from this practice purify my mind and benefit all sentient beings. May all beings awaken to their true nature and be free from suffering."
- Sit in silence for a few moments, resting in **natural awareness**.

Integrating the Four Powers into Daily Life

- **Morning Reflection:** Set the intention to act with wisdom and kindness.
- **During the Day:** If you notice negative actions arising, apply the **Power of Remedy** by immediately transforming the situation (e.g., offering an apology or redirecting emotions).
- **Evening Practice:** Engage in the full purification process before sleep to ensure daily renewal of virtuous habits.

By consistently practicing the **Four Powers**, you cultivate **purity of mind, speech, and action**, ensuring that negative karma is purified and replaced with **wisdom and compassion**.

Higher Realisations

Aggregates: Five Aggregates

The five aggregates (*skandha*) is a schema for categorising impermanent phenomena. In general, the five aggregates include all impermanent phenomena, but when they are spoken of in relation to a person, they are the basis of designation of that person. In his *Supplement* (*Madhyamakāvatāra*), Candrakīrti defines the five aggregates:

> Form has the definition "suitable as form."
> Feeling has the nature of experience.
> Discrimination apprehends [entities and] characteristics.
> Miscellaneous factors contain [all the others].
> "Individually cognising objects" is the specific definition of primary consciousness.

In general, the form aggregate consists of things that are material in nature. The other four aggregates are predominantly mental.

1. ***Form*** *(rūpa)* in general refers to objects apprehended by our sense consciousnesses; colours, shapes, sounds, odours, tastes, and tangibles. As noted above, it also includes forms for mental consciousness. **When speaking of the five aggregates that constitute a person, the form aggregate refers to the body.**
2. ***Feeling*** *(vedanā)* **is the mental factor of the experience of pleasure, pain, or neutrality.**
3. ***Discrimination*** *(saṃjñā)* **is the mental factor that apprehends the distinctive characteristics of an object and can distinguish one thing from another.**
4. ***Miscellaneous factors*** *(saṃskāra)* **are mental factors other than feeling and discrimination, such as emotions, attitudes, and views, as well as abstract composites such as karmic seeds and latencies of afflictions.**
5. ***Primary consciousnesses*** *(vijñāna)* consist of the visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, tactile, and mental primary consciousnesses that apprehend the general type of object. Visual primary consciousness apprehends colours and shapes, auditory primary consciousness apprehends sounds, olfactory primary consciousness apprehends smells, gustatory primary consciousness apprehends tastes, tactile primary consciousness apprehends tangibles, and mental primary consciousnesses know mental phenomena.

Unlike other mental factors, **feeling and discrimination are distinguished as their own aggregates. This is due to the special roles they play. Pleasant and unpleasant feelings evoke attachment and animosity, respectively. These emotions motivate sentient beings to create karma that ripens in birth in cyclic existence. Discrimination is the source of disputes because sentient beings discriminate one thing as attractive and another as repulsive, one idea as right and another as wrong. Becoming attached to their views, they quarrel with others who hold different views, thus creating karma that propels rebirth in cyclic existence.**

Attainments: Two attainments

In Buddhism, the "two attainments" typically refer to the two major aspects of spiritual achievement that practitioners aim to realize on their path to enlightenment. These are:

1. **Cessation (Nirodha or Nibbāna)**:
    - This is the ultimate goal of the Buddhist path: the complete cessation of suffering (dukkha) and the end of the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth (saṃsāra).
    - Nibbāna (or Nirvana) is described as the extinguishing of the fires of greed, hatred, and delusion. It is the realization of the true nature of reality and liberation from all forms of suffering.
    - Cessation is characterized by peace, freedom, and the absence of all mental defilements. It is often depicted as an unconditioned state, beyond the limitations of ordinary existence.
2. **Insight (Vipassanā)**:
    - Insight refers to the profound understanding and direct experiential realization of the true nature of reality, particularly the Three Marks of Existence: impermanence (anicca), suffering (dukkha), and non-self (anattā).
    - Vipassanā meditation is a practice aimed at developing this deep insight. Through sustained mindfulness and contemplation, practitioners observe the arising and passing away of phenomena, leading to a clear and direct perception of their transient and conditioned nature.
    - The cultivation of insight dismantles the ignorance and misconceptions that bind individuals to the cycle of saṃsāra. It helps practitioners to see through the illusions of permanence, satisfaction, and a solid, independent self.

Together, these two attainments—cessation (nibbāna) and insight (vipassanā)—constitute the culmination of the Buddhist path. Insight leads to the understanding necessary to achieve cessation, and the realisation of cessation is the ultimate fulfilment of the insights gained through diligent practice. These attainments represent the highest forms of spiritual realisation in Buddhism.

Trainings: The Three Trainings

In Buddhism, the Three Trainings (ethical discipline, concentration, and wisdom) are foundational practices essential to achieving liberation from suffering. These trainings align with the Noble Eightfold Path and are considered the core framework for progressing along the Buddhist path.

Fourth Noble Truth: The Truth of the Path (*Magga*)

The Fourth Noble Truth describes the path leading to the cessation of suffering, namely the Noble Eightfold Path, which the Three Trainings encompass and deepen. Each training corresponds to aspects of the Eightfold Path:

- **Ethical Discipline** aligns with Right Speech, Right Action, and Right Livelihood.
- **Concentration** corresponds to Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration.
- **Wisdom** is linked with Right View and Right Intention.

This path, structured within the Three Trainings, guides practitioners toward the complete liberation that the Four Noble Truths point to.

1. Ethical Discipline (*Sila*)

What It Is

Ethical discipline (*sila*) involves cultivating moral conduct by refraining from harmful actions and engaging in beneficial ones. This training is based on the precepts, which differ slightly for monastics and lay practitioners but generally include guidelines like refraining from killing, stealing, lying, sexual misconduct, and intoxicants. Ethical discipline lays the groundwork for a stable, harmonious mind and prevents actions that would create negative karma, which could obstruct spiritual progress.

Importance

Ethical conduct is foundational because it purifies negative habits and stabilises the mind. By practicing ethical discipline, practitioners reduce the agitation, guilt, and distractions that arise from harmful actions. A stable and peaceful mind can then progress more easily toward higher mental states, enabling deep meditation and insight.

Order and Stage

Ethical discipline is the first training because it addresses gross forms of attachment, aversion, and ignorance expressed through harmful actions. In the early stages of the path, ethical discipline is crucial for purifying negative karma, creating a supportive environment for meditation, and beginning to weaken ego-driven behaviours.

2. Concentration (*Samadhi*)

What It Is

Concentration (*samadhi*) involves training the mind in focused, undistracted attention, often achieved through meditation practices like mindfulness and breath awareness. Through sustained concentration, practitioners develop single-pointed focus and stability, entering deeper states of calm known as the *jhanas* or meditative absorptions.

Importance

Concentration is essential for cultivating a focused, steady mind that is not easily disturbed by fleeting thoughts or emotions. This mental stability allows practitioners to observe the nature of their own mind and experiences without being swayed by attachment or aversion. It is only with a concentrated mind that practitioners can fully apply the training in wisdom, as mental distractions obscure insight.

Order and Stage

Concentration follows ethical discipline because an ethically disciplined mind is less likely to be disturbed by cravings and aversions, making it easier to achieve focused concentration. It becomes especially important in the middle stages of

the path, as practitioners seek to cultivate calm, undistracted states of mind to prepare for profound insights.

3. Wisdom (*Prajna*)

What It Is

Wisdom (*prajna*) is the direct insight into the nature of reality, specifically the understanding of impermanence, suffering, and non-self. Wisdom is often developed through practices that reveal the emptiness of inherent existence in all phenomena, including the self. This insight into emptiness dismantles deeply ingrained delusions, leading to liberation from saṃsāra and, eventually, the attainment of enlightenment.

Importance

Wisdom is considered the ultimate training, as it provides the insight needed to sever the root of saṃsāric existence—ignorance of the true nature of reality. Without wisdom, ethical discipline and concentration alone are insufficient for liberation. Wisdom reveals the emptiness of phenomena and the absence of a permanent self, breaking the habitual attachment that binds beings to the cycle of rebirth.

Order and Stage

Wisdom is the final training because it requires a stable mind, undistracted by desire or aversion, which can only be developed through ethical discipline and concentration. Wisdom becomes particularly important in the advanced stages of the path, where practitioners use insight meditation to attain direct understanding of reality. It is the culminating practice that leads to complete liberation and the end of suffering.

Summary

The Three Trainings are ordered as ethical discipline, concentration, and wisdom because each training builds upon the previous one. Ethical discipline purifies actions, creating the mental stability necessary for deep concentration. Concentration steadies the mind, allowing the clarity required for wisdom. Finally, wisdom provides the insight needed to overcome delusion, leading to enlightenment. These trainings collectively represent the gradual process of purification, cultivation, and insight that define the Buddhist path, guiding practitioners through each stage from ethical conduct to the profound realisation of reality.

Stages: Two Stages

Buddhism what are 'the two stages'

In Buddhism, the term "the two stages" can refer to different concepts depending on the context and the particular tradition or teaching. However, one common interpretation of "the two stages" is related to the process of spiritual development and realisation. These stages are:

1. **Path of Accumulation (Sambhāramārga)**:
   - This is the initial stage of the Buddhist path, where practitioners accumulate merit and wisdom through ethical conduct, meditation, and the study of the Dharma.

- During this stage, practitioners focus on cultivating the foundational qualities necessary for deeper spiritual progress. This includes following the precepts, developing concentration, and understanding the basic teachings of the Buddha.
- The path of accumulation involves the practice of generosity, moral discipline, and meditation to build the necessary conditions for realizing deeper insights.

2. **Path of Seeing (Darśanamārga)**:
   - This stage represents a profound shift in understanding and realisation. It is characterised by the direct perception of the true nature of reality, often referred to as penetrative insight or vipassanā.
   - At this stage, practitioners gain direct insight into the Four Noble Truths and the Three Marks of Existence (impermanence, suffering, and non-self). This insight leads to a fundamental transformation in their understanding and experience of existence.
   - The path of seeing marks the transition from intellectual understanding to direct experiential knowledge. It is a pivotal moment in the practitioner's journey, where they begin to see through the illusions and attachments that cause suffering.

These two stages are part of a larger framework of the five paths (pañcamārga) often described in Mahayana Buddhism, but they can also be relevant in other Buddhist traditions:

1. **Path of Accumulation (Sambhāramārga)**
2. **Path of Preparation (Prayogamārga)**
3. **Path of Seeing (Darśanamārga)**
4. **Path of Meditation (Bhāvanāmārga)**
5. **Path of No More Learning (Aśaikṣamārga)**

In summary, "the two stages" typically refer to the **Path of Accumulation**, where foundational practices are established, and the **Path of Seeing**, where direct insight into the nature of reality is attained. These stages mark significant milestones on the practitioner's journey toward enlightenment.

Mental Factors: Eleven Virtuous Mental Factors

The eleven virtuous mental factors cause the omnipresent, object-ascertaining, and variable mental factors to take on a virtuous aspect and bring peace to oneself and others. Each of the eleven is an antidote to particular afflictions.

1. ***Faith*** **(confidence, trust, *śraddhā*) is confidence in such things as the law of karma and its effects and the Three Jewels. It produces a joyous state of mind free from the turmoil of the root** (see 3.8) **and auxiliary afflictions** (see 3.9) **and is the basis for generating the aspiration to develop new constructive qualities and enhancing virtuous aspirations already**

generated. It is of three kinds: *Inspired faith* knows the qualities of the object and rejoices in them. *Aspiring faith* knows the qualities of the object and aspires to attain them. *Convictional faith* (believing faith) knows the qualities of the object and thereby has confidence in it.

2. ***Integrity*** **(hrī) avoids negativity for reasons of personal conscience and self-respect. It enables us to restrain from harmful physical, verbal, and mental actions and is the basis for ethical conduct.**
3. ***Consideration for others (apatrāpya)*** **cares about the effect of our actions on others and avoids negativity for their sake. It enables us to restrain from harmful physical, verbal, and mental actions, acts as the basis for maintaining pure ethical conduct, prevents others from losing faith in us, and causes joy to arise in the minds of others.**
4. ***Non-attachment (alobha)*** **is not the mere absence of attachment, but the opposite of attachment and the direct antidote to it. Referring to an object in cyclic existence, non-attachment prevents and counteracts attachment and subdues obsession with attractive objects and people.**
5. ***Non-hatred (adveṣa)*** **is the opposite of animosity; it is love and benevolence, not just the absence of anger and ill will. When referring to someone who harms us, the harm itself, or the cause of the harm, it has the characteristic of love and directly overcomes anger and hatred. It is the basis for the prevention of hostility and the increase of love, benevolence, forgiveness, and fortitude.**
6. ***Non-confusion (amoha)*** **is the opposite of confusion. Arising from an inborn disposition and nurtured by study, reflection, and meditation, it acts as a remedy for confusion and ignorance and accompanies the firm wisdom that thoroughly analyses the nature and specific characteristics of an object. It prevents confusion, increases the four types of wisdom, and helps to actualise constructive qualities.**
7. ***Joyous effort (vīrya)*** **counteracts laziness and joyfully engages in constructive actions.** It acts to generate constructive qualities that have not been generated and to bring those that have to completion.
8. ***Pliancy*** **(flexibility, *praśrabdhi*) enables the mind to apply itself to a constructive object in whatever manner it wishes and dissipates any mental or physical tightness or rigidity.**
9. ***Conscientiousness (apramāda)*** **values the accumulation of virtue and guards the mind against that which gives rise to afflictions. It brings to fulfilment and maintains all that is good, protects the mind from pollution, and is the root for attaining all grounds and paths.**
10. ***Non-harmfulness*** **(non-cruelty, *ahiṃsā*) is compassion. Lacking any intention to cause harm, it wishes all sentient beings to be free from suffering. It prevents disrespecting or harming others and increases the wish to benefit and bring them happiness.**
11. ***Equanimity (upekṣā)*** **does not allow the mind to be greatly affected by restlessness and laxity without having to exert great effort to prevent**

them. Important for the development of serenity, it enables the mind to settle and remain on a virtuous object. This equanimity differs from the equanimity of the four immeasurables[14] and the equanimity that is a neutral feeling.

[14]Specifically concerned with the cultivation of **loving-kindness, compassion, appreciative joy and equanimity**. These four are called the Four Immeasurables because they are directed to an immeasurable number of sentient beings, and because the wholesome karma produced through practising them is immeasurable. The four are also called the sublime states of mind because they are like the extraordinary states of mind of the gods.

Dharma Body and Devotional Practices

Dharmakaya: Twenty-one Pure qualities of the dharmakaya

The **Twenty-One Pure Qualities of the Dharmakaya** refer to the ultimate qualities of the **Dharmakaya**—the truth body of a fully enlightened Buddha. These qualities describe the complete purification of obscurations and the perfect realisation of wisdom.

The Twenty-One Pure Qualities are divided into two sets:

1. **The Four Fearlessnesses**
2. **The Four Perfect Knowledges**
3. **The Three Kinds of Mindfulness**
4. **The Eighteen Unshared Qualities of a Buddha**

1. The Four Fearlessnesses

These represent a Buddha's unshakable confidence in teaching the Dharma:

1. Fearlessness in declaring perfect enlightenment.
2. Fearlessness in teaching the path that leads to liberation.
3. Fearlessness in revealing obstacles to enlightenment.
4. Fearlessness in explaining the definitive cessation of suffering.

2. The Four Perfect Knowledges

These refer to a Buddha's complete wisdom regarding:

1. The knowledge of all things as they truly are.
2. The knowledge of the variety of phenomena.
3. The knowledge of paths leading to liberation.
4. The knowledge of the dharmas that lead beings to freedom.

3. The Three Kinds of Mindfulness

These highlight a Buddha's perfect remembrance and mindfulness:

1. Mindfulness of past lives.
2. Mindfulness of karma and its results.
3. Mindfulness of the aspirations and mental dispositions of all beings.

4. The Eighteen Unshared Qualities of a Buddha

These are eighteen unique qualities that only a Buddha possesses:

1. No mistakes in actions.
2. No mistakes in speech.
3. No mistakes in mind.
4. No mistaken perception.
5. No decline in wisdom.
6. No decline in compassion.
7. No decline in meditative concentration.
8. No decline in realisation.
9. No decline in diligence.
10. Mindfulness that never lapses.
11. Perfectly free from any form of conceptualization.
12. Engages in activity based on wisdom and compassion.
13. Acts with wisdom and without conceptual fabrication.
14. Acts with perfect motivation.
15. Acts without partiality.
16. Acts without attachment.
17. Acts without distraction.
18. Acts for the benefit of all beings at all times.

Summary

These **Twenty-One Pure Qualities of the Dharmakaya** highlight the **completely purified** and **fully realised** nature of a Buddha. They emphasise **perfect wisdom, unshakable confidence, boundless compassion, and flawless activity** for the benefit of all beings. Meditating on these qualities can inspire deep faith and help practitioners cultivate the path toward Buddhahood.

Meditation and Contemplation on the Twenty-One Pure Qualities of the Dharmakaya

This practice is designed to deepen your understanding and internalisation of the Buddha's enlightened qualities. You can integrate it into your daily meditation routine by focusing on one or more qualities at a time, contemplating how they manifest in your own mind, and aspiring to develop them.

Preparation: Setting the Motivation

Before beginning, take a few moments to sit in a comfortable posture. Relax your body and settle your mind with deep, natural breaths.

Set the intention:
"May this practice help me purify my obscurations and cultivate the wisdom and compassion of the Buddhas for the benefit of all beings."

1. Meditation on the Four Fearlessnesses *(Complete confidence in the truth of the Dharma)*

- Reflect on the **fearlessness** of the Buddha in teaching the Dharma without hesitation.
- Visualise the Buddha sitting before you, radiating golden light, embodying supreme confidence and clarity.
- Ask yourself:
  - Do I have confidence in my own potential for awakening?
  - Do I fear criticism when speaking truthfully about the Dharma?
  - How can I cultivate the courage to share wisdom with others?

Mantra for Courage:
Recite silently or aloud:
"*OM ARA PACHANA DHI*" (a mantra associated with wisdom and clarity).
Let the feeling of fearless wisdom settle in your heart.

2. Meditation on the Four Perfect Knowledges *(Unshakable wisdom that sees all phenomena clearly)*

- Contemplate how a Buddha sees all things exactly as they are, without distortion.
- Reflect on **wisdom**: How often does my mind distort reality through assumptions, attachments, or aversions?
- Visualise a vast sky, clear and boundless—this is the nature of wisdom, free from confusion.
- Silently ask:
  - How can I deepen my clarity and discernment in daily life?
  - What causes my mind to become clouded?

Practice:

- Spend a few minutes in **silent observation** of your thoughts, letting them arise and dissolve like clouds in the sky.

3. Meditation on the Three Mindfulnesses *(Perfect remembrance and awareness)*

- Recall that the Buddha never forgets the past, present, or future effects of karma.
- Think of the law of cause and effect: *"Every action I take shapes my future."*
- Ask:
  - How does forgetfulness affect my spiritual progress?
  - What small habits can I cultivate to stay mindful of my actions?

Practice:

- Throughout the day, pause before major actions and reflect: “Is this leading me toward or away from wisdom and compassion?”
- Keep a small notebook to jot down moments when mindfulness is strong or weak.

4. Meditation on the Eighteen Unshared Qualities *(The flawless nature of an awakened mind)*

- Contemplate how a Buddha never makes errors in thought, speech, or action.
- Reflect on how often we act impulsively or unskillfully.
- Ask:
  - Which of these qualities do I struggle with most?
  - How can I cultivate mindfulness to prevent errors in speech or thought?
- Visualize yourself as already embodying these qualities—free from mental disturbances, effortlessly compassionate, and deeply aware.

Mantra for Purification:
Recite "*OM VAJRASATTVA HUM*" to purify any past unskillful actions.
Imagine golden light washing away negative habits, leaving only wisdom and clarity.

Daily Life Integration

1. **Morning Intention**: Each morning, choose one quality to cultivate throughout the day (e.g., fearlessness, mindfulness, wisdom).
2. **Mindful Speech**: Before speaking, reflect: “Is this truthful, beneficial, and kind?”
3. **End-of-Day Reflection**: Before sleeping, review how you practiced these qualities. If you fell short, visualize purification and set an intention to improve.

Conclusion: Dedication of Merit

At the end of your practice, dedicate any positive energy generated for the benefit of all beings:
"*May all beings awaken to their own Buddha nature. May my efforts in cultivating wisdom and compassion help bring about the enlightenment of all sentient beings.*"
This practice, when done consistently, plants the seeds for **awakening** and aligns your mind with the pure nature of the Dharmakaya.

Weekly Schedule for Cultivating the Twenty-One Pure Qualities of the Dharmakaya

This structured weekly practice integrates meditation, contemplation, and daily mindfulness to cultivate the enlightened qualities of the Dharmakaya. Repeat the cycle weekly, deepening your understanding and application over time.

Monday: Cultivating Fearlessness

Focus: The Four Fearlessnesses *(Confidence in teaching and guiding others to truth)*

Morning Practice

- Visualise the Buddha radiating golden light, embodying unshakable confidence.
- Reflect on how a Buddha fearlessly shares wisdom.
- Recite the **mantra for courage**: "*OM ARA PACHANA DHI*" (for wisdom and clarity).

Daily Mindfulness

- Speak truthfully and kindly today, even in small conversations.
- When fear arises, remind yourself: *“The Buddha speaks fearlessly. I, too, can act with wisdom and courage.”*

Evening Reflection

- Recall a moment when you hesitated to speak up today. How could you have responded more fearlessly?

Tuesday: Cultivating Perfect Knowledge

Focus: The Four Perfect Knowledges *(Understanding reality as it is)*

Morning Practice

- Contemplate the **clarity of a Buddha's wisdom**—seeing all things as they truly are.
- Visualise your mind as an open sky, free from distortion.
- Recite the **wisdom mantra**: "*OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNIYE SOHA*".

Daily Mindfulness

- Question assumptions—are you seeing things clearly, or through biases?
- Pause before reacting, asking: *"What is the reality of this situation?"*

Evening Reflection

- Did you catch yourself reacting based on habit rather than wisdom? How can you cultivate deeper awareness?

Wednesday: Cultivating Mindfulness

Focus: The Three Mindfulnesses *(Awareness of past karma, present actions, and future results)*

Morning Practice

- Reflect on **karma**—the continuity of actions and their results.
- Ask: *"What patterns am I reinforcing in my life?"*
- Sit for a few minutes in mindful breathing, bringing awareness to your body and thoughts.

Daily Mindfulness

- Before each major action, pause and reflect: *"Does this create wisdom or confusion? Help or harm?"*
- Take mental notes on how mindfulness shifts your daily experiences.

Evening Reflection

- When were you mindful today? When were you on autopilot? What habit can you change to improve mindfulness?

Thursday: Purifying Actions, Speech, and Mind

Focus: The First Three of the Eighteen Unshared Qualities *(No mistakes in action, speech, and mind)*

Morning Practice

- Visualise the Buddha's **perfect purity** in body, speech, and mind.
- Recite the **purification mantra**: "*OM VAJRASATTVA HUM*".
- Set the intention: "*Today, I will speak, act, and think with clarity and kindness*."

Daily Mindfulness

- Before speaking, pause and check: *"Is this true? Is this kind? Is this necessary?"*
- Keep track of how often unskillful speech arises and gently redirect yourself.

Evening Reflection

- What unskillful habits in speech or thought did you notice today? How can you refine your awareness tomorrow?

Friday: Deepening Concentration and Compassion

Focus: The Next Five Unshared Qualities *(Unwavering wisdom, compassion, and meditation)*

Morning Practice

- Meditate on **unshakable wisdom and compassion**—like a vast ocean, undisturbed by waves.
- Reflect: *"How can I remain stable in wisdom and compassion, even in difficult moments?"*
- Recite the **Bodhisattva Aspiration**: *"May I develop limitless compassion for all beings."*

Daily Mindfulness

- Observe moments when **anger or impatience** arise—can you meet them with wisdom?
- Consciously **practice deep listening** today, holding space for others without reacting.

Evening Reflection

- Were there moments of irritation or impatience today? How could you have responded differently?

Saturday: Developing Unwavering Awareness

Focus: The Five Qualities of Perfect Mindfulness and Freedom from Conceptualization

Morning Practice

- Sit in **silent meditation**, allowing thoughts to arise and dissolve naturally.
- Contemplate: *"Who is thinking? Where do thoughts come from? Where do they go?"*
- Recite the **mantra for clarity**: "*OM GATE GATE PARAGATE PARASAMGATE BODHI SOHA*".

Daily Mindfulness

- Notice how often your mind clings to **labels and concepts**.
- When caught in a thought loop, simply return to awareness of the present moment.

Evening Reflection

- How often did your mind create unnecessary conceptual stories today? What can you do to cultivate more presence?

Sunday: The Buddha's Limitless Activity

Focus: The Final Five Unshared Qualities *(Acting for the benefit of all beings at all times)*

Morning Practice

- Reflect on the **selfless activity of the Buddhas**—always working for the welfare of others.
- Ask: *"How can I make my own actions more beneficial to others today?"*
- Visualise yourself as a Bodhisattva, offering help and wisdom effortlessly.

Daily Mindfulness

- Look for **small ways** to be of service today—kind words, generosity, patience.
- Mentally dedicate your actions to **the benefit of all beings**.

Evening Reflection

- What was the most selfless act you did today? How can you expand your efforts in benefiting others next week?

Closing: Dedication of Merit

At the end of each day or week, dedicate any positive energy gained from this practice:
"May all beings awaken to their true nature. May wisdom, compassion, and fearlessness increase in the world. May this practice benefit all."

How to Use This Schedule

✔ Pick one **main focus** each day, but feel free to return to previous ones.
✔ Keep a small **journal** of your reflections.
✔ After a few weeks, **notice patterns**—where do you need more work?
✔ Gradually incorporate these qualities into **all aspects of life**.

Seven Limbed (or Branch) Prayer

The **Seven Branch Prayer** and the **Seven-Limbed Prayer** are the same practice, just referred to by different names. They are a fundamental part of Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhism, often recited in daily practice, purification rituals, and preliminary prayers. This prayer is designed to accumulate **merit** and **purify negative karma** by engaging in seven key devotional actions.

The Seven Branches (or Seven Limbs)

Each "branch" represents a different aspect of spiritual practice that supports the path to enlightenment:

1. Prostration (Reverence)

- Paying **homage** to the Buddhas and enlightened beings.
- Cultivates **humility** and **respect** while purifying pride.
- Example verse:
  "With my body, speech, and mind, I bow in deep respect to all the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas."

2. Offering

- Making **real or visualized** offerings to the Buddhas.
- Develops **generosity** and reduces attachment.

- Example verse:
  "I present offerings, both real and imagined, filling the entire sky, to all the Buddhas."

3. Confession (Purification)

- Acknowledging past mistakes and negative karma.
- Purifies **obscurations** that block spiritual progress.
- Example verse:
  "I confess all negative actions I have committed through body, speech, and mind."

4. Rejoicing in Virtue

- Rejoicing in **one's own** and **others' good deeds**.
- Cultivates **joy** and prevents jealousy.
- Example verse:
  "I rejoice in all the virtues accumulated by ordinary beings and noble ones."

5. Requesting the Buddhas to Teach

- Asking Buddhas and teachers to **continue turning the Wheel of Dharma**.
- Strengthens **one's connection to wisdom**.
- Example verse:
  "I request the Buddhas to turn the Dharma wheel for the benefit of all beings."

6. Requesting the Buddhas to Remain

- Asking enlightened beings **not to pass away** but to continue guiding beings.
- Develops **faith and gratitude**.
- Example verse:
  "I request the enlightened ones not to enter nirvana, but to remain and guide beings."

7. Dedication of Merit

- Dedicating all **positive actions** for the benefit of all sentient beings.
- Ensures **merit is not lost** and helps achieve enlightenment.
- Example verse:
  "May the merit from this practice be dedicated to the enlightenment of all beings."

When is the Seven Branch Prayer Used?

- As a **daily prayer** to accumulate merit.
- In **preliminary practices** (Ngöndro).
- During **sutra and mantra recitations**.
- In **purification practices** (such as Vajrasattva practice).

Om Mani Padme Hum

Below is a **full and detailed explanation** of the benefits of this mantra — both from traditional scriptural sources and from the perspective of inner transformation.

🔶 Literal and Symbolic Meaning

The Syllables: Om Maṇi Padme Hūṃ

Each syllable of the mantra is rich in layered meaning:

Syllable	Traditional Association	Purification	Realm	Symbolic Meaning
Om	Sacred syllable, universal sound	Pride/ego	Deva (God) realm	Body, speech, and mind of all Buddhas
Ma	Jewel (Maṇi)	Jealousy/envy	Asura (Demi-god) realm	Compassion
Ni		Passion/desire	Human realm	Ethics/morality
Pad	Lotus (Padme)	Ignorance/ prejudice	Animal realm	Patience

Me		Poverty/ possessiveness	Hungry Ghost realm	Diligence
Hum	Enlightened mind	Aggression/hatred	Hell realm	Wisdom/realization

So the mantra invokes the union of **jewel (maṇi)** and **lotus (padme)**, which together symbolise the **path (lotus)** and **goal (jewel of enlightenment)**.

🔶 Scriptural Source and Avalokiteśvara

The mantra is found in the ***Kāraṇḍavyūha Sūtra***, a Mahāyāna text that praises Avalokiteśvara. This sutra presents the mantra as containing:

- All **dharma teachings** in condensed form.
- A **complete method** for liberation from samsāra.
- The **seed of all perfections** (pāramitās), especially **compassion** and **wisdom**.

Avalokiteśvara, the deity associated with the mantra, is said to have **taken the vow** not to attain full Buddhahood until all beings are liberated. By reciting his mantra, practitioners **connect directly** with his compassion.

🔶 Benefits from Traditional Tibetan Sources

According to teachings from Tibetan masters (especially from the Nyingma, Kagyu, and Gelug traditions), the **benefits of reciting Om Mani Padme Hum** are said to be vast:

1. Purification of Karma

- The six syllables purify the six root afflictions (pride, jealousy, desire, ignorance, greed, hatred).
- They purify the negative karma that keeps beings trapped in the six realms.

2. Development of the Six Pāramitās

- Each syllable is associated with one of the six perfections:
  - **Om** → Generosity (*dāna*)
  - **Ma** → Ethics (*śīla*)
  - **Ni** → Patience (*kṣānti*)
  - **Pad** → Diligence (*vīrya*)
  - **Me** → Concentration (*dhyāna*)
  - **Hum** → Wisdom (*prajñā*)

Reciting the mantra cultivates these qualities and brings one closer to Buddhahood.

3. Protection from Harm

- Said to offer protection from dangers such as untimely death, demonic forces, and natural disasters.
- It is frequently carved into stones, prayer wheels, and flags to bless the environment.

4. Rebirth in Amitābha's Pure Land

- Regular recitation is said to plant the causes for rebirth in **Sukhāvatī**, the Pure Land of Amitābha Buddha, where conditions are ideal for attaining enlightenment.

5. Connection to Avalokiteśvara's Blessings

- The mantra functions as a **direct line** to the Bodhisattva of Compassion.
- By invoking it with sincere motivation, one brings Avalokiteśvara's energy into one's heart and mindstream.

🔶 Inner and Psychological Benefits

Even apart from the metaphysical or scriptural aspects, modern contemplative traditions and psychologists have observed powerful **transformative effects** of mantra recitation:

1. Mental Focus and Tranquillity

- The rhythmic recitation develops **one-pointed concentration** (samādhi).
- Helps settle restless thoughts and cultivates calm.

2. Emotional Regulation

- The mantra invokes **compassion**, dissolving feelings of anger, resentment, and self-centeredness.
- Regular practice shifts emotional patterns toward empathy.

3. Sense of Connectedness

- Reciting it reminds practitioners of their wish to **benefit all beings** — building a less egoic and more altruistic mindset.

4. Habitual Repatterning

- Mantra becomes a mental habit that can **replace negative thought loops**.
- Over time, the mantra "runs by itself" even without deliberate effort, especially in Tibetan oral traditions.

🔶 Commentary from the Dalai Lama

H.H. the **14th Dalai Lama** has said:
“It is very good to recite the mantra *Om mani padme hum*, but while you are doing it, you should be thinking on its meaning. The six syllables mean that, in dependence on the practice of a path which is an indivisible union of method and wisdom, you can transform your impure body, speech, and mind into the pure exalted body, speech, and mind of a Buddha.”
This underscores that **recitation alone is not enough** — it must be accompanied by **right motivation**, **understanding**, and a genuine **wish to awaken for the sake of others**.

🔶 How to Practise

1. **Motivation**: Begin with a bodhichitta motivation — “May this benefit all sentient beings.”
2. **Posture and Focus**: Sit comfortably, visualising Avalokiteśvara above your head or in your heart.
3. **Visualisation**:
    - Imagine the six syllables radiating light purifying yourself and all beings.
    - Visualise them spinning on a **mani wheel** or in a **lotus in your heart**.
4. **Recitation**: Softly or silently repeat the mantra, feeling it vibrate through your body.
5. **Dedication**: At the end, dedicate the merit to the enlightenment of all beings.

🔶 Final Thought

‘**Om Mani Padme Hum**’ is not merely a string of syllables — it is a **vehicle of transformation**, containing in seed form the entire Mahāyāna path. Whether whispered on a mountaintop or turned on a prayer wheel, it is a call to awaken our inner compassion and unite it with wisdom — the path and goal of all Bodhisattvas.

🔶 Repetition

Repeating the mantra ***Om Mani Padme Hum*** many times — whether **4 malas (432 times), 1,000 times, or millions of times** — is not simply a matter of quantity for its own sake. In Tibetan Buddhism, **accumulation of mantra recitation** is a profound and cumulative practice that purifies, blesses, and transforms the practitioner over time. Below is a detailed explanation

of the **benefits at increasing levels of repetition**, as understood through both **traditional texts** and **contemporary reflections**.

🔶 Why Repeat the Mantra Many Times?

The power of mantra comes not from the sound alone, but from:

- The **intent behind it** (bodhichitta motivation)
- The **purification it brings**
- The **habitual transformation** of the mind
- The **blessing of Avalokiteśvara** entering your heartstream

Each recitation is like planting a karmic seed. Repeated often enough, these seeds mature into compassion, wisdom, and eventually enlightenment itself.

🔶 Benefits of Different Levels of Recitation

🪷 A Few Hundred Times (e.g. 4 malas = 432 recitations)

- **Initial purification**: Begins to remove surface-level mental afflictions like irritation, distraction, and anxiety.
- **Mental focus improves**: The rhythm of chanting calms the mind and generates a meditative state.
- **First link to Avalokiteśvara**: Creates a channel for compassion to arise in your daily life.
- **Merit generation**: Even short sessions generate positive karma if done with sincere motivation.

🪷 1,000 Times or Daily Recitation

- **Builds momentum**: The mantra becomes a mental habit, arising spontaneously in times of stress or need.
- **Strengthens refuge**: You begin to feel Avalokiteśvara's presence as a protector and guide.
- **Purifies karma**: Especially useful for clearing heavy obscurations, habitual anger, selfishness, and mental agitation.
- **Aligns body, speech, and mind**: Reciting while visualising Avalokiteśvara and focusing the mind aligns all three.

🪷 100,000 Times (Often a Preliminary Requirement – Ngöndro)

- **Major karmic purification**: Removes obscurations from past lives and begins to alter deeply embedded emotional patterns.
- **Planting irreversible seeds**: This level is said to guarantee rebirth in a human body with a strong dharma connection.
- **Energetic transformation**: Body and speech begin to vibrate with the mantra; subtle energy channels begin to open.
- **Foundation for deeper practice**: This level of accumulation is often required before tantric initiations and advanced practices.

🪷 1 Million Times

- **Profound transformation**: Compassion becomes the default emotional setting. You see others through the lens of Avalokiteśvara.
- **Integration**: The mantra continues in the background of the mind, like a background hum or inner melody.
- **Blessing field**: You become a source of blessing to others — your speech and presence naturally benefit beings.

- **Powerful dedication**: The merit can be dedicated to healing, liberating others, or blessing an environment.

🪷 5 Million Times or Lifelong Accumulation

- **Rewriting the mindstream**: Your entire consciousness becomes shaped by the compassion and wisdom of the mantra.
- **Avalokiteśvara merges with your mind**: The deity is no longer separate — your own mind and Avalokiteśvara's become indistinguishable.
- **Unshakable rebirth in a Pure Land**: Tibetan texts assure that such accumulation ensures rebirth in **Amitābha's Sukhāvatī** or as a Bodhisattva in any form needed.
- **Becoming a vessel of healing and liberation**: Your prayers and presence benefit others effortlessly.

🔶 Traditional Teachings on Large Accumulations

In the **Tibetan tradition**, great masters have extolled mantra accumulation:

- **Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche**: "Even if you do no other practice, accumulating *Om Mani Padme Hum* with devotion will bring you to enlightenment."
- **The 14th Dalai Lama**: Teaches that repeating the mantra transforms the body into the **speech of Avalokiteśvara**, and the mind into the **wisdom of compassion**.

There are practitioners (including lay people) who commit to **100 million** recitations over a lifetime — with the support of daily practice, retreat, or group accumulation. In **Tibetan refugee communities**, even children and the elderly recite mantras all day.

🔶 Additional Benefits of Large-Scale Recitation

- **Creates a field of merit** for family, community, and all sentient beings.
- **Cleanses environments** of negative energy and blesses homes and retreat centres.
- **Uplifts the dead**: Mantras dedicated to the deceased can help guide them through the bardo and into higher rebirths.
- **Forms a spiritual "storehouse"**: Every syllable is said to remain in the mental continuum, aiding future rebirths, realizations, and even dream clarity.

🔶 Important Reminders

- **Sincerity over numbers**: Though numbers are useful for discipline and focus, it is more beneficial to recite with bodhichitta and mindfulness than to rush through.
- **Use mala beads** to help count — traditionally 108 beads, minus 8 for error, so 100 per round.
- **Visualisation and feeling** enhance the effect: Imagine light rays from the mantra blessing all beings.

🔶 Final Reflection

To recite *Om Mani Padme Hum* is to walk the entire path of the Bodhisattva — from purification to awakening — with **compassion as your compass**. Whether you recite it 100 times or 10 million times, each recitation is a **gift to all beings**, a **blessing to your own mind**, and a **step toward Buddhahood**.

Sources

The detailed explanation I provided earlier on the mantra ***Om Mani Padme Hum*** draws from a combination of traditional Buddhist scriptures, teachings from esteemed Tibetan masters, and contemporary interpretations. Here's an overview of the primary sources and references that informed the analysis:

📜 Scriptural Foundations

1. Kāraṇḍavyūha Sūtra

This Mahāyāna Buddhist text, dating back to the 4th or 5th century CE, is the earliest known source introducing the mantra *Om Mani Padme Hum*. In this sutra, the mantra is described as the "innermost heart" (*paramahrdaya*) of Avalokiteśvara and is said to encapsulate the essence of all Buddhist teachings. Recitation of this mantra is presented as a means to purify the six realms of existence and to attain liberation.wisdomlib.org

🧘 Teachings from Tibetan Masters

2. His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama

The Dalai Lama emphasises the importance of understanding the profound meaning behind the mantra during recitation. He explains that the six syllables represent the transformation of impure body, speech, and mind into the pure exalted body, speech, and mind of a Buddha through the union of method and wisdom. LotusBuddhas

3. Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche

A revered Tibetan lama, he elucidates that each syllable of the mantra corresponds to one of the six perfections (*pāramitās*):

- **Om**: Generosity
- **Ma**: Ethics
- **Ni**: Patience
- **Pad**: Diligence
- **Me**: Concentration
- **Hum**: Wisdom

Reciting the mantra aids in cultivating these virtues, guiding practitioners along the path to enlightenment.

🌸 Contemporary Interpretations and Commentaries

4. Lama Zopa Rinpoche

He highlights the boundless benefits of reciting *Om Mani Padme Hum*, stating that even a single recitation can purify vast negative karma. Regular practice is believed to protect one's rebirths for seven generations from rebirth in lower realms. tibetanbuddhistencyclopedia.com

5. Mindworks.org

This platform provides insights into how the mantra aligns with the six perfections and serves as a tool for purifying mental afflictions, emphasising its role in personal transformation and spiritual growth.

🔍 Additional Resources

For further exploration and deeper understanding, you might find these resources valuable:

- **Rigpa Wiki**: Offers detailed explanations on the Mani mantra and its significance in Tibetan Buddhism.
- **Buddhist Encyclopaedia**: Provides comprehensive information on various Buddhist practices, including mantras and their benefits. tibetanbuddhistencyclopedia.com

- **LotusBuddhas.com**: Delivers interpretations and teachings related to the mantra and its application in daily practice.

Lamrim Broad outline of the Lamrim (Stages of the Path)

1) Orientation—why stages?

Lamrim sequences the entire Dharma so an ordinary practitioner can progress without confusion. Keep three maps in view:

- the **three scopes** (initial → intermediate → great),
- the **three principal aspects** (renunciation, bodhicitta, correct view)
- the **milestones** (five paths and ten bhūmis).

Each topic you study plugs into one or more of these maps.

2) Preparatory foundation

We begin by **relying on a qualified teacher** (checking qualities; relying on instructions realistically). Then the **four reflections that turn the mind**:

(1) **precious human life**—rare, powerful, time-limited;
(2) **death & impermanence**—practice now;
(3) **unsatisfactory states**—a sober warning;
(4) **karma**—causes bring results, so ethics matters.

From here we **take refuge** in Buddha, Dharma, Saṅgha, and establish an e**thical baseline**—precepts and mindful restraint—the soil for meditation and insight.

3) The three scopes (three kinds of practitioner)

- **Initial scope**: Aim is **fortunate rebirth** and safety from the worst suffering. Practice is straightforward: abandon non-virtue, cultivate virtue, dedicate merit.
- **Intermediate scope**: Aim is **personal liberation from saṃsāra**. We contemplate the **defects of saṃsāra**, the **Four Noble Truths**, and **twelve links**; train the **three higher trainings—ethics**, **śamatha (stable attention)**, and **vipaśyanā (insight)**.
- **Great scope**: Aim is **buddhahood for all beings**. Generate **bodhicitta**, the "superior thought" that accepts responsibility to free every being. Cultivate it via **seven-cause-and-effect** and **equalising & exchanging self and others** (with **tonglen** as applied method). Live the **six perfections** (generosity, ethics, patience, joyous effort, concentration, wisdom) with the **union of śamatha and vipaśyanā**; here **ultimate bodhicitta** is direct realization of emptiness.

4) Cross-sections & milestones (running through everything)

- **Three principal aspects:** renunciation (realistic disillusionment with cyclic life), bodhicitta (vast responsibility), correct view (emptiness as dependent arising).
- **Five paths**: accumulation → preparation → **seeing** (first direct realization of emptiness) → meditation (removing subtler obscurations) → no-more-learning (buddhahood).
- **Ten bhūmis**: progressive deepening of compassion, power, and wisdom.
  1. **Pramuditā ("Very Joyous") — Generosity (dāna)**
     First nonconceptual realization of emptiness: entry to the path of seeing; great joy and irreversible commitment to awakening.
  2. **Vimalā ("Stainless") — Ethical discipline (śīla)**
     Conduct becomes naturally spotless; deep purification of coarse ethical faults and spontaneous care for precepts.
  3. **Prabhākarī ("Luminous / Radiant") — Patience (kṣānti)**
     The light of the Dharma "shines": unshakeable patience with beings, conditions, and the truth itself.

4. **Arciṣmatī ("Blazing / Radiant") — Joyous effort (vīrya)**
   Energy blazes forth; tireless perseverance in vast virtue without discouragement or burnout.
5. **Sudurjayā ("Difficult to Conquer")** — Concentration (dhyāna)
   Mastery of samādhi; subtle distractions are "hard to conquer" no more—attention becomes a perfectly stable tool.
6. **Abhimukhī ("Face-to-Face / Manifest") — Wisdom (prajñā)**
   Reality is met "face-to-face": profound, flexible wisdom that integrates emptiness with dependent-arising in action.
7. **Dūraṅgamā ("Far-Going") — Skillful means (upāya)**
   Goes "far" in benefiting beings; effortless alignment of compassion and wisdom across countless methods.
8. **Acalā ("Immovable / Unshakable") — Aspiration/Vows (praṇidhāna)**
   Unshakable in samādhi and vow; cannot be turned back by obstacles or extremes.
9. **Sādhumatī ("Excellent Intelligence") — Spiritual powers (bala)**
   Exceptional discernment and spiritual strength; vast mastery in teaching, taming, and timely interventions.
10. **Dharmameghā ("Cloud of Dharma") — Knowledge (jñāna)**
    Like a cloud that rains Dharma on beings; the final obscurations to omniscience are on the verge of clearing—buddhahood is next (path of no-more-learning).

- **Two accumulations**: merit (method) and wisdom (insight).
- **Two truths**: conventional and ultimate—two ways one reality functions.

5) Practice integration—cushion & life

- Use the six preparatory practices to start sessions.
- A compact daily arc: refuge & bodhicitta → brief lamrim recall (set the scope) → main practice (śamatha, vipaśyanā on emptiness, or lojong) → **dedication & rejoicing**.
- Off-cushion, train vigilance and antidotes, carry a few **lojong slogans**, and repeatedly dedicate merit.

6) Optional advanced entry: Vajrayāna

Tantra is "swift" but stands on the full lamrim base. With empowerment and vows, one practices generation and completion stages to rapidly complete the two accumulations—never a bypass of ethics, bodhicitta, or emptiness.

7) Common pitfalls & correctives

Skipping scopes, meditating without ethical repair, compassion fatigue (counter with rejoicing and balanced effort), and wrong views of emptiness (steer between nihilism and eternalism via dependent arising).

Emptiness and Daily Behaviour

Question. In the work on Emptiness and its importance in Buddhism, I can easily understand that everything and person in empty of an inherent existence (everything and person is constantly changing, people are different in each life and even during this one.). The texts stress how important this understanding is . What I cannot see is how this understanding will change my daily behaviour.

This is a profound and honest question; and one that goes to the very heart of Buddhist practice. It's one thing to understand emptiness **philosophically or intellectually**, but quite another to see how it transforms our **moment-to-moment experience and behaviour**.
Let's unpack this step by step.

🧠 What You Understand: Emptiness as Lack of Inherent Existence

You've grasped the essential insight:

- **Persons and phenomena do not exist inherently**—that is, from their own side, independent of causes, parts, and the mind that apprehends them.
- **Things are empty** because they arise dependently: on causes and conditions, on their parts, and on conceptual designation.

🤔 The Gap: "How does this change how I act or feel?"

You're not alone in this. Many practitioners grasp the idea of emptiness but don't immediately see how it shifts day-to-day behaviour. Let's explore how the realisation of emptiness **radically transforms** our experience of:

1. Reacting to People and Situations

- **Without Emptiness**:
  When someone insults us, we instinctively feel hurt, angry, or offended. Why? Because we believe in a **solid "me"** being attacked by a solid "other."
- **With Emptiness**:
  We see that "I" am not some fixed, fragile identity. The insult was words dependent on someone else's conditioning, mood, projections.

  👉 *Result*: You feel less compelled to retaliate or collapse into self-pity. Compassion becomes easier.

Real-life shift: Someone cuts you off in traffic. Instead of "How dare he do *that* to *me*," you might notice how the mind is constructing a narrative. You let it dissolve.

2. Reducing Craving and Clinging

- **Without Emptiness**:
  We chase after things—a partner, status, possessions—believing they will bring lasting satisfaction. We cling to them because they seem solid and essential.
- **With Emptiness**:
  You realise these things arise and pass due to countless factors. Even the one craving them is not fixed.

  👉 *Result*: The grip of attachment loosens. You can enjoy things without being possessed by them.

Real-life shift: You desire recognition at work. Instead of being obsessed, you see both the desire and the "self" wanting it as impermanent and constructed. The pressure drops.

3. Loosening Anger and Aversion

- **Without Emptiness**:
  We see an enemy or a source of pain as inherently bad. We exaggerate faults and solidify them.
- **With Emptiness**:
  That "enemy" is a flux of conditions, just like us—shaped by karma, upbringing, fear.

  👉 *Result*: We see the commonality and reduce reactivity.

Real-life shift: An old family grievance flares up. You remember: both sides are stories built on shifting causes. Forgiveness arises naturally.

4. Facing Aging, Illness, and Death

- **Without Emptiness**:
  We fear decline because we identify with the body or ego-self as who we truly are.
- **With Emptiness**:
  You see that the self is not a single unchanging entity, but a process—flowing and evolving.

  👉 *Result*: Fear lessens. You meet aging and death with greater acceptance.

Real-life shift: You notice grey hair or forgetfulness. Instead of panic, you observe with curiosity: “This too is changing. So am I. But who is ‘I’?”

5. Practising Compassion

Perhaps most powerfully:

- **Without Emptiness**:
  Compassion risks becoming pity, superiority, or burnout—because we think others are *truly* suffering beings, locked into fixed identities.
- **With Emptiness**:
  We see suffering as dependently arisen. We know the sufferer is not inherently defective.

  👉 *Result*: Compassion becomes spacious, wise, and enduring.

Real-life shift: You help a friend in distress. You're not weighed down by their pain or caught in ego ("I'm the helper"). You're present, open, available.

🪷 Meditation and Reflection: Bridging the Gap

To let emptiness transform daily life:

- Reflect often: “This anger/desire/thought—does it exist as it appears?”
- Use analytical meditation: “Is there a real ‘me’ being hurt right now?”
- Watch your projections: “Am I seeing the object, or my concepts about it?”
- Combine with lojong (mind training): e.g., “Regard all phenomena as dreams.”

📌 In Summary

Understanding emptiness isn't about escaping the world—it’s about **seeing it more clearly**, with fewer delusions. This doesn’t make us passive or disengaged—it makes us free:

- Free to act wisely without clinging.
- Free to feel love without possessiveness.
- Free to serve without ego.

Your question shows you're on the cusp of moving from intellectual understanding to transformative insight. That’s where real practice begins.

Question. Helpful. In Tibetan Buddhism, we are striving to achieve bodhichitta (becoming a buddha in order to help all sentient beings achieve enlightenment). I can clearly see that without really understanding the emptiness of "I", feelings of superiority will completely destroy the full compassion and right motivation needed. How do I achieve this understanding and change my behaviour in real life?

That’s beautifully observed—and absolutely central to the Mahāyāna path. You’re not just asking “How can I understand emptiness?” but more powerfully: **“How do I *live* it, so that my bodhichitta is real and uncorrupted by ego?”**
This is the very challenge the great Tibetan masters have addressed for centuries.
Let’s break it into **two interwoven aspects**:

1. 🧠 Achieving the Understanding of Emptiness of "I"

This is the wisdom side of the path. Without it, bodhichitta remains shaky—corrupted by pride, subtle self-clinging, or a desire to be a "heroic saviour."

A. What You Are Trying to Realise

You are *not* trying to realise that "I don't exist." That leads to nihilism.
You are trying to realise:
❝ The "I" appears to exist as something solid, independent, and findable—but when you search for it among the aggregates (body, feelings, mind, consciousness), it can't be found. Yet there is still a conventional "I" that functions, speaks, learns, and aspires to awakening. ❞
—based on Chandrakīrti's and Tsongkhapa's Middle Way teachings.
This insight is subtle, experiential, and *must* be cultivated gradually.

B. How to Cultivate That Insight

i. Analytical Meditation on the Self

Use this classic Tibetan method repeatedly:

- Sit quietly and ask:
  "Where is the 'I'? In the body? The mind? The combination?"

- Examine: "If I lose an arm, am I less 'me'? If a thought vanishes, where did 'I' go?"
- Ask: "What exactly is the 'I' that feels superior, insulted, or proud?"
- Keep searching until the apparent solid "I" dissolves into dependent processes.

🔁 **Repeat daily**. You won't get a lightning bolt at first—but the certainty will grow, and the self-clinging will loosen.

ii. Study with Contemplation

Don't only meditate—*study* the correct view:

- Chandrakīrti's *Madhyamakāvatāra*
- Tsongkhapa's *Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path* (especially the chapter on emptiness)
- Commentary by the Dalai Lama (like *The Middle Way*, or *The Essence of the Heart Sutra*)

As you study, pause to **contemplate** each point deeply. Bring examples from your life.

iii. Combine with Calm Abiding (Śamatha)

Analytical meditation is most powerful when grounded in a quiet, focused mind. Spend time cultivating single-pointed attention—even just 5–10 minutes—so you can enter the analysis more deeply.

2. ❤️ Changing Your Behaviour in Real Life

Here's the other side—**how your behaviour shifts through practice**.
Even before full realisation, emptiness can **reshape your moment-to-moment motivations**, especially when linked with bodhichitta:

A. Catch the Subtle "Spiritual Ego"

When doing something virtuous (e.g. helping someone, giving advice, teaching), notice:
"Am I doing this *for others*, or *to feel like someone good, wise, or superior*?"
This doesn't require guilt. Just notice the tightness around the 'doer.'
Bring to mind:
"Even this 'I' that's helping—empty like a dream."
You can even silently say:
"No one helped; no one was helped. Like an illusion, for the benefit of all beings."
This is exactly what advanced bodhisattvas reflect on **as they act**.

B. Lojong: Train the Mind

Use the Seven-Point Mind Training and related slogans to reshape daily life:

- "Regard all phenomena as dreams"
- "Be grateful to everyone"
- "Drive all blames into one" (i.e. self-grasping)
- "Don't expect applause"

🧠 These are *practices*, not just sayings. They slowly dismantle pride, expectation, ego, and superiority—while leaving you full of love.

C. Practice Tonglen with Emptiness

Tonglen becomes radically more transformative when infused with emptiness:

- Breathe in: Others' suffering, seeing them as like waves in an ocean—no fixed "them"
- Breathe out: Compassion, healing, love—from an "I" that's also unfixed

"The one giving, the act of giving, and the one receiving are all empty of inherent nature."
— *Prajñāpāramitā Sutra*
Tonglen with this view dissolves subtle pride and burnishes genuine, humble bodhichitta.

D. Serve Others Without Ownership

Practice doing good without "owning" the goodness.
When someone thanks you, think:
"The karma ripened for them to receive help; I was just the temporary condition. Like a cloud giving rain."
You become freer, less burdened, less proud—and your compassion deepens.

🧘 Daily Practice Plan (15–30 min total)

1. **Refuge & Bodhichitta prayer**
   (e.g. "I go for refuge… to attain Buddhahood for the benefit of all beings")
2. **5–10 min Calm Abiding**
   (Focus on breath or a visualised image)
3. **5–10 min Analytical Meditation on the "I"**
   - Where is it?
   - What is it?
   - Is it the same as the body? The mind?
4. **Tonglen or Lojong reflection**
   Pick a slogan and live with it all day
5. **Dedication**
   ("May this practice dissolve my self-clinging, so that I may truly benefit beings…")

✨ Final Thought

The key is *integration*. Real understanding of emptiness **doesn't come in a flash**—it comes from **many small insights**, applied constantly and compassionately.
You are not trying to destroy the "I"—you're trying to see it **rightly**: not as a lord of experience, but as a **label on causes and conditions**.
And from that insight, bodhichitta is no longer just a vow—it becomes your nature.

How is ignorance the root cause of negative actions (karma).

In Buddhism, ignorance is considered the root cause of all negative actions (karma) because it fundamentally distorts our perception of reality. Specifically, this ignorance refers to misunderstanding or misapprehending the true nature of existence—especially the emptiness or lack of intrinsic self that characterises all phenomena.

Here's how ignorance leads directly to negative actions in detail:

1. Ignorance as Misperception
Ignorance (*avidyā*) involves believing that phenomena, including ourselves, have a solid, intrinsic existence independent of other causes and conditions. This false perception leads us to relate to the world and ourselves inaccurately.

2. Ignorance Causes Attachment and Aversion
Because ignorance makes us see phenomena as inherently existent, desirable things appear truly attractive and undesirable things truly repulsive. This distorted view fuels strong emotional reactions:

- **Attachment:** Believing that happiness comes from external things, we cling to them, creating attachment-based actions.
- **Aversion**: Perceiving certain things as inherently harmful, horrible or undesirably, we reject them strongly, resulting in anger or hatred-driven actions.

These powerful emotions compel us to act negatively, either to obtain what we crave or eliminate what we dislike.

3. Creating Negative Karma
Once these emotions arise, negative actions inevitably follow. Driven by attachment, we may steal, lie, or manipulate. Driven by anger or hatred, we may harm, insult, or destroy. Each negative action leaves an imprint, reinforcing ignorance and causing suffering in the future.

4. Cycle of Samsara (Rebirth)
Ignorance thus initiates an ongoing cycle of mistaken views, emotional turmoil, harmful actions, and painful consequences. This cycle perpetuates itself endlessly (known as saṃsāra), because each negative action creates conditions for more ignorance, reinforcing the false perception of inherent existence.

5. Breaking the Cycle
Overcoming ignorance through understanding and direct realization of emptiness cuts the cycle at its root. When ignorance fades, attachment and aversion lose their strength, reducing negative actions and ultimately leading to liberation from saṃsāra.

Thus, ignorance is the deepest root because it conditions the mind to perceive reality wrongly, and from this fundamental misperception arises the entire chain of afflictive emotions, negative actions, and resultant suffering.

Index

Aggregates

- Five aggregates, 2, 3, 10, 13, 14, 19, 21, 59, 60, 80, 102

Afflictions (Kleshas, Delusions)

- General, 1, 17, 18, 27–33, 41, 59–60, 68, 83, 101
- Six root afflictions, 18
- Overcoming delusions, 28
- Daily practice to overcome delusions, 31
- Eliminating faults, 33
- Inner enemies (see also Self-cherishing mind), 25

Bodhicitta-Bodhisattva

- General, 33, 70–71, 98–99
- Vows, 42
- Daily practice schedule, 44
- Training (Tsongkhapa's combined method), 46
- Causes and conditions, 48
- Equalising and exchanging self and others, 50
- Daily life integration, 53
- Levels (Ten bhūmis), 55
- See also Compassion; Superior thought

Compassion

- General, 7, 9, 12, 14–16, 18, 23–26, 29–35, 37–40, 41–52, 54–57, 59–61, 63–67, 74–79, 86–96, 98–101, 103
- Great compassion, 23
- Superior thought (taking responsibility), 24
- See also Bodhicitta

Dependent origination (Pratītyasamutpāda)

- General, 7–14, 20–23, 33, 70, 98–99
- Forward and reverse cycles, 10
- View of the transitory collections, 13

Emptiness (Śūnyatā, Selflessness)

- General, 3–5, 7, 9–15, 17–18, 20–22, 24–28, 33, 56, 59–60, 64, 69–72, 76–77, 83, 98–104
- Four seals, 12
- Emptiness and daily behaviour, 33

Ethical conduct (Śīla)

- General, 1, 10, 12, 18–19, 22, 27–30, 34–37, 39, 43, 45, 56, 68–69, 76, 82–85, 93, 97–99
- Morality: three types, 35
- Vinaya, 36
- Virtuous actions: ten, 37
- Non-virtuous actions: ten, 37
- Worldly dharmas: eight concerns, 40

Ignorance (Avidyā)

- General, 2–12, 17–22, 25–28, 31, 41, 59, 64, 68, 70, 74, 81–83, 86, 92–93, 103–104
- As root affliction, 20
- Connection to wrong views, 21
- Remedy through wisdom, 68, 82–84

Meditation

- General, 1–2, 5, 7, 12–16, 18–33, 35, 37, 42–45, 47–55, 57–67, 68–71, 73–77, 81–84, 86–91, 96, 98–103
- Ten most important meditations, 59
- Śamatha (calm abiding), 62
- Lojong (seven-point mind training), 63
- Mindfulness and introspective alertness, 68
- Renunciation, 73
- Reliable cognizers, 71
- Union of śamatha and vipaśyanā, 73

Merit

- General, 2, 15, 31–33, 38, 41, 43–45, 50, 55, 57–58, 76–79, 83, 91–99
- Perfections (pāramitās), 76
- Four powers, 76–77
- Guided meditation & daily practice, 77

Noble Truths

- Four truths of the āryas, 1, 3, 5, 8, 18–21, 33, 36, 39, 82, 84, 98
- Sixteen characteristics, 5

Obscurations

- General, 4, 27, 87–88, 92, 95, 98–99

Path of the Bodhisattva

- General, 1–7, 17–36, 41–46, 49–52, 58, 60, 62, 73, 76, 78–85, 87–85, 98–102
- Stages (two stages), 83
- Trainings (three trainings), 81
- Attainments (two attainments), 81
- Suffering (three types), 84
- Mental factors (eleven virtuous), 85

Wisdom (Prajñā)

- General, 1, 3–5, 7, 9, 12–16, 18, 20–23, 25–28, 30–31, 33, 35–40, 42–47, 55–57, 59–64, 67–69, 71, 73–74, 76, 78–79, 81–97, 98–103
- Insight (vipaśyanā), 73, 82
- Relation to emptiness, 82–84
- As antidote to ignorance, 20, 68

Worldly dharmas

- Eight worldly concerns, 1, 40

Wrong views (Mithyā-dṛṣṭi)

- General, 19, 21–23, 39, 99
- Denial of cause and effect, 21
- Eternalist and nihilist extremes, 21
- Remedies through right view, 21, 68